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This issue of The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics addresses the question of art's ability to give form to the catastrophic events of the 20th Century, primarily World War II and the atomic bomb, but on the way it – neces- sarily – broadens the scope of the enquiry to include the question of the relationship between art, remembrance and history today. The articles all contribute to the discussion of that complex relationship asking how art can call attention to past and present historical events of a catastrophic character with a view to changing the present (and the past). History – as Walter Benjamin has taught us – is always written from the present and 'official history' thus always has a very selective framing of the victims of history preferring to exclude and 'invisibilize' certain subjects and groups in order to naturalize the present order.

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On the Mattering of Silence and Avowal

Joseph Beuys' Plight *and Negative Presentation in Post-1945 Visual Art*

Gene Ray

ABSTRACT Joseph Beuys' installation *Plight* (1985) forcefully avows of the Nazi genocide by means of negative presentation. The work culminates a collective artistic investigation of negative sculptural strategies for representing traumatic history, opened by the Nouveaux Réalistes under the impact of Alain Resnais' documentary film *Nuit et Brouillard*. This article outlines this history and analyzes *Plight* in the context of the 'after Auschwitz' crisis of representation and traditional culture theorized by Theodor W. Adorno. For Adorno, Auschwitz demonstrated threats to autonomous subjectivity posed by tendencies unfolding within the global social process of modernity itself. Reflecting on the fate of music, poetry and literature under these conditions, Adorno advocated a hermetic art of silence and dissonance, as exemplified by Paul Celan and above all Samuel Beckett. This article shows that in the visual arts, too, the genocidal violence of World War II was confronted with analogous strategies of indirection. In *Plight*, Beuys would successfully synthesize John Cage's symbolic demolitions of traditional music and the investigations of negative presentation carried out in sculpture by Arman and Daniel Spoerri.

KEYWORDS Beuys, Negative presentation, Adorno

Two works by Joseph Beuys, or more precisely, two contrasting moments in his output: the first, a proposal for a Holocaust memorial produced in 1958, a feeble misfire; the second, the installation *Plight,* made and exhibited in 1985, a forcefully effective work of historical avowal. These two moments document the impressive development of one German artist. But more than that, they indicate the whole painful struggle within the visual arts to confront and respond to the Nazi genocide, a crime of state terror for which the place-name 'Auschwitz' has come synecdochically to stand. For visual artists willing to risk such a confrontation, the means and strategies with which to do so were by no means clear or obvious in 1958; if, after 1985, such means and strategies were established and available, that was due to the work of many, in a collective development that was absorbed and synthesized in *Plight.*

Beuys' proposal for a memorial at Auschwitz-Birkenau, submitted in March 1958 to the juried competition organized by an association of camp survivors, was a failure by any standard. His offer to overshadow

the camp with a monumental 'monstrance' derived from Roman Catholic ritual was wildly, monstrously inappropriate. I register this moment of misfire only to establish Beuys' relatively early concern with the meaning, legacy and representation of Auschwitz. Beuys was one of 426 artists who submitted proposals to the jury convened in 1956 by the Comité international d'Auschwitz. For it, he produced numerous drawings and models in wood, pewter and zinc. None are compelling or evince much insight. Some were later incorporated into various installations and vitrines, including *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956–1964*; the dates in the title of the latter indicate the artist's retrospective desire to establish his continuous engagement with the Nazi genocide and the problem of its artistic representation. This desire is significant, especially given Beuys' evident reticence with regard to Nazism and its crimes. These early sketches and models, loaded with the Christian symbolism of sin, guilt, sacrifice and forgiveness, may betray the stirrings of the artist's own unresolved conflicts in facing this history. They certainly illuminate a profound confusion before the crisis of representation imposed on art 'after Auschwitz', to use the phrase of Theodor W. Adorno. This confusion was hardly unique at the time; it marks a moment when the dialectic between genocidal history and representation was felt by some European visual artists as the pressure of a still unclarified problematic.

The negative presentation of Auschwitz through the indirect material linkages and evocative strategies deployed so effectively in *Plight* – the environment he installed in the London gallery of Anthony d'Offay in 1985 – was only possible after the investigation of negative presentation in the visual arts had reached a certain point of development. The artistic strategy evident in this work manifests an understanding of the potentials of negative evocation to respond to historical trauma and catastrophe, as well as an at least minimally conscious control of the sculptural means for such evocation. With regard to artistic means, all the techniques used by Beuys in *Plight* had probably been developed by other artists by the end of 1961, although their potentials would not have been immediately clear to all.[1] The necessary historical disclosures no doubt took longer to circulate and fully sink in; the critical processing of those disclosures is by no means complete today.

Plight is a culminating work, in the precise sense that it consolidates this collective investigation and development that took place in the visual arts between 1945 and the end of 1961 in a way so compelling that it establishes a new standard for artistic approaches to Auschwitz. The negative memorials that in the 1990s would become the institutionally preferred

model for monumental public remembrance are prefigured by *Plight* and are, by and large, merely echoes or variations on it. I am not concerned in this essay to treat Beuys' personal development or career in any detail, beyond what I have done elsewhere.[2] Here I focus on *Plight*, in order to unfold from this one work the outlines of a larger history – the discovery and development, in the visual arts, of negative, dissonant strategies for representing catastrophic history in the aftermath of World War II.

Any such outline necessarily takes up problems articulated after 1945 by critical theory, namely, the very specific predicament or indeed plight of art 'after Auschwitz'. Critical reflection on the meaning and implications of Auschwitz, and indeed on the whole social context of violence that produced it, emerged and circulated relatively slowly. Of the few sustained reflections in the early postwar period, only Adorno's attempted to articulate fully the implications of Auschwitz for music, literature, philosophy and all forms of serious cultural production. A detailed study of Adorno's reception has yet to be written, but his critique of traditional culture in the aftermath was probably disseminated first in fragments and echoes. It would be surprising, though, if partial, more or less distorted forms of Adorno's complex arguments were not beginning to penetrate the visual arts in Europe by the late 1950s, given a push no doubt by the impact of Alain Resnais' 1955 documentary *Nuit et brouillard*. Literature and music led the way in developing new means and strategies for responding to Auschwitz, as even Resnais' film confirms: much of the force of *Nuit and brouillard* comes from the dissonance generated between the images qua visual evidence and the critical glossing of those images by Jean Cayrol's voice-over text and Hanns Eisler's score. Indeed, Adorno's thinking about dissonance was strongly stimulated by postwar developments in literature, music and theater. About the visual arts, he wrote relatively little. But as I show, visual analogues of dissonance and negative presentation emerged in sculpture and installation art as well beginning in the late 1950s.

The Elements of *Plight*: Installed Forms, Materials and Objects

Stepping through a doorway or passage, the spectator enters a rectangular room lined floor to ceiling with standing felt columns: two columns of equal size stacked vertically, one on the other, so that two closed ranks of standing columns extend horizontally, wall to wall. Each constituent column is about a meter and a half in height, and roughly the volume of a person. The repeated felt forms affect the space as an echoing lining that both isolates and insulates. Sound from outside is suppressed, temperature in-

side is conserved, and light seems to be absorbed by the rough gray tactility of the felt. Toward the back of the room, an opening in the lower row of columns on the right wall leads to a second room, also lined with felt columns. To navigate this opening, most spectators will have to bend down and pass beneath the upper row of columns. Having gained the second room, which in the original London installation contained no other openings, one finds a grand piano.[3] Both its case and keyboard are closed. A chalkboard lined with musical staves lies flatly on top of the piano; no notes are written on it. Lying on the staff board is an ordinary fever thermometer. From the dead end of the second room, the spectator's line of sight to the outside is severed, and the suppression of outside sound increases. An L-shaped, felt-columned cul-de-sac, then, containing three objects.

The wall label or equivalent signage identifies all this as the work of Beuys, a German artist. A certain history necessitates that we qualify this nationality rather severely. Beuys was eleven years old when, through no fault of his own of course, the Reichstag Fire Decree and Enabling Act of 1933 handed vast powers to the new Nazi Chancellor and his party. Subsequently, we know, Beuys was a member of the Hitlerjugend and served in the Wehrmacht. These facts do not permit us to think of Beuys the artist as just any 'German'. Encountering or considering his art, we are enjoined to remember that he was a boy scout and combat veteran of the Nazi regime. As such, he is indelibly marked as a member of the so-called perpetrating generation.[4] These facts are not a warrant for arrest. They cannot be construed in a way that would fix or freeze Beuys beyond any growth or change, or would deny to him any possibility of critical understanding or agency. And they certainly do not suffice to indict or automatically discredit his art. But neither can they be forgotten or blithely avoided. The work is not reducible to the life, but neither can it be isolated from it, behind a *cordon sanitaire*. Beuys' position within a certain, extremely violent and disastrous history is a social fact that is objective in a very unanswerable sense.

The title, *Plight*, constitutes the artist's concise statement about the work. A title is a linguistic tag, hence a conceptual anchor, tied to the work by a rode of intention. As such, it cannot be read naïvely. 'Plight', an English noun, denotes a dangerous, difficult or unfortunate situation. A verb form, marked as a secondary meaning of archaic origin, means to make a solemn pledge or promise. This semantic range points, if it is not ironic or deceptive, to some danger, difficulty or misfortune still to be specified. Alternatively or perhaps additionally, there may be some pledge or promise operative in or activated by the work.

The three objects installed in the work – piano, staff board and therm-ometer – are so-called found objects, the authorized presentation of which in art spaces was long established by 1985. The selective principles of montage and assemblage reach back to Cubist collage, which around 1912 first opened the door to invasions of visual art by bits and pieces of empirical life. Passing through Dada and the readymades of Duchamp, such object-choices were given additional psycho-erotic charges by the Surrealists. In the postwar period, empirical reality once again flowed undigested into works and galleries, this time in the service of diver-gently developing artistic agendas that tended, even in their divergence, to erode the borders between art and life and to subvert the stability of mimetic representation. The ambiguity and disruptive potential of found objects have undoubtedly been diluted with institutional acceptance and widespread use; today their appearance troubles no one. But they still carried some force when, in the 1950s and 1960s, the arts were overflow-ing the demarcations of traditional media and were recombining glo-bally into new streams of pronounced performativity. Relevant here are Allan Kaprow's Happenings, largely a movement of New York painters spurred by the pressure of Jackson Pollock; the Gutai Art Association of Japanese painters and sculptors; and Fluxus, a network of composers and poets largely inspired by John Cage and active in Europe. The latter, along with Nouveau Réalisme, gave strong impetus to Beuys' artistic de-velopment. If, as we will see, he learned a great deal about the sculptural possibilities of found objects from Nouveaux Réalistes such as Arman and Daniel Spoerri, it was through his participation in events organized by or around Fluxus that Beuys was able to assimilate Cage's deconstruc-tion of music and to work out his own more symbolist and allegorical approach to performance.

Beuys has gathered and configured three specific objects into an as-semblage installed in the dead-end of the felt-walled space. The grand piano and the staff board clearly allude to music. But the piano is closed and no musical notes have been written on the staff board. So there is actually no music. Music is evoked by negative presentation, called in as it were, not by naming but by the selection and presentation of two found objects with specifically musical associations. Here, in the installation, the evocation avows that there is, or at least was, music, at the same time that it refuses, blocks and occludes the actual acoustic phenomenon of music. The grand piano alludes to concerts and concert halls, the practice and recital of sonatas. But no sonatas, or any other form of music, will be performed on this piano. The possibility is foreclosed by the shutting of

the case and keyboard: music as such has been silenced. The staff board, a pedagogical device, evokes scenes of musical instruction. But the lesson here is: no notes, no music. Silence and silencing, then, are the common associations of these musical found objects. Irony? Possibly. But what of the third object? The household thermometer evokes domestic scenes of illness. Does silenced music have a temperature or fever? A joke, perhaps? While such questions cannot yet be answered, their posing is made more insistent by the sound absorbing and temperature conserving character of the thick felt columns.

Silence and Demolition

It was John Cage, of course, who famously investigated ambient and found sounds – indeed, the very sounds of silence audible in the negation of formal or traditional music. Cage's best-known composition, the provocative *4′33″* (1952) was precisely a score, in three movements marked *tacet*, for the performed silencing of a piano. Experiments with an anechoic chamber in 1951 convinced Cage that so-called silence does not really exist. Music, he was proposing by 1955, is a duration of intended sounds and silences, while what we call silence is merely all the sounds we do not intend.[5]

Perhaps because Cage himself exuded a benign and serene gentleness and great personal generosity, the violence of his gestures vis-à-vis the Western musical tradition often goes unremarked. His experiments and compositions for prepared piano, dating back to 1938 or 1939 but intensifying between 1942 and 1948, enact mutilating interventions on the piano qua traditional instrument. Notes and harmonies are in effect disappeared and deflected into new and uncanny sounds, through the distorting insertion of screws, bolts, weather stripping and other objects and materials between the piano strings. Cage, a former student of Arnold Schoenberg, was schooled in dissonance. But his investigations of ambient and chance sounds eschew even that tradition. His subversion of artistic intention, linking up to heretical streams of automatism and aleatory gaming, goes far beyond the rigorous combinations of twelve-tone composition. With regard to the whole context of traditional music and its performance, Cage is quietly demolitionist. And his demolitions resound beyond the medium of music as such, to challenge the other arts as well. How much more devastating is Cage's silence, for example, than Duchamp's fictional turn to chess and 'silence', or the automatic poems of Surrealist aesthetes.

Cage's demolitions of tradition are not usually understood as responses to the violence of World War II. Such a reading runs against the tenor

of Cage's own words and his well-marked indifference to history. In an interview published in 1955, Cage refused the suggestion that his suppression of intention must still maintain some hidden lyric concern. He flatly cut off the interviewer's question ('Do not memory, psychology –') with a demonstrative '– never again'.[6] In a text from three years later, he repeats this refusal, ventriloquizing Kafka in a question that nevertheless endorses it: 'Do you not agree with Kafka when he wrote, "Psychology – never again"?'[7] If this refusal of memory and psychology, which might be suspected of protesting too much, reflects an avant-garde grasp of some real crisis of the subject under pressures of modernity, then, as we will see below, any such crisis itself throws us back on history. For how else could we explain it, or an art already looking beyond it? It is the violence of the mid-twentieth century, Adorno will argue, that demonstrates in specific and irrefutable ways, the crisis and fate of the autonomous – that is, the lyrical, psychological – subject.[8]

In the Beckett-like 'Lecture on Nothing', first delivered at the 8th Street Artists Club in New York in 1949 but not published until a decade later, Cage makes a rare but revealing mention of the war. 'The most amazing noise // I ever found / was that produced by / means of a coil of wire / attached to the // pickup arm / of a phonograph and then / amplified. / It was shocking, // really shocking, / and thunderous / . / Half intellectually and // half sentimentally / , when the war came a-long, / I decided to use / // only / quiet sounds / . / There seemed to me // to be no truth, / no good, in anything big / in society.'[9] (The lecture was reprinted in 1961, in Cage's collected texts, under the title *Silence*.) Wars of course do not just 'come along', and the close proximity of shock and thunder, insistently repeated, suggests that it, the war, rather than the fabricated sound, is what Cage really 'finds'.[10] These lines, including their passing naturalization of social violence, can be read symptomatically as the registration of a general, globalized trauma – one that Cage is working-through, or better, playing-through, as method, in his opening of a new line of artistic experiment. In this light it is not irrelevant that *4'33"*, first performed by David Tudor at Woodstock in 1952, was conceived in the immediate postwar period, as Cage was working on the *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano* (1946–48). Even his famous turn to Zen and chance did not really begin until 1946.[11]

Even stronger confirmation of such a reading is found in the gestures and production of Cage's students in and around Fluxus. Clearly understanding something else or more in the master's lessons, Nam June Paik, La Monte Young, Benjamin Patterson, George Brecht, Philip Corner,

George Maciunas, Dick Higgins, Emmett Williams and others, including Wolf Vostell and – yes – Joseph Beuys, radicalized Cage's relatively subtle and symbolic demolitions into often aggressive enactments of literal violence and destruction. Paik was the driving force.[12] In his notorious *Étude for Piano*, performed in Cologne in 1960, Paik leapt from the stage and attacked his watching 'fathers', Cage and Tudor, cutting off Cage's tie and pouring shampoo on both composers before fleeing the concert. In June of 1962, the symbolic violence was literalized onstage in Paik's *One for Violin*, at the event *Neo-Dada in der Musik* in Düsseldorf. Grasping a violin by the neck with both hands and raising it above his head, the artist suddenly swung it down, shattering it on a tabletop.[13] In September of the same year, a Fluxus gang in Wiesbaden performed Corner's *Piano Activities*. A photo shows Maciunas, Higgins, Vostell, Patterson and Williams cutting into a grand piano with a tree saw. Crowbars and hammers were also inflicted on the hapless instrument. In the following year, at Paik's *Exposition of Music Electronic Television* in Wuppertal, three prepared pianos and thirteen prepared television sets were demolished. At the opening, Beuys took an axe to one of the pianos.[14]

Such demolitionist tendencies are by no means limited to music, or the overlapping of music, performance and visual art in Fluxus. We could trace a certain family resemblance across all of the arts in the wake of World War II. Two streams or tendencies are entwined, converging and diverging with a pulsing ambivalence: one, more cautious, forsakes or abandons traditional object-making and makes a leap into performativity, which then becomes a new object of investigation; the other, less restrained, attacks traditional culture, at first symbolically but soon enough literally. Both streams are globalized.[15] The Lettristes in Paris liquidate first poetry and then cinema. Fontana stabs and slashes the canvas in Milan, while in Japan, Shozo Shimamoto punches and kicks through stretchered paper and Kazuo Shiraga wrestles mud. Neo-Dada here and there cries havoc and raises hell. And so on. Nouveaux Réalistes Daniel Spoerri and Arman carried the demolition into sculpture. In 1961, Spoerri made two works of palpable menace: *Hommage à Fontana*, which carries the painter's slashes into an image of actual throat-cutting, and *Les lunettes noires*, a blinding booby-trap that jokes grimly on the optimist's rose-colored glasses, even as it raises the stakes of Man Ray's *Gift*.[16] Also in 1961, the year before Paik destroyed a violin onstage, Arman began his *colères* (tantrums or rages), in which beautiful stringed instruments of traditional music were systematically smashed to pieces, more or less instrument by instrument – a violin, a bass, a mandolin,

1. Documentation photo of Nam June Paik's *One for Violin*, performed at the event Neo-Dada in der Musik, Düsseldorf, 16 June 1962.

2. Documentation photo of Philip Corner's *Piano Activities*, performed at the Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik, Wiesbaden, 1962. The photo shows George Maciunas, Dick Higgins, Wolf Vostell, Benjamin Patterson and Emmett Williams attacking a grand piano with a table saw and other tools.

3. Arman, *Mama mia!*, 1961. *Colère*, destroyed violin on wooden board, 93 x 67 x 12 cm. Collection of Corice and Armand Arman, New York.

4. Arman, *Le Piano de Néron*, 1965. *Combustion*, burned piano in polyester on wooden board, 200 x 300 x 42 cm. Private Collection, Antwerp.

a piano, a harp – and the gathered bits and splinters affixed to boards. Three years later, in 1964, he varied the gesture in the *combustions* series; this time he burned the instruments to crisps and hung the charred remains on the gallery walls. This cursory highlighting would of course need to be backed up by close readings of specific works in context. But it suffices to indicate how far such attacks on the media and body of art can be grasped in general as mirroring displacements of the violence and trauma of the war.

'This radically guilty and shabby culture' (Adorno)

The bulk of postwar art was undoubtedly restorative and accommodating. But even if it is granted that the examples I have cited do constitute countertendencies of hostility and a crisis of faith in art's traditional authority, why should we think they are responses to World War II? The period indicated, from 1945 to the mid-1960s, is after all complexly full of momentous transformations, antagonisms and struggles. What about the Cold War and nuclear arms race, whose shadows fell constantly on the economic miracles of reconstruction culture? What about the anti-colonial struggles and wars of national liberation flaring across the so-called Third World? Was there not always much to be worried, anxious and angry about? Was not the traumatic ferocity of the Algerian War, for example, the more potent context of Nouveau Réalisme? Such questions are valid and point to factors that were no doubt operative, but the tumults and stresses of the postwar period unfolded within a global social process that was itself radically and irreparably altered by the violence of World War II. It is Adorno who announces and clarifies this.

Auschwitz, for Adorno, is *not*, strictly speaking, the catastrophe. The catastrophe is rather the global social process founded in and reproduced by antagonism and violence. All societies structured around the division of manual and intellectual labor and the domination of man and nature are doomed to 'perennial suffering'.[17] Capitalist modernity is the latest and most totalizing form of such a class society. Nor did Soviet-style 'actually existing socialism' offer any liberating alternative. In both 'late capitalism' and its stunted rivals in 'the East', Adorno saw the same two dominant tendencies unfolding: 'integration', or the tightening of social control and increasing elimination of difference under the reign of identity-thinking, and 'administration', or the expanding powers of bureaucratic concentration and managerial direction. In a globalizing society of expansive states and corporations tending toward 'total administration' and 'total integration', the scope for autonomous subject-

ivity, capable of spontaneous experience and feeling as well as a practice of critical thought, is progressively restricted. Dominated individuals are trained to accommodate themselves to social and economic forces indifferent to their happiness and beyond their control. Their anxiety and repressed rage over this apparent fate predispose them to fascistic appeals and ensure that episodic genocidal eruptions will be a perennial feature of contemporary life.[18] In this light, Auschwitz was only the 'first test piece' (*erstes Probestücke*), the proof that the tendencies of integration and administration contain within them the logic of genocide: 'Genocide is the absolute integration.'[19]

The industrial murder of whole categories of individuals, then, was a latent potential within capitalist modernity that was actualized under the specific conditions of Nazism and war. Racism and anti-Semitism were unquestionably central to the conception and execution of the Nazi genocide. However, the essence of Auschwitz, the fully globalized meaning and implication of this actualized potential, cannot be located in or reduced to anti-Semitism.[20] Once demonstrated, this potential haunts all forms of contemporary society, as a deployable power of state terror. Auschwitz was a qualitative leap in violence that reaches into and changes – must change – the very meaning of life, humanity, society, the future. Nor was it the only such leap, in the context of World War II. Hiroshima, the other threshold-crossing event of violence, demonstrates a different potential: the terminally genocidal power of weapons systems produced under the merger of science and war machine. Adorno takes note of Hiroshima in numerous places, but does not develop its implications in a way comparable to his meditations on Auschwitz.[20] Nevertheless, it follows relentlessly and necessarily from his arguments that Auschwitz and Hiroshima must be thought together, as historically-demonstrated genocidal potentials that remain entangled in the tendencies of the contemporary social process.[21] The meaning of the change that this imposes on us all, without exception, is that the future of humanity, in any form at all, is now in question and fully open to doubt. We may not survive our own social process.[22] Auschwitz and Hiroshima are the end of the myth of automatic progress, full stop. 'No universal history leads from savagery to humanity, but one does lead from the slingshot to the megaton bomb.'[23] For Adorno, then, the catastrophe is emphatically not in the past, an event that happened once and now is to be avoided. We are in the catastrophe and it is ongoing.

The implications of this for art, Adorno argued, are intimidating. With modernity, the arts had acquired a new autonomy, claiming their place,

along with letters, learning and autonomous science, within an honored production of 'spirit' (*Geist*). But such 'culture' remains the luxury of an extracted social surplus, conditioned on the division of manual and intellectual labor and thus implicated in domination. Emphatically differentiating itself from 'life', art nevertheless remains bound to it. As flaring promise of happiness, art cannot become the praxis that would realize what is promised. And this constitutive frustration converts art's very refusal of function into functioning affirmation of the given social reality. Art's 'double-character as both autonomous and *fait social*' is thus an antagonism that 'announces itself unceasingly from the zone of its autonomy'.[24] And the same antagonism haunts all autonomous culture conditioned on the splitting off of spirit in the division of labor, tainting its claim to enlightenment: 'all culture shares society's nexus of guilt'.[25] As the social process of modernity unfolds, and its totalizing tendencies of integration and administration undermine the very autonomous subjectivity on which culture depends and for which it alone can have any redeeming meaning, art's predicament becomes increasingly acute. Under the heading of 'culture industry', Adorno and Max Horkheimer describe how the market, mediating these social pressures, tends systematically to undermine art's autonomy and, behind the mirage of diversity, to reduce culture to conformist *'Ähnlichkeit'* (sameness).[26] Even before Auschwitz, a crisis of faith would merely have reflected an accurate registration of social reality. After it, art's 'very right to exist' is in question, as the opening sentence of *Ästhetische Theorie* announces.[27]

These critical reflections and arguments, developing and deepening in the period from *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944) to Adorno's death in 1969, are the context in which we have to read his assertion that 'after Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric' – and indeed has become 'impossible' (*unmöglich*).[28] Written in 1949 and first published in 1951, at the end of the programmatic essay 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', this infamous provocation only began to circulate widely in 1955, as the lead essay of *Prismen*. Adorno would subsequently revisit this claim, moderating and qualifying it, but pointedly leaving it in force.[29] If, as we have seen, the social process in general is tending to restrict and eliminate the very conditions of autonomous subjectivity, then the subject of spontaneous experience and feeling who could write or read lyric poetry is disappearing with it. And if Auschwitz is the demonstration that this tendency carries within it a genocidal potential, then the meaning of Adorno's provocation emerges clearly: poetry, already becoming 'impossible' through the loss of autonomous subjects who are its necessary condition, now be-

comes barbaric, if, failing to register the social catastrophe, it attempts to carry on as if nothing has happened. This first formulation, then, is a demand for self-reflectivity, a wake-up call that challenges art to attain full awareness of its own plight.[30]

Summing up in *Negative Dialektik*, Adorno insists that Auschwitz is the unanswerable proof of 'culture's failure' (*das misslingen der Kultur*):

> After Auschwitz, all culture, along with the urgent critique of it, is garbage. In restoring itself after what took place in its own landscape, it has become entirely the ideology it was potentially, ever since it presumed, in opposition to material existence, to inspire that existence with the light that the separation of spirit from bodily labor withholds from it. Whoever pleads for the preservation of this radically guilty and shabby culture makes himself its accomplice, while whoever refuses to have anything more to do with culture directly promotes the barbarism that culture revealed itself to be. Not even silence gets out of the circle.[31]

Art and the whole tradition of enlightened culture, then, must bear the ordeal of this predicament, reflecting on its own failure, origins and continuing dependence on injustice, brought to a head by its impotence in preventing or resisting genocide. It can neither permit any uncritical restoration of its ostensible authority, nor flee the field before the tightening knots of a hostile and totalizing system.

Adorno's critique of traditional culture helps us to understand the gestural violence of the artists and works I have cited. Struggling to find their way to the clarity eventually expressed in Adorno's late texts, these artists at first more or less blindly 'acted out' the predicament Adorno specifies.[32] Later on, we will see, some of them were able to work it through to moments of lucidity. The demolitionism that some artists directed toward art is misplaced, but is at least understandable. Moreover, we note that Adorno's first formulations of the 'after Auschwitz' problematic set out a general, structural predicament that argues from the tendencies of a global social process and an analysis of art's position within that process. It is not yet a question of representing the catastrophe in art.

Endgames

In the 1962 radio talk and essay 'Engagement', in the context of a running polemic against committed art, Adorno begins to grapple with the issue of artistic representation.[33] Considering the various strategies by which artists have tried to represent Auschwitz and the larger social catastrophe to which it belongs, Adorno begins to theorize and advocate for a form of

dissonant and hermetic production grounded in negative presentation. Adorno concludes that Brecht's and Sartre's committed representations are too direct, distorting and trivializing. As he later summarizes this critique in *Ästhetische Theorie*: 'Artworks exert a practical effect, if they do so at all, through a barely apprehensible transformation of consciousness, and not by haranguing.'[34] Kafka, Schoenberg and, above all, Beckett become his favored models.

The new elaborations of a negative art of dissonance, I have argued at length elsewhere, are Adorno's rewriting of the traditional sublime – or, more precisely, his attempt to understand how Auschwitz has made the old sublime impossible and replaced it with something radically different.[35] The traditional sublime had marked a passage from terror and disturbance to a pleasing self-admiration. The imagination's distress before the power or size of nature was rescued by reason, which reminds the subject of its supersensible destiny, as a free moral agent. But after Auschwitz and the dead letter of automatic progress, the saving recourse to human dignity is foreclosed. The terror of the social process supplants that of nature as the trigger of the sublime, but now the terror remains in force. Indeed, autonomous reason, if that can be found at all, now confirms precisely this. In the negative art Adorno favors, any feeling of enjoyment, any pleasure still generated by the mimetic structure of artistic semblance, is pulled back into terror when scrutinized. The subjects of this sublime are damaged, remnant subjects; they can only watch, as from barrels in the maelstrom, their own slow orbiting descent around the sucking trauma of history. The forceful dissonance of unreconciled artworks, Adorno argues, triggers the emphatic 'anxiety (*Angst*) that existentialism only talks about'.[36] In *Ästhetische Theorie*, he will call this effect '*Erschütterung*' – 'shudder'.[37]

Kant had introduced the notion of '*negative Darstellung*' (negative presentation) in connection with the sublime in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790). In a passage famously including an admiration of the image ban of Jewish Law, he notes that abstract notions, such as the ideas of infinity or God, can be represented negatively, and that the feeling of the sublime loses nothing by a negative approach.[38] Similarly, Adorno argues, the 'abstractness of the objective law prevailing in society' cannot be captured in positive pictures or the simplifying fables of committed art.[39] Like the God of old, the social catastrophe can only be evoked and avowed negatively in art. Even Schoenberg, Adorno implies, does not always remember this. Criticizing *The Survivor of Warsaw*, Adorno suggests that it is still too positive. The remnants of enjoyment that still cling to even

the most ascetic and rigorous artworks, as the structural effect of semblance as such, have to be resisted. Such remnants threaten to turn art 'about' Auschwitz into a new violation of the victims. Only the most indirect, coded and hermetic representations of the victims' suffering generate adequate resistance and counter the enjoyment intrinsic to art. For Adorno, Beckett shows the way. He evokes the catastrophe in its essence, not by direct invocation or committed haranguing, but by showing just how little is left of the autonomous subject in its crisis. In *Endgame*, the catastrophe comes onstage as the news that Hamm has run out of painkiller.[40] 'Beckett responds to the situation of the concentration camp in the only way fitting – a situation he does not name, as if it were subject to a *Bilderverbot*. What is, is like the concentration camp.'[41] Or again, from Adorno's 1961 essay on *Endgame*: 'Only in silence is the name of the catastrophe to be spoken.'[42]

Adorno took a long time in coming to a position on the poetry of Paul Celan. For his part, the poet wrestled courageously with Adorno's challenge. Celan's *Engführung*, his radical 1958 reworking of *Todesfuge* (1945), was written in a full awareness of Adorno's works and arguments.[43] At the end, in the unfinished *Ästhetische Theorie*, Adorno granted Celan a place on his small list of those deemed to have successfully responded to the plight of art after Auschwitz. Arguably, this is the closest Adorno ever came to a real retraction of his 1951 stricture: 'In the work of the most important contemporary representative of German hermetic poetry, Paul Celan, the experiential content of the hermetic was inverted. His poetry is permeated by the shame of art in the face of suffering that escapes both experience and sublimation. Celan's poems want to speak of the most extreme horror through silence.'[44]

Negative Evocation and Avowal in the Visual Arts

In the visual arts, negative presentation had to develop in a different way. Found objects are fully positive presentations, rather than mimetic representations, of selected fragments of empirical life. But we have already seen that found objects can also function as negative presentations of other things that are withheld: the piano and staff board in *Plight* are direct and *positive* presentations of these objects but are *negative* presentations of music. The negative evocation works because the association of these objects with music is established and instantaneous. This suggests that negative presentation depends, and perhaps always depends, on a positive image or association that stands behind or underwrites it.

Before it would be possible to attempt a negative visual presentation

of Auschwitz, for example, it would be necessary for positive images to circulate widely, deeply and long enough to become burned into public consciousness – and presumably to do so against strong resistances and tendencies toward forgetting, avoidance and disavowal. Their establishment in public awareness would not at all suffice to demonstrate that either the Nazi genocide or the catastrophe in Adorno's larger sense had actually been worked through and processed; it would indicate only that the minimal awareness necessary for critical processing was at least in place. Once the positive images are so established, however, once it can be taken for granted that most people have been exposed to and carry the trace of such images, then it is possible to work with them without showing them. The release of Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard* in 1955 was the vehicle of this dissemination and, as such, had a profound impact not just on public consciousness, but on European artists. It seems in fact to have opened and stimulated the investigation of negative presentation, *as a specifically visual strategy for evoking and avowing traumatic history*. The film's form itself, alternating and contrasting archival still and moving images with newly shot color footage of camp ruins in pastoral landscapes, poses the problem of representation, which Cayrol's text then articulates explicitly at several points. If Claude Lanzmann's 1985 film *Shoah* is now recognized as a landmark of negative presentation in film, his 'fiction of the real' probably depends, more than Lanzmann would care to admit, on the impact of Resnais' earlier documentary. Lanzmann criticized Resnais' film for showing too much, too positively, while the actual genocide of millions, taking place in gas chambers, are terror scenes of which no film exists and to which no image could be adequate.[45] Without denying the truth of this, the force of Lanzmann's combination of rigorous refusal of documentary images and a devastating accumulation of testimony is only intensified by our past exposure to positive images. Indeed, this exposure is necessary if we are to grasp, through Lanzmann's work, how inadequate such images must be.

After just a few years, in which implications of Resnais' film were evidently absorbed and translated into an agenda for further research, the investigation of negative presentation as a means for the visual avowal of traumatic history began in earnest in Paris, where *Nuit et brouillard* received its primary reception. From 1959 on, the dots were connected very quickly within the group of Nouveaux Réalistes. Issues that previously were of artistic interest only as problems of form, such as the relation between performance and trace in mark-making, were revisited under the pressure of a growing awareness of catastrophic history and its ground-

ing in an ongoing social process. When Yves Klein returned to figurative painting with his *anthropemétries* in 1960, he would recover ground already explored by Robert Rauschenberg, for example in his negative figures made with floodlit blueprint paper in 1949. But Klein had now seen the shadows burned onto walls and sidewalks of Hiroshima during the atomic bombing. In 1961, the year after France exploded its own atomic bomb and Resnais' and Marguerite Duras' feature film *Hiroshima mon amour* opened in cinemas, Klein's *anthropométries* made a sharp topical veer toward the real: in the sequence from *People Beginning to Fly* to *Hiroshima*, a potential of negative presentation has become lucid. History forces the dialectic of form and content, and figuration after 1945 cannot be what it was before.

More pertinent here were the sculptural investigations of Spoerri and Arman. In his *tableaux pièges* (snare pictures), begun in 1960, Spoerri fixed the objects found on everyday tabletops, shifted them in situ onto the vertical plane and hung the result on the wall. In their negative reconstruction of specific scenes of conviviality and contingency, his *pièges* of meals and shared tables in effect turn the trace into historical evidence, and the assemblage of found objects into forensic exhibit. In 1959, Arman made his first *poubelles* (rubbish bins), boxes and vitrines filled with found garbage and refuse, as well as his first *accumulations*, serial collections of specimens of the same or similar object. As Benjamin Buchloh's analysis of these works and their context establishes, Arman's cumulative reflections of commodity culture and its garbage transform the tradition of found object and readymade and announce 'the end of the utopian object aesthetic'.[46] Quite clearly, the hope and optimism that Duchamp and other artists from the early avant-gardes had sometimes invested in industrialized objects have been objectively liquidated along with the myth of automatic progress. Readymades are no longer optimistic exactly to the degree that optimism in general is no longer possible, and this is an objective problem, as Adorno made clear, that is not alleviated at all by the reconstructed pseudo-optimism of commodified abundance. With eloquent precision, Spoerri's *Lunettes noires* make the same point.

I am less convinced that Arman's selection and manipulation of found objects under postwar conditions empty these objects of every kind of charge and aura, as Buchloh's account in places also suggests. If we supplement his account by tracing the thread of negative presentation, as I do here, then the story becomes more complex. Arman's *portraits-robot* registered the fact that the invisible charge connecting individuals to their things exceeds and survives a mere relation of possession.

Individuals can be evoked negatively in a very precise way by the presentation of things that are linked to them, and Arman shows this in those 'portraits' of his dealer and friends that seem merely to sample each one's garbage. These jokes in poor taste also look to the stage properties of Beckett's *Fin de partie*, which premiered in London in April 1957 and was playing in Paris three weeks later: in that dismal work, Hamm keeps his elderly parents, Nagg and Nell, in two dust bins.[47] Yet, even the exhibited misery and obsolescence of a subjectivity facing its historical endgame carries a certain pathos that we, the crippled remnants of subjectivity still clinging to damaged life, are able to feel and register. Similarly, as we have seen with the *colères* and *combustions* of musical instruments, the destruction of these very auratic objects, with their fragile wooden bodies and warm patinas, produces a secondary aura: the flaring halo of a traditional culture that, like the subject, is in the process of disappearing – and only dimly grasps the objective ground for its demise. For sheer, shocking antihumanism, the smashing or burning of violins and pianos is on a par with the burning of books; even as artistic gestures, all these acts implicitly threaten the body itself with violence. It is wrong to assume or conclude that there is no pathos at all generated by culture's crisis, even if the operative feelings fluctuate unstably between terror, rage, dismay and shame. It is not a matter of no aura at all, then, so much as a need to specify exactly what kind of auratic charge is structured, if even as potential, in Arman's objects.[48] In this direction, we must be painfully precise.

It is now established, and known by those who have taken the trouble to inform themselves, that Auschwitz and the other Nazi murder factories were the scene of a theft so immense and systematic that it recalls Marx's famous account of violent, 'so-called original accumulation' (*sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation*). At these camps, the victims were not just killed; their bodies and personal property were plundered without restraint, in ways so gruesome and appalling that it defies belief. At Auschwitz, where alone a million victims were murdered, ninety-percent of them Jews, the stolen property was carefully sorted and stored in special warehouses, sardonically called 'Canada' by the prisoners forced to carry out this criminal labor. When the Nazis evacuated Auschwitz before the advancing Soviet army in January 1945, they blew up the crematoria and attempted to burn or destroy all obvious evidence of the genocide. But much evidence still remained, and Soviet cameramen on scene at the camp's liberation recorded immense pyramids of sorted clothes, suitcases, eyeglasses, shaving brushes, everything of any possible value

to the Nazi war economy – even dentures stolen from corpses as the teeth of victims were ransacked for gold caps and fillings. Nearly an hour of archival film footage exists, and excerpts were shown as evidence at the War Crimes Trials in Nuremburg. Excerpts were also utilized for some of the montages of *Nuit et brouillard*, which shows stolen eyeglasses, bowls and clothing. Stills taken from the reels of moving image may have had a wider circulation that remains unmapped.

Two of Arman's works in particular are exact reconstructions, on a much smaller scale, of these documentary images. *La Vie à pleines dents*, from 1960, is a disturbing accumulation of dentures; and *Argus extra myope*, from 1961, gathers and boxes found spectacles. Both are negative presentations of the individuals, whose personal belonging these dentures and eyeglasses actually were. At the same time, by reason of a visual linkage to history that is far too precise to be dismissed, these works evoke other people whose dentures and eyeglasses were stolen in the course of their administered murder. By this second evocation, these works of Arman avow the Nazi genocide. The artistic potential uncovered and mobilized here, then, is very clear. This is how visual negative presentation works and how it 'remembers': these works *avow* – they assert that these evoked people existed but were murdered, and that this crime was perpetrated. And this avowal is indeed charged with an awful aura.

Buchloh notes these echoes of *Nuit et brouillard* and concludes: 'In their extreme forms, Arman's *accumulations* and *poubelles* cross the threshold to become memory images of the first historical instances of industrialized death.'[49] But he hesitates to assign any interpretive primacy to this avowal or to explore the implications further. The 'inevitably limitless choice of Arman's object aesthetic' points Buchloh rather to the new conditions for subject formation – the enforced identification with 'sign exchange value'.[50] Taking all of Arman's production into account, these two works and perhaps a handful of others that articulate a similarly precise avowal do seem to be overwhelmed by the sheer volume and randomness of the artist's accumulations. This far, Buchloh's point must be taken. Yet, it must also be said that the relation of these few works to Arman's total output also, and crucially, mirrors and avows the position of industrial murder within the general, global logic of capitalist accumulation: it is there, actually, before our eyes, visible but not necessarily seen – a poorly understood potential or latency that we may well miss in the flux and flood of commodified life and spectacular culture. Buchloh's claim, that a 'dialectic of silence and exposure' (or 'of disavowal and spectularization') forms the historical framework

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5. Arman, *Petits Déchets bourgeois*, 1959. *Accumulation*, rubbish in case of glass and wood, 60 x 40 x 12 cm. Collection of Philippe Arman, New York.

6. Arman, *La Vie à pleines dents*, 1960. *Accumulation*, dentures in case of wood and plexiglass, 18 x 35 x 6 cm. Collection Musée national d'Art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

7. Arman, *Tues-les tous, Dieu reconnaîtra les Siens*, 1961. *Accumulation*, insecticide in case of wood and plexiglass, 80 x 60 x 12 cm. Private collection, La Laune.

of postwar art, is unquestionably correct.[51] But in Arman's case, we can see that it is by negative presentation that his work is able to avow the full catastrophe, in Adorno's sense.

It is necessary at this point to insist that this efficacy of negative presentation does not depend on artistic intention. These visual linkages to history are irrefutably objective. Coded into these works are potentials for precise evocation and avowal that, as soon as they are activated, produce effects – including the hit Adorno called 'shudder'.[52] This holds true even if these linkages were produced unconsciously – even if Arman was utterly blind to what he had done. Nevertheless, a few other works by this artist indicate that he in fact was quite lucid about it. *Tuez-les tous, Dieu reconnaître les Siens*, from 1961, is an accumulation of household insecticide pumps. The prominent brand-names of some – Fly-Tox, Flit, Projex – testify to the commodification even of poison. Here we have to remember Clov, in Beckett's *Fin de partie*, who, discovering a flea has gotten inside his pants, doses his own genitals with poison. As Adorno noted, the scene is one of several in this work that point to the endgame of human domination of nature, which was always self-repressive and carried latently within it a reversal of the instinct for survival. Moreover, insecticide is historically entangled in the pre-history of Zyklon-B, the toxin used in the Nazi gas chambers: 'Insecticide, which pointed toward the death camps from the very beginning, becomes the end-product of the domination of nature, which now abolishes itself.'[53] Arman's title is a line imputed to the Abbot of Cîteaux, the Church official who commanded the massacre of the inhabitants of Béziers, in the south of France, in 1209, during the Albigensian Crusade. It expresses the moment in the escalation of administered violence when the jump is made to whole categories of people, all the members of which are to be targeted and killed indiscriminately. After Auschwitz, racializing translations of the slogan continue to circulate; one in English ('Kill them all and let God sort 'em out') seems to have been popular among US soldiers in Vietnam and, passing through the proxy wars of the South African apartheid regime a decade or so later, to have become a badge of mercenary culture.[54] To point quickly in passing to two more accumulations: *Le village des damnés*, from 1962, packs dolls of children into a glass vitrine as tightly as those deported to the camps were packed into cattle cars; *Birth control*, from 1963, echoes this, but this time the dolls are packed in a hinged cardboard box that evokes the suitcases of the deported.

One more aspect of the Nazi genocide must be attested before this constellation of references can throw its negative light on *Plight*. The

makers of *Nuit et brouillard* produced a German-language version, with Paul Celan's translation of Cayrol's text. *Nacht und Nebel* opened in German cinemas in late 1956, and in April 1957 was broadcast on German television.[55] In the sequences treating the Nazi plunder of victims, Resnais' film takes note of the fact that the victims' hair was shaven, collected in depots, and eventually turned into 'cloth' or textile (*tissu*). Several images show a pyramid of human hair, and another shows what is presumably raw human hair, in a column-like form wrapped in paper. The paper is marked: *K*[onzentrations].*L*[ager].*Au*[schwitz] *Kg 22*. The voice-over for this sequence tells us '*Rien que des cheveux de femme... A quinze pfennigs le kilo... On en fait du tissu.*' (Nothing but women's hair... at fifteen pfennigs a kilo... it's used to make textile). What the hair was turned into, actually, was felt. At Auschwitz, Soviet cameramen filmed the seven tons of human hair that was packed for shipment to German factories, where, other captured documents entered into the record at Nuremburg revealed, the hair of the victims was routinely turned into felt. In these sequences, which last more than a minute, we see 293 column-like sacks of hair, laid on their sides in two stacks, end to end. The sacks are roughly the size of the 284 felt columns used by Beuys to line the walls of *Plight*. The Soviet film footage was reissued in 1985, for the fortieth anniversary of the war's end. In the same year, Lanzmann released *Shoah* and Beuys opened *Plight* in London.[56] In the Pompidou catalog, the full title of Beuys' work, which presumably reflects the artist's retrospective alteration of the dating, is: *Plight 1956–1985.*

The Avowal of *Plight*

We now have all we need to understand what this work is and how it does what it does. Beuys took a long time to attain this synthesis, which in its quiet, restrained precision and power is unequalled by anything else in his output. In the interval before: the Eichmann Trial (1961–62), the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials (1963–65), the German student movement and global uprisings of 1968, the trauma of the RAF. And several decades of playing the art game: haranguing from chalkboards, melting fat, wearing felt, wrapping pianos with it. By 1985, he was ready, whether or not he had full and lucid consciousness of what he pulled together there. In constructing a sculptural afterimage to enclose this space, Beuys in effect 'snared' the sacks in the hair room at Auschwitz and flipped them up from the horizontal to the vertical, just as Spoerri did with his *pièges*. In standing ranks, the felt columns now evoke the victims by negative presentation – this time through the inescapable

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8. Documentation photo of seven tons of human hair, packed in sacks for shipment to factories for processing into felt, abandoned at Auschwitz-II-Birkenau. Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Poland.

9. Joseph Beuys, *Plight 1956–1985*, 1985. Installation, Collection Musée national d'Art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

specificity of an irrefutable material linkage. The thermometer, we can now see, evokes the crematoria and lies on the staff board and piano like a crushing weight or pressure that holds it closed and keeps it silent.

We now have an avowal of the catastrophe that, at the same time, allegorizes art's predicament after Auschwitz, just as Adorno theorizes it. Music, the medium of raw feeling and deep consolation, will not be adequate before the facts of what happened; art will have to shut up. Or rather, because not even silence gets us out of the circle, art will have to go on, bearing its shame and the challenge to break radically with its affirmative tradition. Only in silence can the name of the catastrophe be spoken, but still it must be spoken – if only through the dissonance of a negative, hermetic installation. This one, here, now, puts the spectator under the surveillance of a community of evoked victims, ranked along the walls, as if along fences of barbed wire. The title confirms the interpretation and takes its place within it: if the avowed trauma was that of which no worse can be conceived, it remains, in its urgent legacy for us, a situation of extreme danger and difficulty. Even the secondary meaning of 'plight' piles on, as a question that, given the tendencies of the social process, we must leave open: the situation imposes on us a duty and promise, but only insofar as we can still claim at all to be autonomous, ethical, political subjects. Maybe, in the trial and moment of truth, we earn that designation, maybe we do not. In this work, there is no trace of confident posturing, jester's tricks, or the weird dancing of shamans. The work draws no conclusions about our capacity either to fathom the horror or save ourselves from it. It simply avows: *that happened* and so it is. The disturbance of this work – attested by the punches and kicks of spectators, imprinted into the columns of the second room – leads through the dead-end, to the shudder of the after-Auschwitz sublime.

To have said this is not to have said everything. One would like to say more, and should. Avowal is a moment only – of and in a social process that churns on in defiance of all avowals. What we do with our avowals, where we go with them and how we put them to work, with others, is another, more political matter. The sublime, in itself, is not self-rescue, any more than it ever was. We may think *Plight*, as synthesis and culmination, came rather late in the dialectic of avowal and avoidance. But the irony, if that is what we must call it, lies elsewhere: in *Plight*'s reception, which long managed to avoid what the work avows, and in the social *factum brutum* that all the accelerated proliferation of remembrance in art and official culture since has not resulted in any global public lucidity about the social process. Its powers of terror, far from being arrested,

have only continued to grow. Rememoration is not always, not automatically, counter-memory. It is no longer 1985.

Notes

1. Dissemination is a process rather than a sudden event of universal transmission achieved with perfect success, once and for all, upon first exhibition or publication.

2. See my 'Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime', in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray (New York: D.A.P. and The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2001), pp. 59–61; and revised in Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 37–38.

3. The London configuration is the main focus here. I do not take into account later alterations, such as clear plexiglass barriers lining the entrance passageway, introduced into the Paris version at the Centre Georges Pompidou, or damage inflicted by spectators.

4. As far as I am aware, Beuys is not suspected of any direct participation in the Nazi genocide. How much he may have known about it, from within the Nazi war machine, is less clear and more open to controversy, but in the absence of irrefutable evidence remains unknowable.

5. John Cage, *Silence* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), pp. 13–14.

6. Ibid., p. 17.

7. Ibid., p. 47.

8. Cage's name appears only once, in passing, in Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie*, but there Adorno aligns him with Beckett's reduction of meaning to the absence of any redeeming meaning: 'Schlüsselphänomene mögen auch gewisse musikalische Gebilde wie das Klavierkonzert von Cage sein, die als Gesetz unerbittliche Zufälligkeit sich auferlegen und dadurch etwas wie Sinn: den Ausdruck von Entsetzen empfangen.' ('Key phenomena may include musical constructions, such as the piano concert of Cage, which by imposing relentless chance on themselves as law thereby attain something like meaning: the expression of horror.' *Ästhetische Theorie* [1970], eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 231; *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 154. Here and throughout, English renderings of Adorno are my modifications of the standard translations.

9. Ibid., p. 117, my slashes (/) marking discrete measures, four to a line, and double-slashes (//) marking line breaks in Cage's scored lecture. The text continues: 'But quiet sounds / / were like loneliness / , or // love / or friendship / . / Permanent, I thought // , / values, / independent / at least from // Life, Time and / Coca-Cola / .'

10. What a shock it must have been, for example, when the full extent of the Nazi genocide was revealed, to have remembered his 1942 work for prepared piano, titled *In the Name of the Holocaust*, after Joyce's pun from *Finnegans Wake* ('In the name of the Holy Ghost.'). Such an accident might fuel anyone's reflection on the relation of culture and chance. But for Cage the sensitive American, Hiroshima was probably the more traumatic detonation.

11. In that year, Cage began studies of Zen with D. T. Suzuki and of Indian philosophy with Gita Sarabhai.

12. Born in Korea, Paik finished a thesis on Schoenberg at the University of Tokyo in 1956. Afterwards in Europe, he studied with Karlheinz Stockhausen in Cologne before meeting Cage in Darmstadt in 1958.

13. Contrast this with Cage's most extreme embrace of indeterminacy, *0'0"*, performable by anyone in any manner, composed in the same year.

14. See Douglas Kahn, 'The Latest: Fluxus and Music', in Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, *In the Spirit of Fluxus* (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 1993), pp. 100–21; on Beuys and Fluxus, see Joan Rothfuss, 'Joseph Beuys: Echoes in America', in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray, pp. 37–53.

15. For other readings of these tendencies in postwar art history, see *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949–1979*, eds. Paul Schimmel and Russell Ferguson (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

16. Spoerri, like Paul Celan and Isidore Isou a Rumanian Jew displaced by the Nazi terror, is probably the most complex and interesting of the Nouveaux Réalistes. By his own account, he fled with his mother and siblings to Switzerland in 1942, his father, Isaac Feinstein, having been murdered by the Nazis in 1940. See Spoerri's interview with Freddy De Vree in *Daniel Spoerri: Detrompe-l'oeil* (Antwerp: Ronny Van de Velde, 2000), no pagination. Cf. *Nouveau Réalisme*, ed. Susanne Neuburger (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, 2005), p. 198; and *Anekdotomania: Daniel Spoerri über Daniel Spoerri* (Basel: Museum Jean Tinguey Basel and Hatje Cantz Verlag), p. 290.

17. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* [1966] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), p. 355: 'das perennierende Leiden'; *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1995) p. 362. Cf. the variant, 'das perennierende Unheil', in 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' [1951], in *Prismen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), p. 16; 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 25. Both mark the legacy of misery unfolding from the division of labor, 'die tödliche Spaltung der Gesellschaft', 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', p. 15; 'the deadly splitting of society', 'Cultural Criticism and Society', p. 24. Pertinently, the separation of spirit (*Geist*) from manual labor is the necessary condition and primal scene of all autonomous art and culture.

18. See Adorno, 'Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit' [1959], in

Eingriffe: Neun kritische Modelle (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 139; 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past', *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 98.

19. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, p. 355: 'Völkermord ist die absolute Integration', in *Negative Dialectics*, p. 362.

20. Part of Adorno's critical provocation is to insist that, essentially, Auschwitz is an absolute threat that exceeds its historic specificity. Auschwitz qua appearance-form (*Erscheinungsform*), to use Adorno's Hegelian idiom, was driven by toxic and anti-Semitic fantasies of racial purity that took hold, with official promotion, in Germany, within a highly specific conjuncture of history. Auschwitz qua essence (*Wesen*), however, is the genocidal potential of social tendencies toward integration and administration. Behind the murder of Jews by Nazis, the logic of modernity itself is unfolding.

21. To clarify this was a main aim of my *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory*; see in particular chapters one and eleven (of the revised soft-cover edition), as well as my further elaborations in 'Hits: From Trauma and the Sublime to Radical Critique', *Third Text* 23, no. 2 (2009): 135–49.

22. As Adorno puts it, the 'threat of total catastrophe' ('*der ... Drohung der totalen Katastrophe*') has become '*allgegenwärtigen*' – omnipresent, ubiquitous, saturating the contemporary. *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 362; *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 243–44.

23. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, p. 324: 'Keine Universalgeschichte führt vom Wilden zur Humanität, sehr wohl eine von der Steinschleuder zur Megabombe.' *Negative Dialectics*, p. 320.

24. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 16: 'Der Doppelcharakter der Kunst als autonom und als fait social teilt ohne Unterlaß der Zone ihrer Autonomie mit sich.' *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 5.

25. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', p. 26; 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', p. 17: 'alle Kultur am Schuldzusammenhang der Gesellschaft teilhat'.

26. Max Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* [1944] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2003), pp. 128–76; *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 94–36.

27. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 1; *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 9: 'nicht einmal ihr Existenzrecht'.

28. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', p. 34; 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', p. 31: '[N]ach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frißt auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben.'

29. In 'Engagement' [1962], in *Noten zur Literatur*, pp. 422–23; in English as

'Commitment', in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 87–88; *Negative Dialektik* [1966], pp. 355–56; *Negative Dialectics*, p. 362; 'Ist die Kunst heiter?' [1967] in *Noten zur Literatur*, pp. 603–4; 'Is Art Lighthearted?' in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, p. 251; and 'Kunst und die Künste' [1967] in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10.1, p. 454; 'Art and the Arts', trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 387.

30. Both '*Gedicht*' and '*Gedichte*' are to be read here as synecdoche for all the arts, in the same way that 'Auschwitz' stands for the Nazi genocide.

31. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 366–67; *Negative Dialektik*, pp. 359–60: 'Alle Kultur nach Auschwitz, samt der dringlichen Kritik daran, ist Müll. Indem sie sich restaurierte nach dem, was in ihrer Landschaft ohne Widerstand sich zutrug, ist sie gänzlich zu der Ideologie geworden, die sie potentiell war, seitdem sie, in Opposition zur materiellen Existenz, dieser das Licht einzuhauchen sich anmaßte, das die Trennung des Geistes von körperlicher Arbeit ihr vorenthielt. Wer für Erhaltung der radikal schuldigen und schäbigen Kultur plädiert, macht sich zum Helfershelfer, während, wer der Kultur sich verweigert, unmittelbar die Barbarei befördert, als welche die Kultur sich enthüllte. Nicht einmal Schweigen kommt aus dem Zirkel heraus.' Cf. Adorno's gloss on 'Schuld' (guilt) in *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 347–48; *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 234–35.

32. I of course am not claiming these artists were all struggling readers of Adorno. The dissemination of Adorno's texts may have played a role, but cannot explain everything. It is the social process, unfolding as history that bears down on all, which both Adorno and artists responded to, in whatever ways they could.

33. Adorno's case against Brecht is stimulating, but not without serious problems. I examine these in 'Dialectical Realism and Radical Commitments: Brecht and Adorno on Representing Capitalism', *Historical Materialism* 18, no. 3 (2010): 3–24.

34. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 243; *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 360: 'Praktische Wirkung üben Kunstwerke allenfalls in einer kaum dingfest zu machenden Veränderung des Bewusstseins aus, nicht indem sie haranguieren.'

35. See my *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory*, chapter one; and my summary discussion in 'Hits: From Trauma and the Sublime to Radical Critique.'

36. Adorno, 'Commitment', p. 90; 'Engagement', p. 426: 'Kafkas Prosa, Becketts Stücke oder der wahrhaft ungeheuerliche Roman Der Namenlose üben eine Wirkung aus, der gegenüber die offiziell engagierten Dichtungen wie Kinderspiel sich ausnehmen; sie erregen die Angst, welche der Existentialismus nur beredet. Als Demontagen des Scheins sprengen sie die Kunst von innen her, welche das proklamierte Engagement von außen, und darum nur zum Schein, unterjocht. Ihr

Unausweichliches nötigt zu jener Änderung der Verhaltensweise, welche die enga-gierten Werke bloß verlangen. Wen einmal Kafkas Räder überfuhren, dem ist der Friede mit der Welt ebenso verloren wie die Möglichkeit, bei dem Urteil sich zu bescheiden, der Weltlauf sie schlecht: das bestätigende Moment ist weggeätzt, das der resignierten Feststellung von der Übermacht des Bösen innewohnt.'

37. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 364: 'Erschütterung, dem üblichen Erlebnis-begriff schroff entgegengesetzt, ist keine partikulare Befriedigung des Ichs, der Lust nicht ähnlich. Eher ist sie ein Memento der Liquidation des Ichs, das als erschüttertes der eigenen Beschränktheit und Endlichkeit innewird.' *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 245: 'Shudder, starkly opposed to the usual concept of experience, is no particular satisfaction of the ego, is not similar to desire. Rather, it is a memento of the liquidation of the ego, which, shaken to the core, becomes aware of its own limitedness and finitude.' At this point, Adorno's rewriting of the sublime intersects with Jacques Lacan's rewriting of Freud's theory of trauma in the 1964 Seminar, published as *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), pp. 63–75, in English as *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), pp. 53–64.

38. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft,Werkausgabe*, vol. 10, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 201.

39. Adorno, 'Commitment', p. 90; 'Engagement', p. 425: 'die Abstraktheit des Gesetzes, das objektiv in der Gesellschaft waltet.'

40. Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*', in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 260; 'Ver-such, das Endspiel zu Verstehen', in *Noten zur Literatur*, p. 303: 'es keine Nährpillen mehr gebe'.

41. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 380. *Negative Dialektik*, p. 373: 'Beckett hat auf die Situation des Konzentrationslagers, die er nicht nennt, als läge über ihr Bilderverbot, so reagiert, wie es allein ansteht. Was ist, sei wie das Konzentra-tionslager.'

42. Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*', p. 249; 'Versuch, das Endspiel zu Verstehen', p. 290: 'Schweigend nur ist der Name des Unheils auszusprechen.'

43. See the correspondence between the two, published with an introduction by Joachim Seng in *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter*, no. 8 (2003).

44. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 322; *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 477: 'Im bedeu-tendsten Repräsentanten hermitischer Dichtung der zeitgenössischen deutschen Lyrik, Paul Celan, hat der Erfahrungsgehalt des Hermetischen sich umgekehrt. Diese Lyrik ist durchdrungen von der Scham der Kunst angesichts des wie der Erfahrung so der Sublimierung sich entziehenden Leids. Celans Gedichte wollen das äußerste Entsetzen durch Verschweigen sagen.'

45. See Raye Farr, 'Some Reflections on Claude Lanzmann's Approach to the Examination of the Holocaust', in *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*, eds. Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), pp. 161–67.

46. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'From Yves Klein's *Le Vide* to Arman's *Le Plein*', in Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. 270.

47. This seminal work was written in French and translated by Beckett into English; a German edition, however, translated by Elmar Tophoven with Beckett's approval, appeared even before the English: *Fin de partie* (Les Editions de Minuit, 1957); *Endspiel* (Suhrkamp, 1957); *Endgame* (Grove, 1958). Adorno met and had long discussions with Beckett in Paris in 1958; he had already seen a production of *Endspiel* in Vienna. The dedication of Adorno's essay on *Endspiel* reads, in English: 'To S.B., in memory of Paris, Fall 1958.' On the dustbins, Adorno comments: 'Beckett's trashcans are emblems of the culture reconstructed after Auschwitz.' 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*', pp. 266–67; 'Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen', p. 322: 'Becketts Mülleimer sind Embleme der nach Auschwitz wiederaufgebauten Kultur.' On Adorno's meetings with Beckett, see Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), pp. 356–60. On the early production history of *Fin de partie*, see Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (London: Flamingo, 1997), pp. 458–66.

48. Walter Benjamin taught that aura is a charge or effect of distance grounded in various kinds of authority – that invested in singular artworks, authentic experience or returning 'lost time'. We may belong to the era of reproducibility, degraded experience and enfeebled memory, but even withered subjects can still suffer trauma. Traumatic history, evoked and avowed by negative presentation, would very emphatically have claim to a requisite authority.

49. Buchloh, 'From Yves Klein's *Le Vide* to Arman's *Le Plein*', p. 274. Indeed, as a footnote (19, p. 283) to his discussion at this point indicates, he went to the trouble of confirming, in an interview with Arman, that the artist 'saw the film upon its release and remembers its having a profound impact on him'.

50. Ibid., p. 272–74.

51. Ibid., p. 259.

52. This is to say that only in *reception* does the subjective decisively reappear: only in specific spectators can such linkages be activated and effects produced. All the factors conditioning the encounter between spectator and artwork (namely the shaping of subjective disposition by the objective social process) then come into play. With regard to *production*, artistic intention is not necessarily fully conscious and cannot always be verified. Nor are moments of attained lucidity necessarily permanent. *How* such potentials were installed in

specific works is finally not as important as the fact, which we *can* verify, that they *are* installed there. With Beuys, too, this is the case.

53. Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*', p. 270; 'Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen', p. 315: 'Das Insektenvertilgungsmittel, das vom Anbeginn auf die Vernichtungslager hinauswollte, wird sum Endprodukt der Naturbeherrschung, die sich selbst erledigt.'

54. The slogan was openly promoted in the pages of *Soldier of Fortune*, a magazine found on the racks of retail bookstore chains, and even today T-shirts bearing it can be purchased online from Amazon.com.

55. On the German version and its reception, see Ewout van der Knaap, 'Enlightening Procedures: *Nacht und Nebel* in Germany', in *Uncovering the Holocaust: The International Reception of Night and Fog*, ed. van der Knaap (London and New York: Wallflower Press), pp. 46–85.

56. The footage filmed by Aleksander Woroncow at Auschwitz in 1945 was reissued by Irmgard von zur Mühlen, with added voice-over commentary and a new interview with Woroncow, as *Die Befreiung von Auschwitz* (1985). The film has been available on DVD since 2005.

Apocalypse (Not) Now

Sven Lütticken

ABSTRACT From its beginning in the 1940s, the nuclear regime has been the subject of aesthetic as well as political practices and interventions. This article examines a number of such interventions, from the Surrealists via the Situationists to the present. The focus is on forms of aesthetic activism that challenges the reigning thanatocracy. Key figures are Roberto Matta and Wolfgang Paalen (as "first responders" in the 1940s), Situationists such as Debord and Vaneigem in the late 1950s and 1960s (effecting a repoliticization of avant-garde aesthetics), later writings by ex-Situationists and pro-Situs such as René Riesel and Jaime Semprun, as well as contemporary artists such as Ei Arakawa and The Otolith Group (and their responses to Fukushima). Through concepts and tropes such as invisibility, survival and mutation, these practitioners seek to counteract the "insensible" nature of radiation and problematize post-war society's dependency on nuclear deterrence and "peaceful" nuclear technology alike.
KEYWORDS Invisibility, Neo-avant-garde, Nuclear arms, Nuclear energy, Radiation

Those who today limit themselves to the perception of whatever happens to be visible at that moment miss reality.

–Günther Anders[1]

At a 1984 "Nuclear Criticism" conference, Jacques Derrida gave a lecture titled "No Apocalypse: Not Now," in which he argued that a nuclear "apocalypse" would actually not be worthy of that name. The very distinction between science and belief has collapsed in the age of Cold War rhetoric. Nuclear power being no longer strictly techno-scientific but rather "techno-militaro-politico-diplomatic," its calculations are as it were polluted with "doxa, opinion, 'belief.'"[2] This also means that there is no longer any place for truth: "No truth, no apocalypse. (As you know. Apocalypse means Revelation, of Truth, Un-veiling.)"[3] With a nuclear catastrophe, there can be no Hegelian, teleological end of history, with Spirit finally realizing its essence.

What nuclear technology *does* announce is the possibility of a total destruction of the cultural archive, much more radical than that of the Library of Alexandria.[4] Even while we thus appear to face the destruction of literature and culture by technoscience, Derrida argues that nuclear technology is itself "fabulously textual," being built upon structures of information, structures of language, and nuclear war existing only as a myth or fantasy:

For the moment, today, one may say that a non-localizable nuclear war has not occurred; it has existence only through what is said of it, only where it is talked about. Some might call it a fable, then, a pure invention: in the sense in which it is said that a myth, an image, a fiction, a utopia, a rhetorical figure, a fantasy, a phantasm, are inventions. It may also be called a speculation, even a fabulous specularization. The breaking of the mirror would be, finally, through an act of language, the very occurrence of a nuclear war. Who can swear that our unconscious is not expecting this? Dreaming of it, desiring it?[5]

As the field of fantasy and belief, as fabulously textual, the nuclear regime has from its beginning been the subject of aesthetic as well as activist practices and interventions. However, certain of these practices can also be seen as de facto critiques of Derrida's insistence on the textual and the fantasmatic, on text and image. Does the nuclear regime not exacerbate the crisis of the aesthetic? Or, to put it differently: does it not intensify the aesthetic as a practice and theory *of* crisis? The aesthetic pertains to the senses, to the sensible. What, then, if the modern "mastery" of matter penetrates the infra-sensible realm, with consequences for all living beings that are carefully kept abstract and hypothetical?

1. First Responses

The avant-garde had a profound investment in realities below the threshold of visibility – and with operations that would introduce them into the visual by changing the nature of the image. Moholy-Nagy's "new vision" and Walter Benjamin's "optical unconscious" are cases in point. Film and photography were credited with the power to make the world manifest itself in unprecedented ways, beyond 19th century realism, and beyond the capabilities of the human eye. Moholy's interest in X-rays and Benjamin's in psychoanalysis are far from disconnected to their investment in the possibilities of film: Akira Azura Lippit has argued that psychoanalysis, X-ray and cinema, all developed or discovered around the same time, were the essential techniques of "avisuality" of the early twentieth century, promising to make things and the mind transparent.[6]

In "Prolégomènes à un troisième *manifeste* du Surréalisme ou non," which was published in *VVV* in New York in 1942, André Breton launched the "new myth" of the "Great Transparent Ones" – giant invisible beings whose parasites we humans are. The text was illustrated by Roberto Matta, who always maintained that he had provided Breton with the idea for the *Grands Transparents*.[7] Whereas Breton interpreted them more literally as enormous invisible beings, for Matta they were

wave-forms: "That's what had interested Breton, the idea of 'great transparencies' that I spoke about. The great transparencies in these paintings were like waves – they were, for example, economic, social, and political upheavals."[8] To this list, one surely has to add *nuclear events.* Shortly after WWII, Matta illustrated Denis de Rougememont's book *Lettres sur la bombe atomique*, published by Brentano's in New York. As the introduction states, Matta "was always drawn to modern physicists' work on wave propagation and radiation, and to the huge transformations that scientists had imposed on matter" – with drawings of emaciated beings in some non-Euclidian forcefield.[9] However, his illustrations for de Rougemont's book reflect an anthropomorphic turn in his work, characterized by emaciated figures Matta often referred to with the term *vitreur.* These *vitreurs* inhabit the universe of the *Grands Transparents.*

De Rougemont, a Swiss author who was to become one of the mainstays of the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom, reports in his book on the last months of 1945, which he spent on the American East Coast, where he encountered two cultures: that of art, as exemplified by Marcel Duchamp, and that of (nuclear) science. Duchamp, identified here only (and rather misleadingly) as "a surrealist painter," did not let the explosion of the first nuclear bombs change his convictions: science is nothing but a mythology, its "laws" are man-made myths and have no bearing on reality. The explosion of the Bomb did not prove that science had actually penetrated the core of reality: "Some proof – they had arranged for it!"[10] During a stay in Princeton, de Rougemont found himself surrounded by the scientists who had "arranged" the explosion; here Einstein – the Moses of the atomic Earth – walked by his window. For de Rougemont, the Bomb heralded the end of war and contained "possibilities for a global union."[11] What was needed in the face of global nuclear annihilation was a "planetary thinking": "To the planetary weapon thus corresponds a universal community that relegates nations to the status of mere provinces. Let yourself get carried away for a moment in this revolving game of symbols: the Earth, the Globe, the Ball, the Head, the Bomb, and the Unit regarded always and everywhere as a round object – apple, sphere or golden scepter, whether the Universe, or the Empire, or the Atom. Here, extremes mirror each other."[12] As many science-fiction films would reiterate, it takes a planetary threat to create global unity.

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, advances in particle physics seemed to be full of promise to some of the younger Surrealists: was this not an exemplary science that was both materialist and sur-real, promising new ways of understanding and altering reality? Wolfgang Paalen,

who lived and worked in Mexico during World War II, having broken with Breton's group, claimed in a 1944 interview: "It seems to me that we have to reach a *potential* concept of reality, based as much on the new directives of physics as on those of art."[13] Having liberated himself from Breton, Paalen embarked on a crusade against dialectics, reserving special scorn for Engels's notion of a *dialectic of nature*, which made the category mistake of applying logical categories not only to history, but even to the natural world.[14]

But while Paalen attacked Engels's famous law of the transformation of quantity into quality as nonsense, he effectively presented his own version of surrealist dialectics by arguing that "[the] new Quantum Physics is compelled to abandon the rigorous determinism that until now was held to be the very foundation of physics," and therefore compelled to question physics' "pretension of offering us a purely quantitative and yet satisfying interpretation." [15] This in turn had to have consequences for art as the domain of *qualitative* experience, albeit one that had often been made subject to pictorial rules and "laws." As Paalen phrased the relation between advanced science and advanced art: "Quantitative physics, in perceiving that the causal concept becomes inapplicable in the microscopic domain – and painting, in abandoning the causal development of plastic relations – is the same revolution."[16] The "new physics" having abandoned causality and certitude for potentiality and possibility, Paalen adopted the Greek term *dynaton* (the possible) for his art. Abbreviated to *Dyn*, this became the name of the journal he published from Mexico – in part to remain a presence in the New York art world.

Matta's characterization of Paalen as "the first painter of the Atomic Age" irked the latter, who complained about it in a letter written a few weeks after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings.[17] To Paalen, it seemed that Matta was compromising his work by placing it in an illustrative relation with Hiroshima and Nagasaki – which is what Matta did with his own work in illustrating de Rougemont's book.[18] Paalen, in turn, *did* respond quite directly to the double nuclear event of August 1946 with a play he completed the following year, *The Beam of the Balance.* In a post-Hiroshima counterpoint to his earlier praise for the new physics, Paalen's play is a sci-fi allegory on the dangers of nuclear power in the hands of all-too-human scientists and barely human politicians. As Paalen notes in the "Brief Outline" for his play, "Reality has, at last, become big enough to do away with realism. [...] The incommensurable explosions of 1945 have not only smashed cities but also shattered consciences. The same men who have been able to release forces beyond the

dreams of yesterday, have proved inadequate to tell us what to do with these forces."[19]

Convinced that only an artistic "liberation of the imagination" can result in the "broadening of vision: necessary to deal with the new (un) reality," Paalen opens his three-act play with a cosmic vision set among the stars: "Cosmogons," great cosmic forces, watch stars and/or planets (Paalen seems not to care about the distinction) blow up one after another, as civilizations develop technologies they cannot control. Earth, we hear, still hands in the balance – there is a "decisive struggle" going on, and in the three acts to follow we witness that struggle, involving a scientist (Prometheus/Faust), an ape-like, brutish dictator whose name (Gori) is a reference to Stalin's birthplace, and a stand-in for Paalen himself, Frank. The first two acts are set in a post-office that is crumbling under the unleashed power of "anagravity," which has been unlocked by Prometheus/Faust and stolen by Gori – and which is Paalen's stand-in for nuclear power. In the third act, Prometheus and Frank return to a post-apocalyptic earth, having absconded with a spaceship when things went really wrong; they find a wasteland, but Gori is still alive and unchanged. Disappointed with Marxism and with Surrealism, Paalen retreats to a position of bourgeois humanism. The resulting critique of human folly is prevented from being truly withering by its general and abstract nature.

A reading of *The Beam of the Balance* took place at Robert Motherwell's house; the year before, Motherwell had published a collection of Paalen's writings, *Form and Sense*.[20] Motherwell's fellow post-Surrealist, Barnett Newman, saw in Hiroshima the need for a new tragic culture. In his essay "The New Sense of Fate" (1948), Newman praised Greek tragic poetry to the detriment of Greek visual art (sculpture), which had no real sense of tragedy and was focused on physical beauty. Newman noted that after WWII, the artist "has more feeling and consequently more understanding for a Marquesas islands fetish than for the Greek figure."[21] The war was the gruesome realization of Surrealism, making much Surrealist art look very recherché and aesthetic in the process:

> The war the Surrealists predicted has robbed us of our hidden terror, as terror can exist only if the forces of tragedy are unknown. We now know the terror to expect. Hiroshima showed it to us. We are no longer, then, in the face of a mystery. After all, wasn't it an American boy who did it? The terror has indeed become as real as life. What we have now is a tragic rather than a terrifying situation.[22]

In 1945, Georges Henein, member of an Egyptian Surrealist group, re-

sponded to Hiroshima in an essay titled "The Prestige of Terror." Praising "the valiantly independent attitude of Camus – and, for other things, of a Breton, a Calas, a Rougemont," Henein develops a much more political analysis of "terror" than Newman with his "tragic" stance.[23] After Auschwitz, carpet bombings and Hiroshima, the Dialectic of Enlightenment had finally culminated in a generalized system of terror and counter-terror that seemed to offer a form of security: "Today, a new generation of Encyclopédists who proceeded with the same impertinence as the earlier one, would be made illegal or quickly reduced to begging. Everything is taking place as if man were looking into this long series of unhappy ambitions for a certain form of security in the terror."[24] This kind of dialectical analysis of post-war "security in terror" was far removed from Newman's concerns, which were couched in much more abstract-existential terms. In his conclusion, Newman asks and asserts: "shall we artists make the same error as the Greek sculptors and play with an art of over-refinement, an art of quality, of sensibility, of beauty? Let us rather, like the Greek writers, tear the tragedy to shreds."[25]

While there are notable exceptions, especially in literature and the cinema, on the whole the art of the "first responders" of the late 1940s and 1950s tended to stage the post-war nuclear age *as existential tragedy* rather than as political issue.[26] To a large extent this is true also of the arte nucleare movement created in 1950–51 by Enrico Baj and others. Their pronouncements on the destruction of existing forms and isms and on the "tragic" condition of man in the nuclear age remain within the horizon of post-war "nuclear existentialism," and Baj's attempts to create pictorial equivalents for this condition are fully part of the family of post-Matta and post-Paalen *art informel* – though there are striking exceptions, such as the 1952 *Manifesto Bum* painting, with the text painted over a blotched nuclear cloud.[27]

The aesthetic-existentialist "nuclear art" of the first ten post-war years was profoundly humanist so far as it ultimately posited the artwork as fragile yet enduring in opposition to what Derrida would articulate as "the possibility of an irreversible destruction, leaving no traces, of the juridico-literary archive" – or indeed of the cultural archive in general. The possibility of a total and remainderless destruction of culture and of life is evoked yet at the same time symbolically conquered through the proliferation of tattered, ravaged or starkly simplified and thereby sublime and existential forms.

In 1958, during an anti-nuclear conference in Tokyo, the philosopher and anti-nuclear activist Günther Anders visited the memorial of the

nuclear bombardment in Hiroshima. Its abstract arch only appeared symbolic "because the non-functional always suggests symbolism," and reminded him of American abstract expressionism and its endorsement by the US, even by the War Department itself:[28]

> It is no coincidence that this belated official preference for the destruction of figurative forms in art (the propaganda for enjoyment of this destruction and the mocking of those who did not go along with this artistic progress) occurred simultaneously with the actual destruction of the world; nor is it a coincidence that the dress rehearsal for this destruction, which occurred in Hiroshima, found its memorial in a "non-objective object."[29]

Anders's unwillingness to see in Abstract Expressionism anything but a politically motivated rip-off of pre-war European modernism is obviously problematical, but his suspicions of the open, non-committal nature of the pseudo-symbolism of such art are worth pondering.

This openness contributed to the aesthetic success of post-war abstraction, but also condemned its attempts to respond to the new nuclear era to the production of pat and hollow sub-existentialist suggestions. If, to use a phrase by Sabu Kosho that also evokes Jean-Luc Nancy's analysis of the "equivalence of catastrophes," nuclear explosions and disasters announce "the advent of an age when commodification of everything by capitalism has reached the point where *general equivalence* of value is increasingly approaching the proximity of *general catastrophe* of living," then the art in question tacitly ascribes to this equivalence – and inscribes itself into it.[30] The equivalence of the value of all life in the equivalence of (potential) catastrophes is aestheticized in the form of cultural commodities that are anxiously, tormentedly at home in the global thanatocracy of the nuclear regime.[31]

In 1958, when Anders visited Hiroshima, the first anti-nuclear movement was gaining traction. In Britain, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was launched, and with it the New Left. More marginally, in Paris André Breton penned an anti-nuclear manifesto, *Demasquez les physiciens, videz les laboratoires*, which was co-signed mostly by younger Surrealists, and which attacked the "theology of the bomb" and science's status as the new "Opium of the People."[32] While the text exhorts the reader to support a Comité de Lutte Anti-Nucléaire, this does not appear to have gained any traction. Nonetheless, this tract is a sign of things to come: the neo-avant-garde would go on to desublimate the nuclear aesthetics of the post-war era.

2. Every Day Is like Survival

The fact that I critique a problematic aestheticization of the nuclear should not be taken to mean that I wish to install an undialectical dichotomy of "merely aesthetic" and "properly political" responses. The problem is perhaps not that the aforementioned responses are *aesthetic*, but that they are all too exclusively *artistic*, which curtails their aesthetic potential. In Hans Magnus Enzenberger's words, it is a matter of pursuing "an aesthetic which is not limited to the sphere of 'the artistic.'"[33] When Karl Marx predicted (or demanded) that under Communism painters, people exclusively devoted to the profession of painting, would be replaced by people who *also paint*, he was announcing the transformation of work as the aesthetic project par excellence.[34]

Like "culture," the "aesthetic" is a wider category than art. The modern aesthetic régime, or the modern ideology of the aesthetic, conceptualizes art both (variously, and sometimes simultaneously) as a realm of sensuous plenitude and as impoverished and locked up in failed forms and institutional structures. If aesthetic theory was to become primarily a philosophy of art, it could never shake off the wider remit given to the aesthetic by Baumgarten and Kant, as pertaining to the world of the sense or to the beautiful as such. Following Schiller, "aesthetic education" always came with a suspicion towards art. To fully realize art, it needed to overcome its limitations and realize itself in life, socially. This is the program that Schiller and early German Romanticism would bequeath to the avant-garde.

However, German Romanticism also saw a new emphasis on the essential national characteristics of the art of each people, separating it from that of other nations. "*Kultur* or Culture [...] became the name of the Romantic, pre-Marxist critique of early industrial capitalism."[35] *Kultur* was the name for a conservative version of the aesthetic revolution, of the dream of the integration of art into life and of overcoming art's newly asserted but already crippling autonomy. *Kultur* connected art to the people. Just as the Wilhelmine Empire would construct a parliament and dedicate it to "Dem deutschen Volke," so there would be a Nationalgalerie dedicated to "Der deutschen Kunst."

However, conservative-romantic programmes were less distinct from modern mass media and entertainment than their authors would have liked.[36] Bayreuth may have been a temple for the German Volk and its art, but the grail lights up electrically like a product at a world's fair or department store.[37] *Kultur* becomes a global capitalist *Kulturindustrie*, which confronts the "aesthetic revolution" of modern art with its obscene

double: the *Aufhebung* of art takes the form of commodified leisure and lifestyle. Rather than organically emerging from the people, as per conservative-romantic aesthetics, culture is mass-produced by experts. As Carl Andre, one of the protagonists of the Art Workers Coalition in the late 1960s, famously put it: "Art is what we do. Culture is what is done to us."[38] Artist have indeed been "separated from culture," with the latter appearing like an alien structure imposed by distant boardrooms.

When the Situationist International called for a *cultural revolution* in the late 1950s, this was part of its attack on "autonomous" art as well as on the cultural industry.[39] Art and "mass culture" alike were exponents of the spectacle; in fact, art has already been abolished by being integrated in spectacular culture. Given the "cultural turn" of capitalism in the advanced society of the spectacle, what was needed was not "just" a political or even social revolution, but a full-blown cultural revolution that would entail the aesthetic transformation of life – not as a substitute for its socio-political transformation, but as its culmination. In the early 60s, at a time of escalating nuclear tensions, this was often cast in terms of a fight of *life* against mere *survival* in the nuclear society of the spectacle. The 1962 article "The Geopolitics of Hibernation" in the *Internationale Situationniste* journal mentions the famed "Doomsday system," which two years later would feature as non-human antagonist in Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*: "one extremist faction of American defense doctrine has gone so far as to argue that 'the best deterrent would consist of the possession of an enormous thermonuclear bomb buried underground. If the enemy attacked, the bomb would be detonated and the Earth would be blown apart.'"[40]

Taking up Raoul Vaneigem's claim that life was increasingly being reduced to mere survival (which is, in fact, life's opposite), the article argues that:

> The theorists of this "Doomsday System" have certainly found the ultimate weapon for enforcing submission; they have for the first time translated the refusal of history into precise technical powers. But the rigid logic of these doctrinaires only responds to one aspect of the contradictory needs of the society of alienation, whose indissoluble project is to prevent people from living while it organizes their survival (see the opposition of the concepts of life and survival described by Vaneigem in *Basic Banalities*). Thus the Doomsday System, through its contempt for survival – which is still the indispensable condition for the present and future exploitation of human labor – can only play the role of last resort for the ruling bureaucracies: the insane proof of their seriousness.

But in order to be fully effective in reinforcing people's submission, the spectacle of a war to come must henceforth extend its sway over the organization of our present peacetime existence, while simultaneously accommodating itself to the basic requirements of that organization.[41]

The text homes in on a particularly grotesque manifestation of the nuclear regime: the development of small fallout shelters for the consumer market. These shelters, the Situationists note, will obviously not offer real protection in the case of nuclear war, but protection was only a pretext used to integrate people ever more tightly into a social-economical order that depends on their renunciation of their real desires and their channeling into artificial needs.[42] Survival as the opposite of and as substitute for life should not, however, be equated with the threat of nuclear war and the fallout-shelter racket:

Survival as the opposite of life, if rarely voted for so clearly as by the buyers of shelters in 1961, can be found at all levels of the struggle against alienation. It is found in the old conception of art, which stressed survival through one's works, an admission of a renunciation of life – art as excuse and consolation (principally since the bourgeois era of aesthetics, that secular substitute for the religious otherworld).[43]

Art, then, had been a de facto fallout shelter of the bourgeois soul long before Hiroshima.

And what about *new* conceptions of art? The Situationist International was of course torn over the issue of art; did the *dépassement* of bourgeois art necessitate the abandonment of art making altogether, in anticipation of a future *lived* art of constructed situations? With the resignation of Jorn in 1961 and the exclusion of the "Nashists" and "Spurists" in 1962, the SI was under the control of the Debordian "anti-art" fraction. This Debordian SI did however organize an art exhibition of sorts in Odense in 1963 – and it was an anti-nuclear show, *Destruction of RSG-6.* The (by now) opaque title refers to the plans for the British "Regional Seat of Government #6" nuclear bomb shelter, which had been made public by the group Spies for Peace in April 1962. Picking up the analysis from the previous year, Debord in his text "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art," which accompanied the exhibition, noted that "It is [...] the universally maintained *threat* of a nuclear war which now, in both the East and the West, serves to keep the masses submissive, to organize *shelters for state power*, and to reinforce the psychological and material defenses of the ruling class's power."[44]

In what is probably also a tactical response to the success of "artistic" or "Nashist" Situationism in Scandinavia, Debord states that "In the short term [...] a critical art can be carried out within the existing means of cultural expression, from cinema to painting – even though we ultimately wish to destroy this entire artistic framework."[45] The RSG-6 "event" (as Debord calls it) took the form of a gallery show that combined a space mimicking a fallout shelter and a shooting range with politicians' heads as targets with J. V. Martin's "thermonuclear maps."[46] Debord noted that "The medium here used in a critical fashion is painting."[47] Specifically, these paintings mockingly mimic abstract expressionism or art informel, turning their paint structures into war-ravaged landscapes; a nuclear desublimation of "existential" abstract expressionism.

A parallel attempt to turn art into a critical spectacle of destruction, to foreground the political and technological connotations of post-war art's "destruction of form" can be found in Gustav Metzger's "Auto-Destructive Art." In 1960, Metzger wrote: "Man in Regent Street is auto-destructive. Rockets, nuclear weapons, are auto-destructive. [...] The drop drop dropping of HH bombs. [...] Auto-destructive art re-enacts the obsession with destruction, the pummeling to which individuals and masses are subjected."[48] However, by Situationist standards Metzger's auto-destructive art remained too heavily invested in artistic gestures, with his treatment of nylon canvases with aggressive acids becoming an Yves Klein-like show. The "didactic" exhibition in Odense notwithstanding, the SI was wary of "re-enacting the obsession with destruction," which could all too easily become a symbolic substitute for action within the framework of art, or of mainstream popular spectacle – as in Pete Townsend's theatrical guitar-smashing.

The SI tended to use media that could be used for incursion and insertions into various contexts, without becoming fully part of them: books and pamphlets, detourned comic strips, posters and postcards, various forms of agitation and direct action. As is evident from this list, late-Gutenbergian Print culture in various manifestations was obviously key. The nexus of "socialism and print" went through its last great cycle in the 1960s and early 1970s.[49] Film was of course another crucial medium for the Situationists, but Debord's films or René Viénet's *Can Dialectics Break Bricks* (1972) "detourned" existing films precisely in order to counter the scopic and fetishistic lure of such spectacles.[50] In Britain in the 1960s, a filmmaker with access to the BBC's means of production made a television programme that *détourned* not actual pre-existing film footage, but rather various conventions of TV reportage and cinéma vérité as

well as mainstream filmmaking. Peter Watkins's *The War Game* (1965), which the BBC refused to air for decades, showed a "pre-enactment" of a nuclear attack striking Britain in what often looks uncannily like actual newsreel footage, even though the voice-over emphasizes that this is a hypothetical scenario on the basis of currently available data; this is how a nuclear war would likely play out. The footage focusing on the daily (and soon not-so-everyday) lives of ordinary people suggests documentary presentness, and it is probably the strength of this suggestion that made the BBC lock away Watkins's film. Similar to Situationists film, the voice-over and intertitles are didactic and create a dialectical tension with the images, but in Watkins's case the images are already a *counter-spectacle* that shows what cannot – what must not – be represented.

After the film version of *La Société du spectacle* in 1973 and a short film on its critical reception in 1975, Debord made *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978) as his farewell to the cinema. The film's producer, Gérard Lebovici, was also the patron of the publishing house Champ Libre (later Éditions Gérard Lebovici, later still Éditions Ivrea), with which Debord was closely involved – functioning as an éminence grise behind the scenes.[51] For almost two decades, this small and close-knit organization played a central role in his actitivities. Champ Libre was defiantly classicist in its book design and from a certain point refused to send newspapers review copies. Champ Libre was an autonomist organization that sought to maintain its own cultural-revolutionary activity in the face of the counter-revolutionary appropriation of May 68. The nuclear question was put squarely on the publisher's post-Situationist agenda with the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

From the early seventies through the 1980s, a wide-ranging movement, or constellation of movements, against military as well as "peaceful" nuclear power had of course developed, with the emergence of the Green Movement and the early 1980s protests against the stationing of cruise missiles in Europe. Debord and other ex-Situationists were largely absent from these "new forms of action." The nuclear question became an issue in Champ Libre circles largely because of Jaime Semprun, who in 1980 published a book on the "nuclearisation of the world," which takes the ironic form of a "modest proposal" supposedly written by a rabid defender of the nuclear regime. Semprun became a stalwart of Debord's/Champ Libre's circle, and after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 Éditions Gérard Lebovici (as Champ Libre had been renamed after Lebovici's assassination in 1984) published a reprint of *La Nucléarisation du monde*. The book now bore Semprun's name; it had originally been anonymous.[52]

The following year, Éditions Gérard Lebovici published an anonymous book that responded explicitly to the Chernobyl disaster, *Anatomie d'un nuage* (*Anatomy of a Cloud*).[53] Authored by Jean-Pierre Baudet, who imitated many of Debord's trademark tics, such as references to Clausewitz (whose writings he translated for Lebovici), the pamphlet argued that it is a fatal mistake to differentiate between military and civilian or "peaceful" uses of nuclear energy; it is in both cases a matter of warfare, of war against the global population in the service of a world-economical system that perpetuates itself at all costs.[54] Baudet was part of the editorial group of Jaime Semprun's *Encyclopédie des nuisances*, on which Debord also collaborated. However, due to Baudet's attempts to interest Debord in Günther Anders's 1950s anti-nuclear classic *The Obsolescence of Man*, the alliance ended in acrimony (as most of Debord's alliances tended to end) in 1988.[55]

In 2008, Semprun's own Éditions de l'Encyclopédie des nuisances released a book he co-authored with former Situationist René Riesel, *Catastrophisme, administration du désastre et soumission durable*, which forty years after 1968 delivered a totalizing post-Situationist indictment of the nuclear regime, and of "disaster capitalism" in general.[56] Parodying Debord's famous opening line, "In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacle*," Riesel and Semprun state that "the whole life of world industrial society now presents itself as an immense accumulation of catastrophes."[57] The authors effectively present these catastrophes as the dominant form of the spectacle today: "propaganda advocating authoritarian measures."[58]

The whole Debordian Champ Libre culture was "fabulously textual." In general, from the early campaigns against survival and nuclear fallout shelters to Chernobyl and beyond, the SI and Debord's post-SI circle write against the spectacle of destruction and survival; they marshal a Gutenbergian culture of radical printing against a different textual culture of nuclear codes, protocols and propaganda. If modern art in general was marked by a fraught dialectic of the specific and the general, of modernist fetishization of specific artistic media on the one hand and romantic and avant-garde attempts to combine, blend and synthesize them into "art" in general on the other, then the nuclear exacerbates this structural crisis of mediality and the senses. As Adorno argues, the divergent developments of different media are related to a historically grown division of labour between different senses, which cannot be wished away.[59] But to what extent is the nuclear "sensible" at all? Its dangers can certainly be argued in writing, in the abstract and conceptual medium of language – but is this enough?

3. Waves of Mut(il)ation

In *Catastrophisme*, Riesel and Semprun argue that "Günther Anders' theory of the 'world-laboratory,' according to which the 'laboratory' became co-extensive with the planet at the time of the first nuclear tests, has been positively recuperated, without any rebellious or critical intention whatsoever: as bland confirmation of our confinement in the *experimental protocol* of industrial society."[60] There are a number of artistic engagements with this "world laboratory." After surrealist-existentialist responses and Situationist critique, one could label this the "third wave" of reaction to the coming of the nuclear age: that of ambiguous artistic experiments in the world laboratory.

An extreme proposal for such an experiment is Henry Flynt's manifesto "Overthrow the Human Race!" presumed to be from 1969, in which the author proposes to induce a thermonuclear war to cause mutations and thereby go beyond the human race.[61] Flynt's modest proposal radicalizes the motif of mutation in 1950s and 1960s sci-fi, from the *X-Men* to its metaphorical use in Leslie Fiedler's notorious 1965 essay "The New Mutants," which analyses the changing habitus of young Americans in the age of counter-culture and sexual revolution in terms of mutations.[62] If Flynt presented nuclear mutation as a pseudo-Nietzschean tool to overcome "man," throughout the Cold War (and beyond) mutation was of course most commonly seen as a fearful prospect. Mutation fantasies figures heavily in apocalyptic phantasms, both in fiction and in political discourse. In Holland, for instance, the ecological Kabouter movement that emerged from the ashes of Provo in the late 1960s painted a grim picture of impending monstrous mutations.

The Provo movement of 1965–67 took cues from Constant's New Babylon and did much to galvanize student and youth protest across Europe and beyond – while predictably being attacked by the SI as an insidious form of "recuperation."[63] Post-Provo, the Kabouter (Gnome or Elf) movement, which pronounced Amsterdam a Kabouter commune in 1969, made ecology one of its key concerns. Protagonist Roel van Duyn argued that the mere collectivization of the means of production was insufficient; they needed to be *transformed*, beginning with energy: no nuclear energy, but high-tech windmills.[64] In 1971, Van Duyn & Co. rang the alarm bell over the production of nerve gas by Philips-Duphar in the sleepy Dutch town of Weesp, which – they feared – messed with the genetic make-up of the insects in the region. In a Kabouter publication, Hans Korteweg and Roel van Duyn quoting an anonymous Philips-Duphar employee who sketches a possible scenario for the near future:

This means that most insects in the area are sterilized – and according to someone from the PR department, Philips Duphar will use this as a selling point in its advertising – , but what is hidden from the public is the fear that many insects will undergo mutations. Just imagine! Wasps with a diameter of 40 cm who will attack little children in the streets! Butterflies who will only feed on blood protoplasm![65]

L'imagination au pouvoir!

Riesel and Semprun would no doubt consider this to be highly dubious catastrophism – although *La Nucléarisation du monde* hints at coming mutations that will make humans feel "like a fish in the water of Minimata."[66] As Semprun and Riesel emphasize, the "old schema" according to which "if the masses knew, if the truth was not hidden from them, they would revolt," needs to be questioned.[67] There is, they suggest, "a refusal to understand despite the evidence; or at least to behave, in spite of all the evidence, as if they did not understand."[68] They once more invoke Chernobyl; examples post-dating their text that could be added are the non-response to the Snowden leaks ("I have nothing to hide, so this doesn't concern me") and the Fukushima disaster. While Fukushima, like Chernobyl in its day, did spark a strong resurgence of anti-nuclear protest in Japan and elsewhere, the roll back is already well underway.

As Semprun notes ironically in his *La Nucléarisation du monde*, "nothing is more discreet than radiation."[69] As an infra-sensible phenomenon that can, however, result in very visible physical consequences, the nuclear is an aesthetic-political problem. In *The Radiant* (2012), The Otolith Group investigates the wake of Fukushima though a *sonimage* that makes audible and visible radiation and its effects – for instance through the sounds of Geiger counters and avant-garde sonic performances, and through luminous images of nocturnal Tokyo. *The Radiant* engages with the fatal logic of Japanese necropolitics even – and perhaps especially – in those beautiful shots: after all, the city's spectacular radiance is dependent on the dark glow of nuclear radiation. The bright lights of the big city represent the lure of the nuclear regime; this is the hypervisible obverse of the malignant waves that have now made part of Japan uninhabitable.

Throughout *The Radiant*, the film hovers around the edge of visibility, suggesting a partial transmutation of the infra-sensible into the photo-sensitive. A sequence that was inspired by a video by Sean Snyder shows a photo camera being patiently disassembled. Musing on how Japanese traditions conceive of the landscape as traversed by wind as well as by spirits, the photographer speculates on the addition of a "new kind of

invisibility" after Fukushima. The camera may well have to be retooled for a new form of "spirit photography" to come to terms with radiation.

As The Otolith Group's Kodwo Eshun has put it, *The Radiant* tests "mythologies of radiation" against an actual event, against a reality.[70] The film repeatedly references anime and popular fantasies of mutation, for instance in a shot of a lounge with monitors on which we see the mythical mutants of anime. In the context of Fukushima, these beings are suggestive of the systemic incapability of Japanese society to abandon nuclear energy. Better to change biology than the economy. In Japan as in the US, the post-war era saw a proliferation of both superheroes and monsters whose existence was in many cases – from Spiderman to Godzilla – explained by references to radiation. For the photographer in *The Radiant*, the traditional gods inhabiting the landscape and radiation are two conflicting forms of invisibility. Will radiation ever be turned into a god? Under what circumstances could that happen? The new gods of anime and manga seem to be one answer to that question.

In *La nucléarisation du monde*, Semprun's persona asks if the invisibility on which the nuclear regime depends is not the ultimate, "autonomous" manifestation of "this limitless social power that is the existence of commodified relations."[71] If the commodity fetish depends on the concealment of labour, then does it not, in the nuclear age, also depend on a concealment of the dead, anorganic labour of nuclear power? And, conversely, does the nuclear regime not depend on willing submission to the mechanisms of commodity fetishism?

Commodity fetishism depends, in Stewart Martin's words, on the "illusion of the commodity's sensuousness. The illusion is 'seen through' by knowing that value is not sensuous, but abstract, a quantum of abstract labour time. But seeing through it does not dissolve it, since it is generated by the social relations of private labour."[72] This is why just substituting "alternative energies" for the nuclear and leaving everything else in place will not work; under present conditions, such alternatives must remain weak and inadequate substitutes. Just "making visible" is indeed insufficient as long as the social relations that are enabled (or co-produced) by the nuclear regime remain in place.

Some go the other way and exacerbate or emphasize the production of invisibility: the project "Don't Follow the Wind" is an "inaccessible exhibition" in the contaminated zone at Fukushima; the show will remain invisible unless the area is cleared.[73] The risk of such a gesture is that it might become complicit with a new cult of inaccessibility, of nuclear taboos, of condemned zones. Beyond the Scylla of impotent unveilings

and the Charybdis of fetishizing invisibility, however, there are ways of making sensible that go beyond the standard critical unveiling of hidden wrongs.

In 2012, Ei Arakawa and the "Green Tea Gallery" (with Stefan Tcherepnin and Hanna Törnudd) made a contribution to the Studium Generale of the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam that included an exercise in atomic cuisine: For *Yum Yum Vibe*, Arakawa & Co. passed around a parcel containing radishes his mother had sent him from the Fukushima region, where she lives. Subsequently, Arakawa and his associates prepared soup from these vegetables.[74] In 2014, Arakawa repeated the exercise together with his brother in the context of the Frieze Art Fair, now titled *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent*?[75]

The Amsterdam performance was strongly condemned as irresponsible by some. Sabu Kohso, who was participating in the same programme, strongly cautioned against eating the soup, while a Dutch anti-nuclear activist considered the radiation to be below the critical level.[76] The piece had the great virtue of making the nuclear sensible, and of foregrounding the attendees' willing or unwilling, witting or unwitting implication in the nuclear economy. Briefly, the nuclear regime became more than fabulously textual or spectacularly invisible. In the middle of an ongoing disaster that refuses to be a real apocalypse, as massive lobbying efforts are undertaken to push a new generation of "safe" nuclear plants, the piece made the nuclear all too tangible.

Notes

1. "We sich heute auf die Wahrnehmung dessen beschränkt, was der Augenblick gerade an Sichtbarem bietet, der verfehlt die Realität." Günther Anders, "Tagebuch aus Hiroshima und Nagasaki" (1958) in *Hiroshima ist überall* (Beck: Munich, 1982), p. 48. Translation by the author.

2. Jacques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)," *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 20–31 (p. 24). Sean Snyder appropriated Derrida's title for his exhibition at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in 2013.

3. Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now," p. 24.

4. Ibid., p. 27.

5. Ibid., p. 23.

6. Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light* (*Shadow Optics*) (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 30–60.

7. André Breton, "Prolegomena to a Third manifesto of Surrealism or Else",

VVV, no. 1 (1942), pp. 18–26. Matta selected preexisting images but also used his own drawing, "Les grandes transparentes."

8. Christian de Maussion, "Mythomattaque. Entretien avec Matta," *L'Autre journal*, no. 9, 1986, p. 39.

9. "à toujours été attiré par les travaux des physiciens modernes sur la propagation des ondes et les radiations, et par les transformations gigantesques que les savants viennent de faire subir à la matière." Robert Tenger, "Note de l'éditeur," in Denis de Rougemont, *Lettres sur la bombe atomique* (New York: Brentano's, 1946), p. 11. Translations from the French by Michael Andrews for my article "World History and Earth Art", *e-flux journal*, no. 49, November 2013, on which this discussion of De Rougemont is based.

10. "La belle preuve – on avait tout arrangé pour cela!" De Rougemont, *Lettres sur la bombe atomique*, p. 19.

While De Rougemont does not identify Duchamp by name in his 1946 book, he later confirmed his identity: see Denis de Rougemont, *Journal d'une époque* (1926–1946) (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp. 562–71.

11. In the French original: "possibilités d'union mondiale." De Rougemont, *Lettres sur la bombe atomique*, p. 90.

12. "À l'arme planétaire correspond donc une communauté universelle, qui relègue les nations au rang de simples provinces. Laissez-vous entraîner quelques instants dans ce jeu gravitant de symboles: la Terre, la Globe, la Boule, la Tête, la Bombe, et l'Unité considérée partout et de tout temps comme objet rond, pomme, sphère ou sceptre d'or, que ce soit l'Univers, ou l'Empire, ou l'Atome. Ici les extrêmes se reflètent." De Rougemont, *Lettres sur la bombe atomique*, p. 110.

13. Carter Stone and Wolfgang Paalen, "During the Eclipse". In Wolfgang Paalen, *Form and Sense* (*Problems of Contemporary Art, no. 1*) (New York: Wittenborn, 1945), p. 21.

14. See Wolfgang Paalen, "The Dialectical Gospel," *Dyn*, no. 2 (July/August 1942), pp. 54–59. This issue also contains Paalen's famous "Inquiry on Dialectic Materialism," pp. 49–54.

15. Wolfgang Paalen, "Art and Science" (1942), *Form and Sense*, p. 64.

16. Wolfgang Paalen. "On the Meaning of Cubism Today" (1944), *Form and Sense*, p. 30.

17. Letter from Paalen to Gordon Onslow Ford, August 26 1945, quoted in Annette Leddy, "The Painting Aesthetic of *Dyn*," in *Farewell to Surrealism: The* Dyn *Circle in Mexico*, eds. Annette Leddy and Donna Conwell (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012), p. 33.

18. As Andreas Neufert puts it in his biography of Paalen: "Paalen wiederum schlug sich mit Einwänden und Skrupeln gegen Matta herum, der von Hiroshima und Nagasaki einfach gestrickte Rückschlüsse auf seine Malerei ziehen

wollte." Neufert, *Auf Liebe und Tod: Das Leben des Surrealisten Wolfgang Paalen* (Berlin: Parthas, 2015), p. 527. See also more in general Neufert, pp. 433ff., for a detailed account of Paalen's practice in 1945–46.

19. Wolfgang Paalen, "Brief Outline," part of the unpublished typescript of *The Beam of the Balance* (1946). I am grateful to Andreas Neufert for making this script available to me.

20. Paalen, *Form and Sense*.

21. Bartnett Newman, "The New Sense of Fate" (1948), in *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 165.

22. Newman, "The New Sense of Fate," p. 169

23. Georges Henein, "The Prestige of Terror" (1945), http://www.egyptiansurrealism.com/index.php?/contents/the-prestige-of-terror/

24. Henein, "The Prestige of Terror."

25. Newman, "The New Sense of Fate," p. 169.

26. Kurosawa's *I Live in Fear* (1955) is an example of a film that addresses the social and psychological fallout of the threat (and, for Japan, the memory) of nuclear war.

27. Baj collaborated closely with Asger Jorn during the 1950; it was Baj who brought him into contact with the Lettriste Internationale, and who went on to co-organize the 1956 Alba Congress.

28. Anders, "Tagebuch aus Hiroshima und Nagasaki," p. 64.

29. "Dass diese verspätete offizielel Vorliebe für Zerstörung von Gegenstandsformen in der Kunst (bzw. die Propaganda für den Genuss an dieser Zerstörung und die Verhöhnung derer, die diesen Kunstfortschritt nicht mitmachten) mit der effektiven Zerstörung der Welt synchronisiert aufgetreten ist, war kein Zufall. Und ebensowenig ist es ein Zufall, dass die Zerstörung der Welt, für die hier in Hiroshima die Generalprobe abgehalten wurde, ihr Monument in einem 'non-objective object' gefunden hat." Anders, "Tagebuch aus Hiroshima und Nagasaki," p. 65. Author's translation.

30. Sabu Kohso, "Radiation and Revolution," www.borderlands.net.au/vol-11no2_2012/kohso_radiation.pdf, p. 8.

31. On the nuclear regime as a thanatocracy, see Michel Serres, *Pantopie: De Hermès à Petite Poucette; Entretiens avec Martin Legros et Sven Ortoli* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2014), pp. 161–84.

32. As is evident from the title, Breton presents science as a lost cause altogether, rather than defending it against its instrumentalization, against its reduction to "Zweckvernunft." This is a symptom of Breton's progressive withdrawal into esotericism. See André Breton, Démasquez les Physiciens, videz les laboratoires! (1958), http://www.andrebreton.fr/work/56600100719690

33. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media," *New Left Review*, no. 64, first series (November–December 1970), p. 25.

34. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845–46), Part I, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm

35. Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Malden, MA aand London: Blackwell, 2000), p. 10. See also Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 87–93.

36. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner* in *Die musikalischen Monographien, Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 13, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), pp. 7–148; Matthew Wilson-Smith, *From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

37. Wilson-Smith, pp. 42–43.

38. Carl Andre, "Art is what we do. Culture is what is done to us" (1967), in *Cuts: Texts 1959–2004*, ed. James Meyer (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 2005), p. 30.

39. Guy Debord, "Thèses sur la révolution culturelle," *Internationale situationniste*, no. 1 (June 1958), pp. 20–21; English translation by Ken Knabb at http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/1.cultural-revolution.htm

40. Situationist International, "Géopolitique de l'hibernation," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 7 (April 1962), pp. 3–10; quoted from English translation by Ken Knabb, "Geopolitics of Hibernation," at http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/7.hibernation.htm

41. "Geopolitics of Hibernation." The first part of the Vaneigem text referenced in this quotation, "Banalités de base," also appeared in issue no. 7 of the *Internationale Situationniste* (pp. 32–41).

42. This critical motif plays an important role in both "Geopolitics of Hibernation" and "Basic Banalities."

43. "Geopolitics of Hibernation."

44. Guy Debord, "Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action dans la politique ou l'art" (June 1963), quoted from the English translation by Ken Knabb, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art," at http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/newforms.htm

45. Debord, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art."

46. For an in-depth analysis of the exhibition and its various components as well as of the political and cultural context, see Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "To Act in Culture While Being gainst All Culture: The Situationists and the 'destruction of RSG-6'," in *Expect Anything Fear Nothing: The Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*, eds. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen (Copenhagen: Nebula; New York: Autonomedia, 2011), pp. 75–113.

47. Debord, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art."

48. Gustav Metzger, "Manifesto Auto-Destructive Art" (1960), in *Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, eds. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeleyand Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 401–2.

49. See Régis Debray, "Socialism: A Life-Cycle," *New Left Review* no. 46 (July/ August 2007), pp. 5–28.

50. Incidentally: the sinologist Vienet would later represent nuclear companies Framatome and Cogema in Taiwan; he remains convinced of the "necessity" of nuclear power. See "René Vienet: 'The Bad Boy of Sinology'", http://www.not-bored.org/vienet-radiofrance.html; Gérard Berréby and Raoul Vaneigem, *Rien n'est fini, tour recommence* (Paris: Éditions Allia, 2014), p. 126.

51. Debord, of course, balked at being described as the éminence grise of Champ Libre, but the evidence is all over his published correspondence. On Debord and Champ Libre, see also Sven Lütticken, "Guy Debord and the Cultural revolution", *Grey Room*, no. 52 (Summer 2013), pp. 108–27.

52. Jaime Semprun, *La Nucléarisation du monde* (Paris: Éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1986).

53. Anonymous (Jean-Pierre Baudet), *Tchernobyl. Anatomie d'un nuage* (Paris: Éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1987).

54. In a letter to Debord, Baudet mentions that the book should be published quickly, as the media and the public's attention was already moving on. Thus even while in many ways following the beat of a different drummer, Champ Libre at times felt the need to intervene in current debates in a precisely timed way. This letter is missing from Debord's *Correspondance*, in which only Debord's own missives have been included – and from which Baudet's name has been excised altogether. See "Jean-Pierre Baudet à Guy Debord," December 29 1986, in Jean-François Martos, *Correspondance avec Guy Debord* (Paris: Le fin mot de l'histoire, 1998), pp. 205–7.

55. In 2002, Anders's book would finally be published in French by Éditions Ivrea and the Édition de l'Encyclopedie des nuisances. Concerning the collapse of Debord's relations with Semprun and Baudet, see the correspondence in Martos, *Correspondance avec Guy Debord*, pp. 245–55.

56. René Riesel and Jaime Semprun, *Catastrophisme, admission du désastre et soumission durable* (Paris: Éditions de l'encyclopédie des nuisances, Paris 2008).

In the 1990s, Riesel was a key player in the French Peasants' Confederation alongside José Bové. In 1998, they and a third member of Confederation were put on trial for having sabotages a first trial with Novartis's genetically modified corn. See Riesel, "Declaration Before the Tribunal of Agen," trans. Ken Knabb, http://www.notbored.org/agen.html

57. René Riesel and Jaime Semprun, *Catastrophism, Disaster Management and Sustainable Submission*, translated from the Spanish edition (s.l.: Roofdruk Edities, 2014), p. 42.

58. Riesel and Semprun, *Catastrophism*, p. 42. If this comes close to right-wing attacks on "global warming alarmism," more unsettling still is an off-hand reference to an author named Kaczynski, without any acknowledgement that Kaczynski was the Unabomber. As Ken Knabb put regarding an earlier interview with Riesel: "Neither Riesel nor his interlocutor remind the reader that, as the 'Unabomber,' Theodore Kaczynski was a terrorist, and that his sexist and homophobic 'manifesto' was only published because, in exchange, he promised to stop attempting to maim and kill people." See "The progress of submission moves at a frightening speed. An interview with Rene Riesel," http://www.notbored.org/riesel-interview.html#_ednref11

59. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*, p. 97.

60. Riesel and Semprun, *Catastrophism*, p. 12.

61. The Realists [Henry Flynt], "Overthrow the Human Race!", *Happening & Fluxus*, ed. H. Sohm (Cologne: Kölnischer Kunstverein 1970), unpaginated; see also Branden W. Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), pp. 210, 419 (note 135). Joseph notes that Flynt founded his "party," The Realists, in 1968, and dates the "Overthrow" manifesto as "ca. 1969."

62. Leslie A. Fiedler. "The New Mutants", *Partisan Review* 43, no. 4 (Fall 1965), pp. 505–25.

63. Situationist International, "Révolte et récupération en Hollande", *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 11 (October 1967), pp. 65–66.

64. Roel van Duyn, *Energieboekje: over de energie-krisis en de oplossing daarvan door een alternatieve technologie* (The Hague: Bert Bakker, 1972).

65. "Weesp testgebied voor Philips-Duphars Zenuwgassen", *De Paniekzaaier*, no. 1 (November 1971), p. 6. Author's translation.

66. Semprun, *La Nucléarisation du monde*, pp. 14, 38. Translation from Semprun by the author.

67. Riesel and Semprun, *Catastrophism*, p. 21.

68. Riesel and Semprun, *Catastrophism*, p. 22.

69. Sempun, *La Nucléarisation du monde*, p. 30.

70. Kodwo Eshun, remark during a seminar with research master's students at Casco, Utrecht, autumn 2014.

71. Semprun, *La Nucléarisation du monde*, p. 39.

72. Stewart Martin, "The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity", *Radical Philosophy*, no. 146 (November/December 2007), p. 22.

73. www.dontfollowthewind.info

74. By contrast, Aernout Mik's 2013 video installation *Cardboard Walls* appeared to do everything to distance the reality of the Fukushima fallout from the (European) viewer. Mik treated the disaster as yet another occasion for staging Mikkian

scenes, though livened up with a hint of exoticism: while homing in on Japanese ritual of public apology and self-humiliation, Mik otherwise created a generic theatre of the absurd, with shell-shocked and displaced people sitting and lying around between makeshift cardboard walls. The absence of sound added to Mik's distinctly non-Brechtian distantiation effect, which removed the scene into a time-less sphere of mock-existentialist aesthetics.

75. See for instance http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/ news/frieze-visitors-queue-up-to-risk-delicious-yet-possibly-toxic-fukushima-radish-soup-9801420.html

76. See the video documentation at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvQUCaDAtjU

Fantasies of Participation

*The Situationist Imaginary of New Forms of Labour
in Art and Politics*

Gavin Grindon

ABSTRACT The Situationist International (SI) have become a canonical reference point when discussing artists' participation in political action or activism. This article attempts to decentre the SI from this position, by tracing their theories and representations of political agency and labour. I argue that their notion of agency is deeply conflicted, epitomized by the dual invocations 'never work/all power to the workers' councils. I examine how the SI's representations of agency betray an attraction to and fascination with 1960s reactionary fantasies around brainwashing, conditioning, control and torture. Their practical descriptions of a constructed situation, which 'makes people live' are, in fact, closer to torturous state control than total liberation. The notions of agency they mobilise draw on colonial and classist sources, which actually deny the agency of radical movements. As a result, the SI produce a series of weak fantasies of participation, in which agency is denied and 'demanding the impossible' is actually a demand to constitute and police the impossible. Artistic-political agency was both guarded centre and constituent other. The SI's policing of their identity, tied in name to the agency of 'situations', involved the ongoing exclusion and repression of other artists' more practically-engaged labour within social movements.
KEYWORDS Situationist, Activist-Art, New Materialism, Art and Labour, Torture, Festival, Carnival

On page 43 of *Internationale Situationniste* 9, there appears a print of a now lost painting by Michèle Bernstein depicting, its title informs us, 'The Victory of the Bonnot Gang'. It was part of a series of heroic reconstructions of absent victories. Perhaps the first of these, her 'Victory of the Grand Jacquerie, 1358', inverts the title of one of Loyset Liédet's illuminations for *Froissart's Chronicles* of 1470 to reimagine the fate of this peasant revolt. Debord opposed the paintings to Georges Matthieu's abstract battle paintings, destabilising the framing of mass slaughter as any kind of victory. But crucially, they orient the genre towards the subaltern and untimely project of revolutionary social movements, evoking a series of fantasies of political participation. The series not only steps outside the historical thread of social movement failures, but questions what it would mean to win and how that can be represented. Describing the paintings' impossible logic, Debord cited Lautremont, 'as long as my friends do not die, I will not speak of death'.[1] But the impossible celebration of victories

that never were lends paintings such as 'Victory of the Paris Commune' (Fig 1), a conflicted, ambiguous tone of both affirmation and melancholy. Veering away from figuration towards agonistic abstraction its rough figures are swallowed by a mass of dark smears evoking fiery or bloody catastrophe as much as a subaltern disappearance from historical representation. This ambiguity towards revolutionary agency and success was a central problem for the SI. The SI has been a seminal influence on the post-1968 imagination of political participation among artists, activists and theorists. But their reception, dominated by an opposition between representation and agency, has often neglected the SI's specific representations *of* agency. Critics and historians have regularly emphasised the productive power of the SI's imaginative projections, in which their call to 'demand the impossible', extends Lefebvre's revolutionary romanticism which put one 'in thrall to the possible'.[2] Yet their romanticism was also characterised by a 'left melancholic'[3] refusal to acknowledge possibilities, in which demanding the impossible was also a demand for the disciplinary constitution of the impossible. In Freud's account, melancholy relates to 'an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness'.[4] In the SI's visual and written representations of social change, the lost object that is withdrawn and constituted as impossible is revolutionary agency. Agency remains an elusive 'presence' in their work, appearing in negative through compulsive, even eroticised, images of political agency drawn from cold war colonial and classist ideologies. Their fantasies of

Fig. 1. Michèle Bernstein, *Victory of the Commune of Paris*, 1963 (detail). Original lost. Printed in *Destruktion Af RSG-6* (Galerie Exi, Odense, 1963) p. 8.

political participation develop in gravitation around this founding conceptual lack. As a result, behind the common characterisation of the SI as presenting an easy link between desire and liberation in straightforwardly affirmative situations, the actual images of political participation in their work explore something darker.

The SI's central conception of embodied agency, the constructed situation, is usually described by reference to their own early definition: 'A moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambience and a game of events'.[5] But, appearing in an article titled 'Definitions' which tries to fix 'situationism' and 'situationist', this is only one moment in a process of the group's self-rendition. Rather than a singular form or concept, the situation was a prospective conceptual bricolage of resonances and associations across the fields of sociology, politics, art and architecture, which evoked not a single medium or method, but a general production of social-subjective experience: 'This synthesis must bring together a critique of behaviour, a compelling town planning, a mastery of ambiances and relationships. We know the first principles'.[6] Even when termed Situationist, this prospective discipline was verbosely suffixed: 'We find the question is posed of inventing a situology, a situgraphy and perhaps even a situometry … What we are going to invent is Situationist activity itself. And also its definition'.[7] It was a conceptual placeholder whose precise definition was deferred: a supposition of possibility indicating a yet-to-be-invented form: 'Nothing is less pressing for us than the elaboration of a doctrine: We are far from sufficiently understanding those things that would sustain a coherent system'.[8] But for a concept of materialisation and embodiment central to the group's identity and project, the situation remained a conspicuously vacant category. Each time it was affirmed, it also signified this absence.

Never Work/All Power to the Workers' Councils: What Is Situationist Labour?

The SI's ambiguous conceptions of agency are clearly marked by the dual invocations above, which draw together the threads of a Surrealist war on work and a councillist refusal of work to present an alternate Situationist conception of labour which remains both evocative and unresolved. The central council-communist influence on the SI, Cornelius Castoriadis' *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (SouB),[9] focused on production in terms of a new form of labour whose content was transformed beyond the categories of work / leisure:

> The problem is not to leave more and more 'free' time to individuals – which might well only be *empty* time – so that they may fill it at will with 'poetry' or the carving of wood. The problem is to make all time a time of liberty and to allow concrete freedom to embody itself in creative activity. The problem is to put poetry into work.[10]

Yet the form of this 'poetic' labour was set out in sober terms of a series of open production plans, denoting the workers, hours and material required, developed by an administrative structure of plenaries and delegates. Meanwhile, in the definition above the situation's mode of participation was anthropological and performative: a game. The SI's engagement with 'play' derived from their reception of Surrealism[11] and, although critical, inherited Surrealism's figuration of play in terms of leisure, such as that of the nomadic consumptive 'users' who drifted through Constant's New Babylon in a world of universal sur-leisure. Rather than Castoriadis' refigured creative labour, playful agency was often envisioned by the SI as a leisurely lack of labouring production.

Compulsive Participation

One clue to this ambiguity can be found in their imagination of the labour of political participation,[12] which was centrally influenced by two recent Marxist accounts of alienation. Firstly, in a series of articles entitled 'On the Content of Socialism' Castoriadis argued that pure Fordism had given way to a situation where more *participation* is required on the part of workers. They are required not to *lose* their creative autonomy, or to set it outside work, but to incorporate it *into* their work. Creative subjectivity was not opposed to work, but increasingly became its basis. The autonomy built by radical political participation, in resistance to work, was recast in mutilated form as participation in capitalist value-production; a new mode of work. But this was a contradiction. Capital now depended on the autonomy and initiative of workers at the same time as it tended to take those things from them. The worker is more than a machine or beast because s/he is *creative*, 'he produces for the capitalist more than he costs'.[13] But the more he is treated as a machine, the capitalist 'soon learns (to his cost) that a dumb beast cannot be substituted for the worker. The productivity of overexploited labour falls rapidly'.[14] Here, Castoriadis rejected Marxist accounts of objective laws of capitalist development. Instead he identified the worker's subjectivity as a latitudinal 'other' within capital, such that the value of labour was not fixed like other commodities. Rather than the fixed law of value

of object-commodities, labour's value was determined by an unstable power relationship between workers and bureaucrats. The worker was a necessary but excessive centre that could never be fixed.[15] This entailed a complex dynamic of participation and exclusion: 'Capitalism needs to achieve mutually incompatible objectives: the participation *and* the exclusion of the worker in production - as of all citizens in relation to politics'.[16] The problem of political participation was one of control: of latitudinal agency vis-a-vis forced participation. Secondly, Lefebvre developed an account of alienation in culture in terms of Trotsky's 'uneven development', which Debord pithily condensed, 'Henri Lefebvre has extended the idea of uneven development so as to characterise everyday life as a lagging sector ... one could go so far as to term this level of everyday life a colonized sector'.[17] At the heart of this concept is Marx's theory of primitive accumulation. Here, alienation takes the form of separation from control over one's own time and activity: the colonial subject is incorporated by capital as a more-or-less antagonistic *other*. Lefebvre and Debord's 'colonisation of everyday life' suggests that rather than a founding moment for capital, all social encounters are moments of colonisation in an ongoing internal enclosure of workers' subjectivity. Castoriadis and Lefebvre's shared emphasis on enclosure was transposed by the SI into literal forms of containment: 'Technically improved and collective straightjackets (houses, cities, real-estate developments) ... Power intends to enclose the individual in another, radically different self',[18] in a deconcentrated 'concentration camp world'.[19] Their exemplary narrow spatial enclosure was the fallout shelter, whose crisis-concentration of 'normal' life became a recurring visual obsession. Behaviour meanwhile was ambivalently conceived as both a hopeful Castoriadan kernel of 'radical subjectivity':

> Nobody, no matter how alienated, is without (or unaware of) an irreducible core of creativity ... If ever social organisation extends its control to this stronghold of humanity, its domination will no longer be exercised over anything save robots, or corpses.[20]

And a tragic Hegelian shadow, crushed by capital:

> [Workers] really do participate in [property] through the daily sacrifice of their energy (what the ancients called pain or torture and we call labour or work) since they themselves produce this property in a way that excludes them.[21]

In this world in which 'concrete things are automatically the masters of social life'[22] Castoriadis and Lefebvre's social dynamic of participation/

exclusion became an 'environment/behaviour dialectic' of a vital but contingent agency trapped within-and-against a determinate capitalist materiality.

Socialism or Barbarism had taken its name from an essay which linked the prospect of nuclear war with labour management. Beyond fallout shelters, the SI's account of material enclosure also co-located Marxist labour crisis theory with images of geopolitical and psychological crisis. An article titled, 'The Struggle for the New Control of the New Techniques of Conditioning', describes a room employed for 'brainwashing', then still a neologism:

> The resolutely *other* furnishing of this closed room (transparent furniture, a curved bed); the lighting ... whose psychic effects had been deliberately intended ... waking up with damp clothes and dirty shoes ... projections of absurd and erotic films ...[23]

The account is drawn from a chapter of Lajos Ruff's 1959 book, *House of Torture: The Brain Washing Machine*. Ruff, part of the National Resistance Movement against Hungarian Communism, describes that after long imprisonment and torture he is transported to 'the magic room', irregularly shaped with a sloping bed, rotating coloured lamp shades, film projections and 'paintings of dice like abstract art'.[24] Drugs and theatrics, including a beam of silver light that tracked his movements, intensified the space's disorientating self-loss. Such narratives were more a conservative geopolitical fantasy originating in 1950s US accounts of Chinese attempts to turn prisoners through psychological abuse than evidence of a widespread or effective practice. Ruff's story is a late example of the mythological promotion of such abuses (epitomised by Edward Hunter's 1951 *Brain Washing in Red China*) which imagined neo-colonial fears of 'going native' as a systematic weapon: 'a psychological atomic reactor which is the symbolic apex of Communist organisation'.[25] This other nuclear weapon's destruction of rational individuality fitted easily into Western Cold War narratives of 'two worlds'. This scientist cold war fantasy of materially forced participation overdetermined their Marxian notions of enclosed agency.

Appropriating this conservative imaginary, the SI turned to emerging technocratic, behaviourist iterations of the discipline of cybernetics, in the work of Norbert Wiener and others, which explored control systems and their contingency. Cybernetics' application to labour management was a response to labour struggles increasingly centering on the crisis-dynamic Castoriadis had identified. Under a discourse of 'empowering'

workers, participation in self- managing one's own role became increasingly mandatory through 'feedback' mechanisms: a means to enclosure latitudinal agency in the workplace. The SI framed cybernetics as a whole in terms of material containment and coercion, a 'science of domination',[26] wherein the 'cybernetics of power' provided a mirror-image to the creation of situations. They responded with caustic ire to a hopeful enquiry by Abraham Moles, an academic who proposed a functional 'information aesthetics', publishing the exchange as a pamphlet and distributing it at a talk he gave with the artist Nicolas Schöffer.[27] This 'cybernetic society' was one of compelled participation, a torturous extraction of labour power through 'participation in something in which it is impossible to participate'.[28] It was in these terms that the SI criticised GRAV's 'liberatory' invocation that it is 'forbidden not to participate'.[29] Visualising the environmental materialisation of this dynamic of forced participation through the cold war lenses of fantasies of both brainwashing and cybernetics, the SI theorised a capitalist materiality aspiring to a containment and conditioning both total and impossible, such that 'an apartment, like a neighbourhood, conditions the people who live in it'.[30] This agency-destroying enclosure is figured in a diagram of the constricted space of possible movements of a worker in a 'rationalised' workspace, in Vaneigem's 1961 'Comments Against Urbanism' (Fig. 2). Reiterated amidst Situationist rhetoric and detourned comic book frames, one is tempted to read the figure in this image not as calmly moving between proscribed positions but, the dotted lines indicating comic-book motion, flailing wildly across its workspace, transforming it into a diagram of the workspace-as-struggle - the figure actively disordering and sabotaging its space, or perhaps only thrashing in tortured pain or mad boredom. A translation of 'Basic Banalities'[31] in *Der Deutsche Gedanke* replaces these motion-lines with actual restraints in an even more dramatic figuration (Fig. 3): a man held in an electric chair by leather straps and a rubber face mask, observed and controlled by a suited figure. Their awkward poses perform a spectacle of power and violence. The photograph is a news image from October 1940, taken during the execution of Willie Mae Bragg. The story was covered internationally as Mississippi's first execution, using carnival showman-turned-executioner Jimmy Thompson's travelling electric chair. The SI's use of this spectacle of state discipline as a broad metaphor for social bondage magnifies its fetishistic qualities. Even as it illustrates a critique of such bondage, the reiteration of the image is compulsive, even seductive.
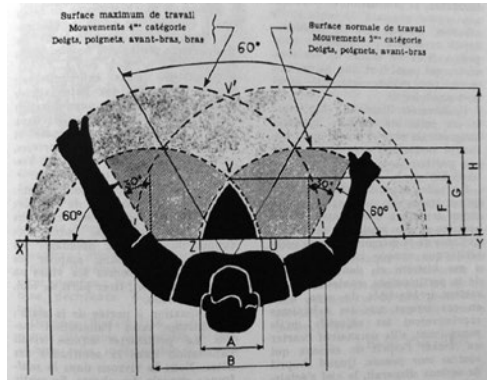
Fig. 2. *Maximum and Normal Work-Surfaces on the Horizontal Plane*.
Printed in *Internationale Situationniste* 6 (August 1961), p. 35.

Fig. 3. Untitled Photograph, *Situationistisk Revolution* 1, October 1962, np.

Anticapitalist Cybernetics:
Revolution Isn't Showing Life to People, It's Making Them Live

The SI's critique of management-facilitated 'participation' gives the lie to the common characterisation of them as propagating simple liberatory, vitalist or affirmative 'situations' against spectacular passivity. But more than this, their appropriation of cold war fantasies of 'conditioning' alongside cybernetics doesn't simply expose the bad conscience of Western ideology. Instead they advanced a far more ambiguous position which displayed a clear *attraction* towards these imaginaries. Of Ruff's fantasies of mind-control through shock and disorientation, they argued:

> We are not *against* conditioning ... But from the institutions that work towards the impoverishment of mankind, we want to wrest the instruments of conditioning at their disposal.[32]

The totalitarian environment of Ruff's 'magic room', with its industrialisation of Surrealist convulsions of identity, actually offered a model and anticipation of their own practices. Debord was enthusiastic about artist Jean-Michel Rankovitch's 'show in which certain inaudible ultrasounds provoked certain psychological effects in the audience. Everyone knows that this is more advanced, in terms of how our Situationist experiments are defined'.[33] Their dream of a coercive materialism, that 'in the future, a free art will be an art that dominates and employs all the new techniques of conditioning',[34] puts in a new light their wish to *make people live*:

> Revolution is not 'showing' life to people, but making them live. A revolutionary organisation must always remember that its objective is not getting its adherents to listen to convincing talks by expert leaders, but getting them ... to achieve, or at least strive towards, an equal degree of participation.[35]

The forced participation of their own 'compelling town planning' and 'houses where one cannot help but love'[36] proposed a paradoxical space of *non-consensual play*, or as we shall see, play *with* non-consent. The SI found an allegorical parallel for such 'liberatory' enclosures in the labyrinth. Before its emergence as a leisure-form, the maze or labyrinth was an archetypal site of transformatory discipline, both play and torment. Rather than fixing a subject, such environments forced a ritual game upon a subject that disoriented their identity through a spatial and sensory disorientation; whether devotee seeking ritual self-loss; imprisoned minotaur; or rodent test-subject. Though Gallizio's 'Cave of Anti-Matter' is perhaps the first attempt to create such a space,[37] it took form beyond the SI's collective influence and was for Debord 'a reactionary farce [which] didn't

represent the movement'.[38] Instead, the unrealised exhibition 'Die Welt Als Labyrinth' proved a collective experiment at the limit of their resources. Willem Sandberg invited the exhibition for May 30–June 20th 1960 at the Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam, as a collaboration between Dutch and French members of the group. Echoing a section of Constant's New Babylon titled the Yellow Zone,[39] the exhibition was understood as partial and experimental, 'It is the only viewpoint financially possible for creating a truly never-before-seen mixed milieu ... we will create real urbanism next time'.[40] Short of the revitalising 'disorientation every day'[41] imagined by Constant's New Babylon, the exhibition was to include the construction of a new internal wall in the gallery, which would then be knocked-through, and a tunnel composed of Gallizio's industrial painting, 'extremely wide at the start, then becoming increasingly narrow, which everyone would be obliged to cross through – with difficulty'.[42] The gallery asserted that this architectural modification was not possible and the SI responded by declining the exhibition to 'safeguard the totality of our approach'.[43] The discomforting enclosure of this tunnel spatialised a Sadistic play with sensory torment and agitation, at the limit of an audience's consent, that Debord's earlier film *Screams for de Sade* had already elicited through containing a cinema audience but depriving them of sensory stimulus through blank projection, teased by snatches of dialogue and white flashes. This 'unitary ambiance' involved a total enclosing and overwhelming of the senses in an act of phenomenological control and subjection, through both cumulative use of media and their complete removal. More than the sum of its formal parts, the self-loss hopefully provoked by this environment was supposed to hold a transformative potential. Following Lefebvre's Marxian reworking of the Surrealist marvellous in his theory of 'moments', the SI associated this overpowering moment with the theoretical perspective of totality's attempt to grasp historical movement. Historical agency would be sparked by a phenomenologically total environment, a phallocentric whole whose determinate power would forcefully engender life, 'making people live' as Lefebvre's 'total man'.[44] Foster has complicated readings of Surrealism as simple, affirmative shock[45] and the SI's neo-surrealist imagination was no less problematic in figuring moments of traumatic social struggle as a self-annihilating play with sadomasochistic overtones. These abortive phantasmic explorations of forcible disorientation can be placed in illuminating relation to the SI's actual organisational activity in this period. Here there was an equal investment in, and ambiguity towards, the problem of participation: a problem tied to the orientation of their own political identity.

'Voting is Participation. Participation = Suicide'

The above slogan, framed by a hangman's noose in a poster produced by the *Atelier Populaire* during May 1968, echoed the SI's critique of political participation through institutional roles. The situation was identified not just with formal innovation, but with an organisational problem of participation: 'a revolutionary organization's relation to artists'.[46] Here there is another determinate cold war context: the tension between historic labour movements dominated by the party and union form and emerging new social movements organised through affinity and direct action.

The organisational mode the situation most resembled, as an immediate transformation of social relations, was direct action. From 1958, the SI followed SouB in specifically proposing direct action via workers' councils. SouB had argued that the 1956 Hungarian uprising marked a historic organisational shift in labour movements, from the party to the council: 'The Workers Councils put an end to the foolish dreams, disasters and despair which have attended all those who ... have placed the hope for socialism in the elite party'.[47] Yet in common with SouB and others to the left of the Communist Party, attracted to but isolated from the counterpower of 1960s new social movements, they vacillated between various forms of political participation. The SI's fifth conference in 1962 is often regarded as a turning point, where they proposed that to be a situationist, one must not attempt to make 'situationist art':

> It is noted that would-be avant-garde artists are beginning to appear in various countries who have no connection with the SI but who refer to themselves as adherents of 'situationism' or describe their works as being more or less situationist ... *antisituationist* art will be the mark of the best artists, those of the SI, since genuinely situationist conditions have as yet not at all been created. Admitting this is the mark of a situationist.[48]

While this has often been identified as an art/politics split with the SI abandoning art, more recent scholarship has resisted this division.[49] However, rather than picking sides, we can see this disavowal, and the flood of others which followed, as marking a split in organisational modes of participation. Definitively in 1962, the SI drew nearer to a form belonging to earlier labour movements, the Leninist revolutionary party cadre, deferring situations and councils as future modes of production. The cadre is, in Lenin's writing, the informal core organisational and disciplinary group within a party who identify not as workers but 'professional revolutionaries'. Rather than a disempowered speech act,[50] the SI drew a resonant and seductive power from this organisational iden-

tification by embracing it as absolutely sincerity and as camp. The SI's most successful work to this end was their journal. Its texts, images and even construction remained the SI's single consistent material practice. The journal was long the traditional object through which a cadre manifested itself, but for the SI especially it functioned as a constitutive self projection-object which embodied and maintained their collective identity. Not only did it literally bind together their fantasies of participation and serve as an authoritative site for announcements of history, intent and membership, but it developed the 'revolutionary romantic' aesthetic that was crucial to the groups' founding.[51] This aesthetic extended into the materiality of the journal, alluringly bound in reflective Lumaline, each issue a different metallic colour, a fetishistic peacock among the sober shelves of modestly printed political journals. Re-captioned superhero comics portrayed their party as a dominant band of 'total men' attacking or defending society, a phantasm closer to Bakunin's vision of a revolutionary secret society than Lenin's cadre. These built a mythology of a sect with transcendent power.[52] Later, they gleefully reprinted scaremongering tabloid newspaper accounts of the international reach and clandestine power of the mysterious 'Situationists', encouraging a vision of themselves as a spectre haunting Europe.[53] After their fifth conference, they photographed themselves standing on machinery and fraternizing with workers. Another photograph in IS5 pictures them as a group on a visit to the British Sailors Society, a historic labour organisation. Yet the 'TO LET' sign behind them reveals the building recently became empty, closed as the shipping industry declined in London's East End. The demise of the building – a Christian mission rather than union headquarters – made it possible to hire the space for their meeting. The founding lack haunting many of the SI's assertions of coherence related to the massed agency of social movements and the various successive revolutionary workers' associations this latter-day 'International' evoked. The suspensive tensions of maintaining the SI's projected body required its own anxious dynamic of participation and exclusion in relation to them, through 'repeated repudiation by which the subject installs its boundary and constructs the claim to its integrity'.[54] Their famous disavowals of art as 'antisituationist' were part of an anxious dynamic of attraction and repulsion in policing the boundaries of 'Situationist' identity, in relation both to new art-world practices (with their own various politics), and new cultural forms of political participation in social movements. To defend against these reiterations, they asserted the cadre alongside a tactical withdrawal from the experimental making they

once championed. While the administrative gloss of 'internal reports' and 'bulletins on the construction of situations' performatively invoked a largely-absent body of structured organisation, the Parisian SI referred to itself as the 'central council', conferring or revoking legitimate member identity on others by published decree. Debord wrote to Constant in 1959, 'the truly Situationist minority … controls the debate of ideas in the SI'.[55] The SI asserted that their ideas were to be found in everyone's heads, while at the same time there was no such thing as 'Situationism'. They nonetheless asserted the right of naming in a 'situationist dictionary'[56] to authoritatively navigate this position. The situation's tension between management and self-management was embodied in their own organisation as it attempted to maintain a situation-ist identity. Much can be revealed about this collective subject and the project it safeguarded by examining the SI's production of a constitutive 'outside' through successive exclusions. That this outside was actually inside the body of the group, as founding repudiation, was revealed as the SI progressively dismembered itself until its end in 1972, with Debord and Sanguinetti the only remaining participants.

One More Effort if You Want to Be Situationists!
Repressing Bad Situationisms

The notion of totality was central to the SI's imagination of the situation. From 1962, the term 'unitary' tended to give way to a Hegelian-Marxian social and philosophical 'totality' as a key description of the situation, marking a shift in emphasis from formal, spatial coherence to teleological historical advance.[57] Already in 1960 after the failure of the Stedelijk show, Debord argued 'the true development of unitary urbanism will inevitably be related to the search for global liberation, and not a pure formal construction, however large it may be'.[58] Its appearance was termed (recalling Lefebvre's use of 'presence' as a term for the moment of Hegelian aufheben) 'an avant-garde of presence'.[59] But this was an anxious projection. This avant-garde of presence replaced any specific presence with a conceptual projection of 'presence' itself, a term which connotes both materiality and spectrality. Echoing Marx's assertion that the working class would abolish class itself, they described themselves as 'the last avant-garde'. This 'last man' position employed totality as a critical means to exclude illegitimate bodies and to assert Lefebvre's 'total man' as an undivided phallic body at the summit of history. Increasingly millennial projections compulsively returned, with cumulative intensity, to the declarative tension of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, dealing

with the problem of agency and totality, in various combinations of both Breton's 'beauty will be convulsive or it will be nothing',[60] and Marx's 'the working class is revolutionary or it is nothing':[61]

> The new beauty will be SITUATIONAL.[62]
> The art of the future will be the construction of situations, or nothing.[63]
> Proletarian revolutions will be festivals or nothing.[64]
> A single choice, suicide or revolution.[65]

The bad conscience of this absent-presence would haunt them, its future-in-the-present a sublime phantasmic rallying point, a byword for embodiment at the level of a historical event forcing the lock of social change, yet seemingly always just beyond their grasp. Barrot and Plant have explored the contradictions of the SI's notion of totality,[66] but rather than reading this as theoretical contradiction, late modernist crisis or proto-postmodernism, it can be understood by looking to the SI's organisational dynamic. Behind this concern with presence and absence stood an intense process of identification and disavowal. In a fetishistic game of *fort-da* with social movements, the reiteration of 'situations' was desired and documented as a growth of influence which drew the seductive 'victory' of social movement participation close, such that 'everyone shares our ideas'.[67] But when the idea of a constructed situation appeared to specifically manifest itself, it immediately seemed a monstrous double, a threatening resignification which displaced the centrality of the Situation-ists. These appearances became 'bad fantasies' which had to be identified and disavowed as unwholesome. Their status as deviant or incomplete embodiments was asserted through a series of critiques and exclusions. This symbolic constitution of the ideal of 'the constructed situation' through 'a series of demands, taboos, sanctions, injunctions, prohibitions, impossible idealisations, and threats'[68] not only instituted and maintained their collective Situationist identity, but attempted to police the projected practice of constructing situations as a normative centre and party line, in the face of multiple new practices which sometimes participated in social movements in ways the SI aspired to. They moved from a speculative practice of 'open creation' to one of defensive prohibition and occlusion. The situation was no longer a constituent imaginary, but a disempowering fantasy of idealised projection in which the term became increasingly fetishised, not by other 'would-be avant-garde artists',[69] but by the SI themselves. They turned to a narcissistic repression of the construction of situations.

During the 1962 split, those that opposed the 'non-activity policy'[70]

of the central council's 'positional Situationism', led by Prem and Nash, marked a breakaway aiming to continue exploring the creation of situations as a form of direct action. They argued 'Situationists must also practice practical activity',[71] persisting with experimental open creation, organised via 'voluntary associations of autonomous work groups'. Framing this as a less theoretically-led 'unpopular folk art',[72] they argued 'We tend to produce our theories after the event … The French work exactly the other way around'.[73] Called to a meeting in Paris, they were presented with a prewritten pamphlet announcing their exclusion. Tellingly, at the time, the excluded members were also defending against criminal charges for political activity. Their exclusion was mentioned by the prosecutor to discredit them, although the SI issued a statement of solidarity after the trial. The group shortly after announced the formation of a Second Situationist International.[74] This group's very name decenters the SI just as it accepts a secondary identity as illegitimate rejected double, whose disorder the SI diagnosed as 'Nashism'. Opposing the purely formal participation of Fluxus and happenings, their extension of the SI's early positions attempted to turn gallery shows into illegal mass demonstrations, termed 'Situationist anti-happenings' and 'collective ritual demonstrations', between 1962–65.

As the SI's construction of an image of themselves progressed, the term situationist was increasingly reiterated in the media and the art world, where it was could denote any radical or utopian artist working with new media; vague romantic affiliations with any anti-state libertarianism; or any particularly chic rebel or architect of scandal. The SI's proposal for a 'game of events' was thrown into crisis once it seemed to be put into practice by several contemporary artists. Locally, the Group de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) made its own claim on the creation of situations,[75] as seemingly did Jean-Jacques Lebel's description, from 1963, of happenings as anarchist 'direct action' vis-a-vis transgression and social transformation.[76] In English, the term happening had been propagated by Kaprow to describe collective performative environments involving chance and the disruption of roles in a fashion that also recalled the SI's claims. Responding, the SI rejected happenings as 'a borderline case of the old artistic spectacle whose remnants get thrown into a common grave'.[77] Threatening the coherence of their projection, the happening was derided as both empty formalism *and* formless debris.

Furthermore, the SI found itself threatened by the adoption of this notion of happening-as-social-change among new social movement groups such as the Amsterdam Provos, to describe their experiments with the aesthetics and affects of direct action. Worse still, Nash supported them[78]

while Constant Nieuwenhuis, who resigned from the SI in 1960, now af-
filiated his New Babylon project with them.[79] Bergen Lucebert, another
CoBrA member who became a prominent poet in the 1950s, also pub-
lished in *Provo*. Meanwhile, the SSI framed their practice by echoing the
terms of the Provos, identifying their construction of situations with this
tendency for political happenings, 'the strongest weapon of Situationism
is an anti-authoritarian and provocative behaviour'.[80] The SI responded
by repudiating their project and any connection to their own: 'It is, how-
ever, erroneous to suppose that 'the Provos provide the theorists, until
now isolated, of the Situationist International with what they lacked:
troops capable of an intelligent representation'.[81]

> The *Provos* ... arose out of an encounter between a few dregs from the world
> of decomposed art in search of a career and a mass of young rebels in search
> of self-expression ... The Provos choose the fragmentary and end by accepting
> the totality.[82]

At the same time, the SI actively sought out, and rejected, exactly such
troops from the wave of social movement activist-art groups articulating
their own 'positive Dadaism' in a mixture of art and direct action. They
met the Chicago Surrealist Group (who had been the first to publish the
SI in the US)[83] and the milieu around Murray Bookchin's attempt to form
a united New York anarchist group, to consider Bruce Chasse, Robert El-
well, Ben Morea, Ron Hahne and Alan Hoffman (the latter three of Black
Mask) as a potential American section. Lastly, the milieu Debord briefly
considered 'English Situationists', suffered a similar fate after refusing to
break all contact with the excluded Americans.[84] This 'breakaway' current,
represented by the Second Situationist International, Provos and others
constitutes a second-wave Situationism in which Situationist practices and
ideas diffused among activist-art collectives who focused on the aesthetics
and affects of direct action. For the SI, these became abject Situationisms,
lacking the conceptual cleanliness of totality. The trauma of the 1962 break
for the 'Nashists' is reflected in an agonistic montage in *Situationist Times*
several pages long, incorporating flicks of paint and labyrinthine spirals of
diaristic text concluding in a final image of Debord's head on the body of
a foetus. The break was no less a narcissistic wound for the SI. Despite in-
tending to 'transition from a utopian revolutionary art to an experimental
revolutionary art',[85] they ultimately moved in the opposite direction. The
situation came to function not as a signifier for ongoing experiment, but as
the site of a series of fantasies of political participation which haunted the
SI as both guarded centre and constituent other.

A Situationist Archive

The SI identified various public sculptural or architectural practices, approving of them for their situation-ish qualities, and composing a de-facto Situationist archive of instances of materialised critique: a nascent, fragmented mythological counter-canon of radical history; the Fourierist Phalanastry;[86] Parisian students (endorsed as 'situationist commandos') reinstalling a statue of Fourier removed by the Nazis; [87] Bakunin's attempt to use oil paintings as a barricade during the 1849 Dresden revolt;[88] the proposed demolition of the Amsterdam stock exchange to turn it into a playground for the area's population,[89] or the demolition of the Vendome column during the Paris Commune. These autonomous manifestations were often readymade situations by virtue of their organisational modes of production within actually-existing social movements: from riots and sabotage to worker's councils. Such identifications found their fullest form in two essays which read moments of mass direct action (the Paris commune and Watts uprising) through the notion of revolution-as-festival.[90] These 'festivals' were the ideal readymade situation. They served as an overdetermined phantasmic resolution of the SI's contrary investments and identifications.

These essays did not advocate councillist production instead fetishising the violence of these events. Tom McDonough has argued that the SI's characterisation of Watts as a 'potlatch of destruction', owes more to Bataille than to Lefebvre.[91] It might also be seen as a competitive break with Lefebvre: an excessive Lefebvrianism which bites the bullet of his conflicted 'revolutionary romantic' method. His suspensive aesthetic of deferred agency, with its unresolved Hegelian and Nietzschean totalities, deferred this festival to a future moment of revolution. The SI instead imagined a fantastical hyper-agency by embracing reactionary contemporary fantasies of the 'mob' as a provocative image of historical agency. The SI agreed with Lefebvre that the Commune was 'the biggest festival of the nineteenth century',[92] but against his melancholic account of the tragic pyre of Paris in flames, the SI celebrated individual acts of murder.[93] Similarly, in the second of these essays, on the 1965 Watts riots, they gleefully juxtapose the image of a burning storefront with the intellectual subtitle 'critique of urbanism', as if thumbing their nose at Lefebvre's spatial critiques. This latter essay was their most developed reading of revolution-as-festival, in which the mostly-white French cadre projected upon and identified with an abortive black working-class uprising in North America. Although the essay implicitly compared it to the Paris Commune, the Watts uprising was less clearly articulated as a political revolt. More limited in duration

and scale, it was characterised not so much by the organisation of committees as by looting, property damage and attacks on police. There was a greater uptake in radical political participation *after* the uprising, and its causes and meaning (as 'riot' or 'revolt') were highly contested.[94] Imagining the labour of Watts as play, they reproduce a newspaper photograph not with *detournement* but maintaining its original subtitle, 'playing with rifled cash register'. This reading, drawing attention to the cultural and affective aspects of the uprising, was not uncommon, as in a *New Left Notes* headline describing Watts as 'Almost a Happening'.[95] But the SI's exploration of this relationship between action and affect was deeply ambiguous. The SI saw citizens stealing commodities they couldn't use as an unintentional critique, taking 'modern capitalist propaganda … literally'.[96] Yet the entire essay echoes this literal appropriation of capitalist ideology. LA as a media centre meant that Watts had massive international reverberations, and the SI's engagement with was not so much with Watts' actual local (or national) antagonisms as with the spectacle of Watts projected across the media.[97] Both the images which illustrated the SI's essay were drawn from the same issue of *Time* magazine. The SI's image of Watts as playful relied on the uncritical appropriation of racist and classist media images constructing Watts as irrational. The SI identified 'festival' not in the social movement culture of the modern demonstration or its precursors, but in the seductive mythic designation of the 'riot': an open legal category blanketing a variety of particular forms of mass-cultural public assembly as 'disorder'. This conception, dating from the 1714 British Riot Act and spreading among the colonies and elsewhere, was a keyword in a discourse which named a wide variety of cultural forms of public assembly in order to outlaw them. In visual and literary representations, it was bound to the image of mass collective action as a senseless manifestation of an unruly multitude outside of political agency or process. The SI's bold gambit was to visualise agency *through* reactionary images of social movement action as undirected non-agency. Watts, a black working class riot, offered an ideal template in that its spectacular mediation combined the twin mythological poles of abject colonial and class otherness. For the SI, accounts of Watts as lumpen-mob violence tied to a racist emphasis on primitive irrationality underwrote a dubious metaphorical play between blackness and philosophical negation: 'the blacks … are the negation at work'.[98]

The cost of this bet on a spectacular image of negation was that it ignores actually-existing movement cultures and reduces radical agency to an exclusive image of heroic violence. Rather than finding in the images

of Watts a Dionysian transformation in the nature or content of work, the SI celebrate its powers of horror, in a serendipitous reactionary concurrence of a mid-twentieth-century consumerist notion of play-as-leisure with a classist, racist identification of 'riot' with irrational, primitive and childish effervescence: an excessive consumption beyond commodities. 'The theft of large refrigerators by people with no electricity, or with their electricity cut off, is the best image of the lie of affluence transformed into a truth *in play*.'[99] Their earlier disavowal of new forms of social movement action returns in inverted form in this celebration of the non-agency of the mob and a failure to conceive of movements as possessing their own cultures. Debord and Constant agreed that 'the working class, historically having no culture, implies the possibility, the necessity, of a new type of culture'.[100] The fantasies of the SI, whether the containment of their exhibitions; their journal's authoritative performance; or the riot-festival of these essays, are anxious projections of potency, historical determination and political power which betray a dual attraction and repulsion toward the agency of others.

Be Cruel: On Revolutionary Sadism

Despite these disavowals and idealisations, one final, key moment finds the SI returning to experimental construction in the light of all these tensions. If embracing brainwashing or riots as revolutionary imaginaries seems self-defeating, this project adopts self-defeat as an aesthetic tactic. Despite having rejected art work and excommunicated SSI members for not doing so, the SI's anxiety around the SSI's threat to their identity became clear when, following the SSI's 1962 exhibition *Seven Rebels* in Odense, the SI set aside their own embargo to stage a counter-exhibition on 22nd June 1963, *Destruction of RSG-6*.[101] Compelled to play their hand, the SI did not transcend their theoretical impasses so much as construct a monument to their contradictions. Against the open, participant-defined spaces of the SSI, whose radicalism was far from guaranteed, the SI's exhibition took the form of an enclosed labyrinthine narrative. The formal approach to enclosed unitary environments of their Stedjelik show was paired with a symbolic compression of contrary social dynamics. Visitors were enclosed in a pedagogic guided walk through their journal, in which their spatial movement was also a teleological one from enclosure to critique and action. The tone was millennial throughout. RSG-6 began by forcing visitors into the cramped space of capitalist material determination, in the form of one of the fallout bunkers regularly pictured in *IS*. In Debord's description, this small space is a morbid echo of

the First Surrealist exhibition. In place of Dali's rainy taxi, a destroyed car outside the exhibition, instead fetishised mannequins recalling sex workers, this 'horrible' room contained an empty cot, preserved food and a mannequin bagged like a cadaver. An air-raid siren played constantly, alongside low 'disagreeable light' while sprayed deodorant impeded breathing. Visitors were disciplined by two managers of the space: 'assistants dressed in anti-nuclear jumpsuits (cowls, goggles) oblige the people to remain 10 minutes in this space'.[102] The exhibition took its title from a contemporary pamphlet, reproduced on the catalogue cover, in which a British activist group, Spies for Peace, leaked the existence of 14 secret 'Regional Seats of Government' bunkers in which government figures would survive a nuclear attack in 'a wholly self-contained community'.[103] The pamphlet was part of a historic moment of social movement action. Distributed at the 1963 Aldermaston march, it led protestors on a detour to occupy the site of RSG-6 in Warren Row village, Berkshire. But the SI's echo of this action returned to fantasies of conditioning and violence. In the next room visitors were invited to 'learn' from this disturbing experience of containment and act up. Rifles were available to fire at targets covered with photographic images of leaders: Kennedy, the Queen of England, de Gaulle, Khrushchev, Franco, Adenauer, and the Danish Foreign Minister. Debord's instructions indicate they were to be surrounded by paintings with titles such as *2 h 15 After the Start of the Third World War* which turned the abstract vitalism Bernstein's paintings had already appropriated to the service of topological 'modifications' projecting a Europe scarred by nuclear war, adding crushed glass, axle grease and human hair to the mixture. Whether the destruction of RSG-6 was to be a matter of nuclear or movement action became unclear, but it composed a traumatic environment of practice-range conditioning for armed revolt, evoking the central figure of a brainwashed Communist assassin in Richard Condon's 1959 novel, *The Manchurian Candidate* and the 1962 film adaption, one year before this exhibition. Visitors became potential Sergeant Shaws, or Harvey Oswalds – who would assassinate Kennedy six months to the day after the exhibition opened.[104] Debord's instructions stipulate that the third room only contain a series of Situationist 'directives', but a photograph of the second room (Fig. 4) shows them hung around the firing range. In Condon's novel, platoon leader Captain Marco is troubled by nightmares of violent conditioning watched over by Communist directors, but in the SI's dream, the firing range is watched over by the abstract directives of Situationist theory itself. Each time one shot a leader in the eye, one was rewarded with a copy of *Situationistisk*
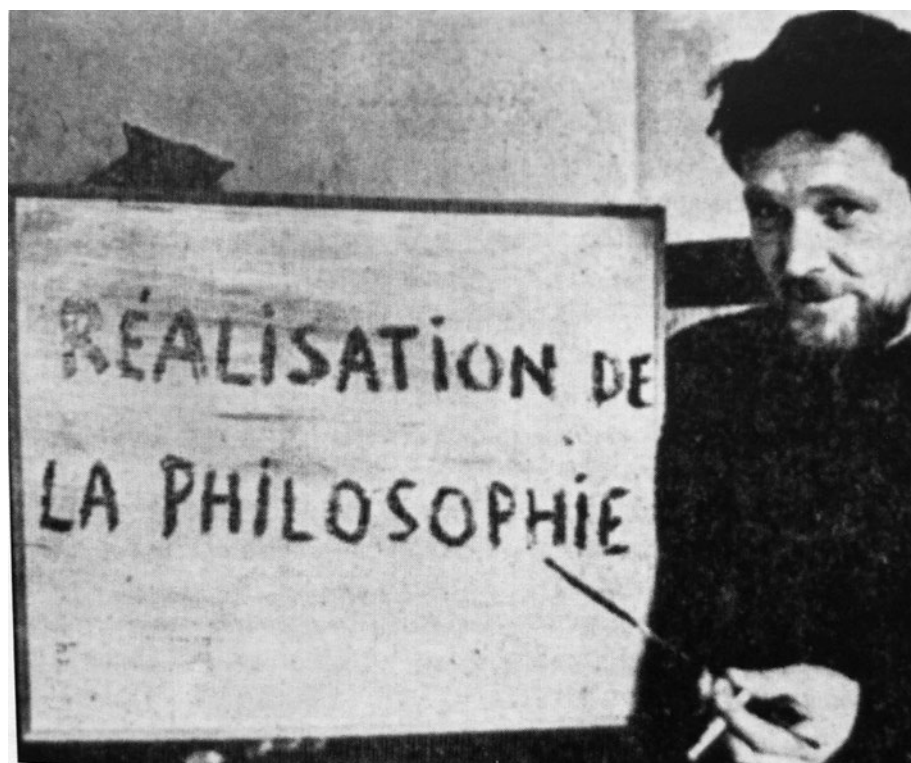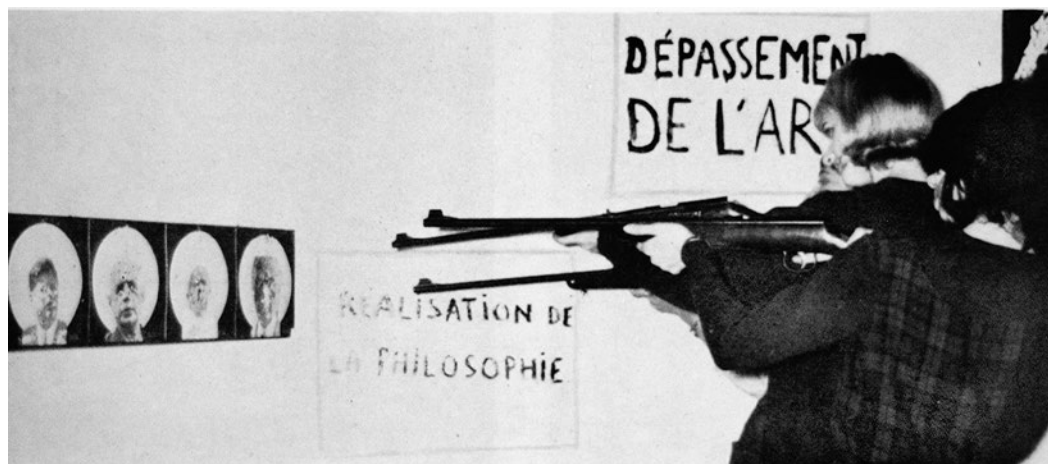
Fig. 4. Untitled Photograph. Else Steen Hansen (J. V. Martin), 'Homo Ludens', *Konstrevy*, no. 5/6, 1963, p. 201.

Fig. 5. Untitled Photograph, *Situationistisk Revolution* 2, March 1967, np.

Revolution. Meanwhile, Castoriadis's wager of Socialism or Barbarism was dramatised as Martin's nightmare-paintings were juxtaposed with Bernstein's dreams of victory.

Debord's second directive, *'Realisation de la Philosophie'*, concentrates these contradictions. Marx's dramatic announcement of a methodological turn in dialectics, from critique to material agency, in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach is here ironically undermined by its materials. It is presented as – of all things – an artwork in a gallery, with the effect of drawing attention to its textual limitations in relation to its object-status. In the catalogue the textual content of these works assumes a pictorial status, as they are not pictured and only their titles, 'directive 1' to 'directive 5', are listed. Furthermore, in an image of 'directive 2' in *Situationistisk Revolution* 3 (Fig. 5), its instruction to demonstrate autonomous agency seems presented ironically with JV Martin pointing at it, as if to a chalkboard, like a smirking schoolmaster. It appears not as the impersonal logic of a historical turn, or even as impassioned partisan demand, but as a managerial 'directive'. Where textually it might function as a revelatory use of dialectical method, it appears here as an undialectical detournement of dialectical language itself. Read critically, it seems not only an ironic comment on the exhibition's crude symbolic passage from passivity to action but on the internal limits of the SI's own poetic appropriation of dialectics as an attempt to grasp social movement.

The RSG-6 pamphlet had derided the futile 'play' of government drill-tests in the face of nuclear genocide as a monomaniacal fantasy, 'in this nightmare world, the authorities still pursued their childish dreams ... In the RSGs the heads of department were known officially as "players".'[105] But as Martin's schoolmasterly gesture suggests, the SI too were playing at managerial control. The distancing effect of Martin's direction towards a directive might also frame the exhibition as an invitation to play with totality and agency. The exhibition's 'total' overwhelming discomforting of the audience involved a baseline of consent in which it was possible to leave the gallery, revealing the exhibition not as a sincere experiment in conditioning but a seductive invitation to a negotiated play in which one submitted to a fantasy of de-individuated Communist violence. *RSG-6* did not realise a 'situation' as either a shock of realisation or attempted conditioning, but as a scene of compulsive play with traumatic disciplinary conceptions of 'failed' social change. It is revealing in this respect that the installation photograph shows three attractive fashionable women as the rifle-bearing subjects of this fantasy. Choice and consent are central attributes of a sovereign liberal subject often conceived as masculine,

while women's exclusion from such subjecthood has often made them the figure of fantasies of domination. This fantasy of brainwashed political violence is played out with an erotic subtext that would be repeated 11 years later in images of a rifle-bearing Patty Hearst. Halberstam argues the subjective unbecoming of masochism's 'failure' might have a political equivalent in a refusal of 'proscriptive forms of agency' and victory.[106] We might find in the eroticised deathly compulsions of RSG-6's fantasies of forced labour an unwitting critique of the SI's own conceptions of agency, themselves transformed into 'a truth in play' open to criticism and alteration. Perhaps their reworking of the enclosure or subsumption of labour as a sadomasochistic play with nightmares of participation and dreams of agency might produce a strange 'lightness and joy'[107] which escapes the suspended romantic/melancholy dichotomy of Marx's eleventh thesis itself. Rather than a left-melancholic fetishisation of past 'victories' which has partly made possible what Wark calls the SI's '50 years of recuperation',[108] we might find in the masochistic compulsions of the SI's fantasies of participation a rejection of movements of success and succession for a more productive and joyful failure. We might think of the contradictions of these Situationist fantasies not as an archive of melancholic failures but, in Vaneigem's own words, as 'the step back preparatory to the leap of transcendence'.[109]

Notes

1. Guy Debord, 'The Situationists and the New Action Forms in Politics and Art', in *Destruktion Af RSG-6* (Odense: Galerie EXI, 1963), p. 12.

2. Henri Lefebvre, 'Le Romantisme Revolutionnaire', *Nouvelle Revue française*, no. 58, 1957, p. 43.

3. Wendy Brown, 'Resisting Left Melancholy', *Boundary* 26, no. 3 (1999), pp. 19–27.

4. Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 14, 1914–1916 (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 244.

5. 'Definitions, Internationale Situationniste 1, 1958', in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995), p. 45.

6. Guy Debord et al., 'Une Idée Neuve En Europe', *Potlatch* 7, 3 Aug 1954', in *Guy Debord Présente Potlatch (1954–1957)*, ed. Guy Debord (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 51.

7. Asger Jorn, *Open Creation and Its Enemies*, trans. Fabian Tompsett (London: Unpopular Books, 1994), p. 30.

8. Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, 'Pourquoi Le Lettrisme?,' in *Guy Debord Présente Potlatch,* p. 187.

9. A council communist group that broke away from the Trotskyist Fourth International in 1948. See Stephen Hastings-King, '*L'internationale Situationniste*, Socialisme Ou Barbarie, and the Crisis of the Marxist Imaginary', *SubStance: A Review of Theory and Literary Criticism*, no. 90 (1999), pp. 26–54.

10. Cornelius Castoriadis, 'On the Content of Socialism II', in *Political and Social Writings*, vol. 2, *1955–1960: From the Workers' Struggle against Bureaucracy to Revolution in the Age of Modern Capitalism*, ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 107.

11. Notably, this Western engagement with social movement cultures cited Surrealism and Dada rather than Constructivism, 'I knew very little about the constructivist avant-garde … I probably discounted it as pure plastic research'. Debord to Constant, 3 March 1959, in Guy Debord, *Correspondence* (*June 1957–August 1960*), trans. Stuart Kendall and John McHale (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), p. 221.

12. This sociological term is used here to expeditiously distance us from the SI's own theorisations of such processes, although its focus on 'inclusion' tends to confer legitimacy on existing institutions, denigrating extra-institutional political labour and often excluding the micro-political and affective dimensions which their ideas sought to emphasise.

13. Cornelius Castoriadis, 'Socialism or Barbarism', in *Political and Social Writings*, vol. 1, *1946–1955: From the Critique of Bureaucracy to the Positive Content of Socialism*, ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 88.

14. Castoriadis, 'Socialism or Barbarism', p. 88.

15. Notably, he later deployed 'potlatch' as evidence. Cornelius Castoriadis, 'Marxism: A Provisional Assessment', in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), p. 26.

16. Paul Cardan, *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* (London: Solidarity, 1965), p. 3.

17. Guy Debord, 'Perspectives for Conscious Alterations in Everyday Life', in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 70.

18. Théo Frey, 'Perspectives for a Generation', in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Doocuments*, ed. Thomas F. McDonough (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), p. 167.

19. Raoul Vaniegem, 'Basic Banalities II', in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 132.

20. Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Rebel Press; Seattle: Left Bank Books, 1994), pp. 191–92.

21. 'Basic Banalities I', in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 98.

22. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 1987), thesis 216. On the neglected materiality of Debord's spectacle, see Richard Gilman-

Opalsky, *Spectacular Capitalism: Guy Debord and the Practice of Radical Philosophy* (London: Minor Compositions, 2011).

23. 'The Struggle for the New Techniques of Conditioning', in *Leaving the 20th Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International*, ed. Christopher Gray (London: Rebel Press, 1998), p. 9.

24. Lajos Ruff, *The Brain-Washing Machine* (London: Robert Hale, 1959), p. 72.

25. Ruff, *The Brain-Washing Machine*, p. 70.

26. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 42.

27. 'Correspondance Avec Un Cybernéticien', *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 9 (1964), pp. 44–48.

28. Raoul Vaneigem and Attila Kotányi, 'Elementary Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism', in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 66.

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30. Uwe Larsen, 'Répétition et nouveauté dans la situation construite', in *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 8 (1963), p. 58.

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32. Larsen, 'Répétition et nouveauté dans la situation construite', p. 57.

33. 'Debord to Gallizio, 10 Feb 1958', in Debord, *Correspondence* (*June 1957–August 1960*), p. 83.

34. 'Debord to Constant, 25 Sept 1958', in *Correspondence* (*June 1957–August 1960*), p. 159.

35. Guy Debord, 'For a Revolutionary Judgement of Art', in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 312.

36. Ivan Chtcheglov, 'Formulary for a New Urbanism', in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 3.

37. See Nicola Pezolet, 'The Cavern of Antimatter: Giuseppe 'Pinot' Gallizio and the Technological Imaginary of the Early Situationist International', *Grey Room*, no. 38 (2010), pp. 62–89; Frances Stracey, 'The Caves of Gallizio and Hirschhorn: Excavations of the Present', *October*, no. 116 (2006), pp. 87–100.

38. 'Debord to Constant, 20 May 1959', in *Correspondence* (*June 1957–August 1960*), p. 250.

39. 'Description de la Zone Jaune', *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (1960), pp. 23–26.

40. 'Debord to Constant, 12 Feb 1960', in *Correspondence* (*June 1957–August 1960*), p. 362.

41. 'Potlatch 5, 1954', in Guy Debord, *Guy Debord Présente Poltatch* (*1954–1957*) (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 38.

42. 'Debord to Gallizio, 14 Feb 1960', in *Correspondence* (*June 1957–August 1960*), p. 331.

43. 'Debord, Constant, Jorn to Sandberg, 7 March 1960', in *Correspondence* (*June 1957–August 1960*), p. 338.

44. Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 1, *Introduction*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 1991), p. 173.

45. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p. 58.

46. Debord, 'For a Revolutionary Judgement of Art', p. 311.

47. C. L. R. James, Pierre Chaulieu, and Grace C. Lee, *Facing Reality* (Detroit: Berwick, 1974), p. 10.

48. 'The Fifth SI Conference in Göteborg', in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 88.

49. Tom McDonough, 'Rereading Debord, Rereading the Situationists', *October*, no. 79 (1997), p. 9.

50. As, for example, in Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos and the Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

51. Gavin Grindon, 'Revolutionary Romanticism: Henri Lefebvre's Revolution-as-Festival,' *Third Text* 27, no. 2 (2013), p. 218.

52. *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 8 (1963), p. 55.

53. 'Judgements Choisis', in *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 11 (1967), p. 49.

54. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 114.

55. 'Debord to Constant, 26 April 1959', in *Correspondence* (*June 1957–August 1960*), p. 242.

56. Mustapha Khayati, 'Captive Words (Preface to a Situationist Dictionary)', in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Thomas F. McDonough (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), p. 173.

57. 'Unitary' is used less frequently after this, and often as a stand-in for totality, for example as 'unitary critique', 'Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations', in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 223.

58. 'Debord to Constant, 21 June 1960', in *Correspondence* (*June 1957–August 1960*), p. 362.

59. On 'presence' in Lefebvre's thought, see Robert Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 53.

60. Andre Breton, *Nadja* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), p. 160. Later in 1948 the Surrealists had defined Surrealism as 'to be nothing, to be everything. To open the individual.' 'Appendix 2: Definitions of Surrealism', in *Surrealism against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, eds. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (London: Pluto, 2001), p. 206.

61. 'Marx to Engels in Manchester, London, 18th February 1865,' in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 42 (New York: International Publishers, 1987), p. 94.

62. Guy Debord, 'Reponse à une enquête du groupe surrêaliste belge', in *Guy Debord Présente Potlatch* (*1954–1957*), p. 41.

63. Guy Debord, dir., *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (1952).

64. 'On the Poverty of Student Life, 1966', in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 337.

65. Vaneigem, 'Basic Banalities I', p. 93.

66. Jean Barrot, 'Critique of the Situationist International', in *What Is Situationism? A Reader*, ed. Stewart Home (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996), pp. 24–62; Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London, Routledge, 1992).

67. René Viénet, 'The Situationists and the New Forms of Action against Politics and Art', in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, p. 183.

68. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 106.

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70. Jacqueline de Jong, Jorgen Nash, Ansgar Elde, *Danger! Do Not Lean Out!*, Paris, 13 Feb 1962.

71. Bauhaus Situationniste, *Who are the Situationists? Alternativ Documenta* (1972), np.

72. 'First Declaration of the Spur Group', in *Spur*, no. 1 (1960), p. 1.

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76. See Jean-Jacques Lebel, *Le Happening*, (Paris: Éditions Demoël, 1966).

77. 'The Avant-Garde of Presence', in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, p. 147.

78. 'Jörgen Nash Kämpar För Sitt 'Provotariat'', in *Provo*, no. 6, 24 Jan, 1966, p. 39.

79. Constant Nieuwenhuis, 'Nieuw Urbanisme', in *Provo*, no. 9, 12 May, 1966. Trans. as 'New Urbanism,' *Delta: A Review of Arts, Life and Thought in the Netherlands* 10, no. 3 (1967).

80. Bauhaus Situationniste, *Who are the Situationists? Alternativ Documenta* (1972), np.

81. 'Révolte et récupération en Hollande', *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 11 (1967), p. 66.

82. 'On the Poverty of Student Life, 1966', p. 328.

83. Penelope Rosemont, *Surrealist Experiences: 1001 Dawns, 221 Midnights* (Chicago: Black Swan, 2000), pp. 102–3.

84. Gavin Grindon, 'Poetry Written in Gasoline: Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker', *Art History* 38, no. 1 (2015), pp. 170–209.

85. 'Debord to Constant, 8 Aug 1958', in Debord, *Correspondence* (*June 1957–August 1960*), p. 149.

86. *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (1960), p. 21.

87. *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 12 (1969), p. 97.

88. Debord, 'The Situationists and the New Action Forms in Politics and Art', p. 10.

89. 'Renseignements Situationnistes,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 (1959), p. 16.

90. For further discussions of this notion, see Gavin Grindon, 'Alchemist of the Revolution: George's Bataille's Affective Materialism', *Third Text* 24, no. 3 (2010), pp. 305–17; idem, 'Revolutionary Romanticism: Henri Lefebvre's Revolution-as-Festival', in *Third Text* 27, no. 2 (2013), pp. 208–20.

91. Tom McDonough, *'The Beautiful Language of My Century': Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France, 1945–1968* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 139.

92. Guy Debord, Attila Kotányi, and Raoul Vaneigem, 'Theses on the Commune', in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 314.

93. 'The rebel who, when a suspect bourgeois insisted that he had never had anything to do with politics, replied, "That's precisely why I'm going to kill you."' Ibid., p. 315.

94. See Gerald Horne, *The Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 1995).

95. 'Newark Riots – NCUP views: Almost a Happening', *New Left Notes* 2, no. 27 (July 24, 1967), p. 1.

96. Guy Debord, 'Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy', in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 155.

97. For a more detailed and firsthand account from a perspective sympathetic to the SI, see 'Riots', *LA Provo*, no. 4, 1966, p. 13.

98. Debord, 'Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy', p. 158. In fairness, Kotanyi, who wrote most of their pieces on Algeria, co-authored. This articulation of Watts as a symbol of 'black' negation was common among radical and counterculture groups even in LA.

99. 'Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy', p. 155.

100. 'Debord to Constant, 21 March 1959', in *Correspondence* (*June 1957–August 1960*), p. 228.

101. On this exhibition see Frances Stracey, 'Destruktion RSG-6: Towards a Situationist Avant-Garde Today', in *Neo-Avant-Garde*, ed. David Hopkins (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 311–30, Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, 'To Act in Culture

While Being against All Culture: The Situationists and The 'Destruction of RSG-6', in *Expect Anything Fear Nothing: The Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*, ed. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobson (Copenhagen: Nebula; New York: Autonomedia, 2011), pp. 75–113. I thank Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen for the image reference to illustration 4.

102. 'Debord to Martin, 8 May 1963', in Guy Debord, *Correspondance*, vol. 2 (*Septembre 1960–Decembre 1964*) (Paris: Fayard, 2001), p. 222.

103. Spies for Peace, *Danger! Official Secret: RSG-6*, 2. On the pamphlet and action, see Sam Carroll, 'Danger! Official Secret', in *History Workshop Journal*, no. 69 (2010), pp. 158–76.

104. It would be in the spirit of the SI's mythmaking to claim a causal connection.

105. Spies for Peace, *Danger! Official Secret: RSG-6*, p. 5.

106. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 136.

107. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 413. Here we might find an alternative to both Lefebvre's Revolutionary Romanticism, and the Western Communist melancholy identified in Charity Scribner, *Requiem for Communism* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003).

108. McKenzie Wark, *50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).

109. Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, p. 119.

A Nightmare on the Brains of the Living

Repeating the Past and Imagining a Future

Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen

ABSTRACT In a historical situation characterised by crisis, wars and widespread protests the question of the relationship between past Left-revolutionary endeavours and present political challenges is of utmost importance for the possibility of mounting an anti-systemic challenge to capitalism. T. J. Clark's essay 'For a Left with No Future' argues that the future-oriented stance of the 19th and 20th Century Left turned the Left into a disastrous dobbelgänger of capitalist modernity causing havoc and death instead of being a genuine opposition to capitalism. The great refusals have to be replaced with a 'modest' and more 'realistic' approach, Clark argues, enabling the Left to understand the human propensity to violence and therefore engaging in a kind of anti-war activism. This article rejects Clark's analysis and tries to save the revolutionary perspective Clark is trying to get rid of arguing that it is indeed the Left that we have to bury. Juxtaposing Clark's argument with a reading of Michèle Bernstein's 'Victories of the Proletariat' made as part of the 1963 Situationist exhibition 'Destruction of RSG-6' the article attempts to contribute to the re-formulation of a contemporary revolutionary position on the basis of the breakdown of the programmatic Left.
KEYWORDS Defeat, The Left, Revolution, Avant-garde, T. J. Clark, Situationist International

> The horror is that for the first time we live in a world in which we can no longer imagine a better one.
> – Theodor W. Adorno[1]

In his 2012 article 'For a Left with No Future', published in *New Left Review*, art historian and Left critic T. J. Clark engages in a critique of the European Left's avant-gardism, its century-long ideals of progress, redemption, and emancipated futures.[2] According to Clark, the Left has long – always? – been indebted to a problematic notion of the future, resulting in a preoccupation with 'fantastical predictions about capitalism's coming to an end'.[3] The Left has been imagining a whole arsenal of different endings, envisioning coming insurrections capable of sweeping capitalism away in an all-out revolution or seeking signs of the soon-to-come crisis, a point of no return that destroys the capitalist mode of production and sets free the enchained workers. Beginnings as well as endings, of course: the various beginnings of the many and diverse Socialisms or Communisms, from the production of a new world courtesy of heavy industry and tractors – 'All efforts to attain the goal of eight

million tonnes of grain' – to a return to a blissful (primitive) Communist Eden or the introduction of the notorious 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in its different guises, some more militarised than others. We are familiar with the images and representations that range intellectually from Marx' 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner' to Gramsci's Fordist fantasies to Hardt and Negri's ever-creative and networked multitude that has already rendered capital's dialectical mediation obsolete. These representations may differ. To state the obvious: There is quite a difference between the Soviet 'utopia of production', as Buck-Morss calls it, and the Parisian students' desire to reveal a beach beneath the pavement in May '68. Yet they all, according to Clark, share the same avant-garde-modernist tonality, the same language of infinite possibility, the sense of a future to be realised, a present to be overcome.[4] Clark seeks to break free from these visions of progress or crisis. 'Leaving behind, that is, in the whole grain and frame of its self-conception, the last afterthoughts and images of the avant-garde.'[5] This is not only because these visions turned out to be prone to extremely violent political practices in the period from 1917 to 1989 and never mounted a real challenge to capitalism anyway but also because they prevent the Left from coming to terms with the present situation of defeat. The Left must wake up from the 20th Century Clark writes, must bid farewell to its grandiose programmes and radical schemes. The Left is clinging to the remains of apocalyptic imagery. As Clark puts it, 'Left politics is immobilized, it seems to me, at the level of theory and therefore of practice, by the idea that it should spend its time turning over the entrails of the present for signs of catastrophe and salvation'.[6]

As the title of his article makes clear, Clark is seeking to distance himself from what he perceives to be the overriding theme and tonality – *Stimmung* – of a Left obsessed with the future or strangely seduced by the possibilities of modernity and totally blind to its extreme consequences. According to Clark, the Left has been simultaneously strangely mesmerised and repulsed by capitalism and the possibilities it brings into being. And he is right, of course. Take Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, where they sing praises to the bourgeoisie's destruction of previous forms of solidarity and modes of production all the while promising and hoping that the proletariat will realise what the bourgeoisie has been unable to accomplish.[7] The Left has been fascinated by such images and painted endless versions over the last two centuries. The Left so often turned out to be a horrid inversion of capital's own modernising terror, part and parcel of the capitalist modernity it half-opposed, half-embodied. The Left failed,

always ended up defeating itself and stood every time, when it came down to it, too close to the worldview of its opponent, capitalism. The need to accelerate the destruction of capitalism has been a steady feature in Left thinking and practice, to a point where the Left turned out to be a realisation of the nightmare of the new world in which people became material to be moulded and given form. Focusing on the end, the means declined in importance, and the glorious future ended up legitimising one horror after another. The Left ended up negating the brute fact of existence, forgetting that this world is the only one we will ever have.

Clark's critique is in many senses right on the money. But in an odd doubling of his own critique of the Left's inability to see nuances – Left, Socialism, Communism, the terms tend to flow together in sweeping judgments – Clark takes no prisoners, and his conclusions are stark, bordering on hard anti-Communist totalitarianism: The path to Socialism was a single enormous tragedy, from the Gulags to the Killing Fields. The Left's grandiose schemes and gigantic programmes paved the way for unfathomable terror. Apocalyptic Left and apocalyptic Right thus converge in Clark's analysis: 'Socialism became National Socialism, Communism became Stalinism, modernity morphed into crisis and crash.'[8] 'A false future', Clark calls it. Instead, Clark opts for what he, following Nietzsche, terms 'the most modest, most moderate, of materialisms'[9] in the form of a substitution of most of Marxism with a highly selective and particular mix of Weber, Nietzsche, and other conservative thinkers and theoreticians of tragedy. Clark conceptualises this as a move away from the avant-gardist obsession with everything young and rebellious towards a 'mature' and 'grown-up' (these are Clark's words) politics that can comprehend and hold at bay the human drive to violence. The Left's utopian orientation has been tragically blind to or even fostered the deep-seated 'human propensity to violence', Clark writes. He builds part of his attack on the Left's emancipatory (read: violent) politics on a quasi-anthropological argument about human nature's inherent drive to violence and 'the horror and danger built into human affairs', referencing Walter Burkert's thrilling *Homo Necans*.[10] The Left has failed to realise that violence is a constant presence in human life.

After 'the Century of Violence', the Left must rebuild itself in order to prevent 'the tiger [of violence and war] from charging out', Clark writes, urging the Left to recognise the presence of violence in all human endeavour. Clark recognises that there was no final cause to explain the barbarism of 'the age of human smoke', as he terms the 20th Century, invoking – or out-doing – Mark Mazower's already gloomy *Dark Continent*. Clark

wishes for the Left to modulate its notion of human possibility and history into something he calls 'a tragic key'. Give up the idea that the revolution will somehow resolve the contradictions of the past and the present. This is the 'moderation' he seeks: leaving the extremes and giving up on optimism. Nietzsche's 'pessimism of strength': a sense of the limits to human affairs, a pessimism that is also a pragmatism, a politics without illusions, truly pessimistic and worldly. Finally, Clark calls for an understanding that the revolution will not be the realisation of a historical logic, for a realist Left that renounces all-or-nothing visions of building a new world. This is a downscaling of the project of the Left or a substitution of its radical utopianism with a tragic pessimism more in tune with modernity's horror. Finally, he asks for the realisation that there will be no peace, that we are faced with the prospect of permanent war.

So Clark wants the Left in the capitalist heartland to give up on the future in favour of the present, give up on grand revolutionary ideals in favour of a quieter, more concrete and 'actual' approach, ditching the visions and idioms of futurity, the otherworldliness that is part and parcel of the revolutionary project. He seeks a politics of moderacy, a politics of small steps: 'It [...] is wrong to assume that moderacy in politics, if we mean by this a politics of small steps, bleak wisdom, concrete proposals, disdain for grand promises, a sense of the hardness of even the least 'improvement', is not revolutionary – assuming this last word has any descriptive force left'.[11]

Clark is absolutely right: From Marx to Diamat, we find problematic notions of the historical development that was no doubt put into practice in highly unfortunate ways or legitimised brutal regimes. But does this mean that we must give up on the idea of revolution? For that ultimately seems to be Clark's solution to the problem: renouncing the revolution. That is the meaning of the attempt to keep the Left but give up on the future. Clark is giving up on radical change as this has shown itself to be a straight road to Hell on earth, but he wishes to preserve and reform the Left. Preserving the Left but renouncing the revolution?

In so many ways, I feel that Clark is right in engaging in a ruthless critique of the euro-modernist Left and its future-oriented stance. His intervention is a hugely important contribution to the necessary critique of the assumptions and premises of radical political practice and the rhetoric of the European Left today. Clark wants to do away with both wishful thinking à la post-*autonomia's* ideas of the multitude as well as automatic notions of capital's decadence, and there is clearly much in Clark's attempt to substitute a Leftist critical theory with a Leftist tragic theory that is nec-

essary and convincing. And yet I nevertheless remain somewhat sceptical. Clark seems willing to let go of an awful lot in his attempt to revise the Left. And I am not sure he is bidding farewell to the right things.

Although there is, of course, a reference to punk in the title of his article, Clark quickly moves from punk to resignation, from Sex Pistols to Nietzsche. The Left must put adolescence behind itself, Clark argues. But does a lack of programmes mean giving up on the critique of the capitalist system and turning inward, contemplating old prints, and reading laments of failed revolts? Fighting the eternal present of the spectacle by returning to a cultural heritage that promises contact with a lost world (Clark urges his readers to substitute reading *The Coming Insurrection* with Christopher Hill's *The Experience of Defeat*) looks a lot like the reverse image of 'the present age of ardent, fetishistic "memorialism"'.[12] Could a farewell to programmes not mean an engagement in radical self-critique, as has been the case many times before? As Clark has himself shown in an earlier rebuttal to Fred Jameson and Perry Anderson, the present conditions of impossibility were already a cultural fact much earlier in the 20th Century and confronted Luxemburg, Korsch, Debord, *etc.* with tremendous challenges in their own times.[13] The ending has been going on for quite a while now, we might say. In this sense, the Left has been without a future for a long time. That is the challenge, in a way: How can we engage in an all-inclusive critique of capitalist society without formulating visions of a much better tomorrow and without plans for how to run the capitalist economy differently (as the Social Democratic and Leninist Left sought in vain to accomplish). That was already the task that revolutionaries like Naville, Bataille, Benjamin, and later Jorn and Debord set for themselves: a total transformation of everyday life. That was previously the task of this kind of 'dark Marxism'. The solution is not giving up on the anti-capitalist struggle, as Clark seems to be proposing. The solution, it seems to me, is giving up on the Left, ditching the identity and the project of the Left: not downscaling and turning backwards but upping the ante in order to create a different future.

Clark is, quite simply, operating against the wrong opposition, and it might just be time to exit the closed interiors of the political struggle of Right and Left. It is time to move beyond democracy as we know it. Political democracy and the whole Left-Right debacle make little sense when we are dealing with the question of revolution (and counter-revolution). The Left-Right opposition has from the very start distorted the potentials of the revolutionary break. A revolution is simply a confrontation of a different nature than the political conflicts between Right and Left.

The revolution is the production of communism, i.e. a real break with the bourgeois nation-state and a complete abolishment of capitalist social relations (wage, money, etc.). The Left has, of course, throughout the 20th Century made reference to the revolution: Stalinists, Trotskyists, Maoists, Guevarists, and New Leftists have used the term, but so have Fascists and Islamists. And we all know the mechanism of political democracy in which Right-Left opposition is a key ingredient to preventing any kind of radical change, balancing out the apparent struggle between Right and Left parties mediating the class struggle and keeping it confined to the nation-state.

The Left-Right political spectrum is a huge problem for the revolutionary perspective and makes no sense. It never did. Clark's text testifies to that. This became particularly clear when the European social democratic parties turned neoliberal, but it was fairly clear already to Luxemburg in 1914 and Debord in the 1960s. Clark seems on the cusp of realising this in his text ('Left, then, is a term denoting an absence') yet he prefers to retain the term, emptying it of all revolutionary content.[14] But we need to get rid of it, get rid of the Left.

In daily life, we pretend to know what the distinction between Right and Left means when, in fact, it has no logical signification whatsoever. The historical origin of the distinction between 'Left' and 'Right' goes back to September 1789 when a Parisian paper first used it to describe opposed fractions in the National Assembly. The opponents of the monarchy gathered to the left of the president's chair in the Assembly, and the king's supporters gathered to the right. Traditionally, the place of honour in the *Assemblée* was to the right of the president, and this place belonged to the aristocracy. The division of the political sphere into Left and Right thus came into being: The Right were the ones who wished to maintain the status quo while the Left were the ones in favour of change. If the National Assembly had been arranged the other way around, we would be labelling Luxemburg, Bordiga, Rühle, and Gorter 'ultra-Rightists'. The way in which the Left-Right division is used distorts capitalist society and creates political sympathies based on unconscious political reflexes alone. The actual political effect of this dichotomy in Western Europe is more often than not a very surprising equal division between those voting Left and Right. This is not the effect of a corresponding uniformity in the social constitution of these states; it is instead caused by the manifestation of the Left–Right model's purely mathematical logic. The figure produces a polarisation of the population, which cuts across social groupings. The population is split into two more-or-less equal political

groups, which are by definition opposed to one another. The polarisation inherent in the Left-Right dichotomy 'naturally' privileges the centre and political compromise. The problem is, of course, that the capitalist mode of production is anything but moderate! It is radical in the sense of going to the core of things. Life in the most basic sense – people and the biosphere – is being threatened by the logic of capital accumulation. The solution ought to be as radical (the negation of the capitalist system), definitely not moderate, as Clarks argues.

The Left-Right dichotomy to which Clark subscribes actually prevents the development of this radical project. Within the Left-Right political spectrum, radicalism and the revolutionary perspective take the form of 'extremism', which is loaded with negative associations and portrayed as blind passion and terror: 'Pol Pot', Clark writes. People on the Left are thus afraid to go to the extreme, to step outside the normal cosy political spectrum and end up standing alone. The abolition of the capitalist system is thus abandoned. The revolutionary perspective – the overcoming of capitalism as the abolition of wage labour and the state – disappears. The fear of extremism functions as a deterrent to thinking matters through. The result is that 'the Left' guarantees the continuation of current 'political' thinking. Therefore, the important distinction is not between Left and Right but between being for or against the revolution as the abolition of capitalism.

When we are dealing with the revolution, we are dealing with a philosophical and anthropological matter related to promise. This is not because we must somehow raise hopes but instead because it is necessary to instil trust that the revolution is better than decadence and decline.

But the necessary working-through of the Left does not take place as Clark prefers to lump together everything from Stalinism to ultra-Leftism as instances of an avant-gardist Left. Clark should readjust his aim: It is less the avant-garde than the Left that is the problem. It is time to leave behind the project and identity of the Left altogether. Unfortunately Clark never goes this far, preferring instead to critique what he considers the damaging avant-gardist dimension of the revolutionary project. But the inability to engage in a critique of the Left while dismissing the revolutionary perspective means that Clark ends up promoting a kind of nihilistic Left-leaning conservatism in which he warns about the continued presence of violence and war. The critique of the disastrous consequences of revolutionary transgression comes dangerously close to an anti-totalitarian position that has characterised the fight for another world as violently excessive and doomed to failure

ever since the Russian Revolution. Clark is on the brink of joining an odd choir of reaction in which he sits uncomfortably alongside the likes of not only Jacob L. Talmon and Hannah Arendt but also François Furet, Martin Malia, and André Glucksmann.[15] These are strange bedfellows for a former Situationist.[16]

In the present situation, ditching the distinction between reform and revolution comes across as somewhat strange. No doubt, the Arab revolts and the movements of the square have proved incapable of setting off a successful global wave of revolutionary protest and have met with serious opposition here and there, yet they nevertheless constitute the most important resistance to the present capitalist system in the past 40 years. Failure to recognise the potential in the recent upswing in protests, strikes, and demonstrations gives Clark's text a peculiar semi-aristocratic tonality resembling that of his friend/enemy Perry Anderson, who also withdrew decades ago to a kind of intellectual Olympus from which he could dismiss any and all protests: 'Oh dear, the natives are restless.' By foregoing distinctions between revolution and reformism as well as the distinction between revolution and counter-revolution, Clark risks ending up not only with no future but, more importantly, with no revolutionary position from which to engage in any kind of meaningful critique of capitalism besides a moralising lament of its hollowing out of the human.

Part of the problem with Clark's analysis is precisely his move away from a Marxist framework towards a Weberian one in which capital is replaced by modernity as an iron cage and in which the vocabulary centres on the emptying out of meaning, with disenchantment – rather than the accumulation of capital – becoming the central process of modernity.[17] As Clark has abandoned the critique of political economy, he is left with a language of loss and privation. We are stuck with a gloomy, quasi-sociological account of the destruction of some prior world of communal values and life forms as a result of rationalisation and disenchantment.

This also results from his dismissal of what he sees as attempts to pinpoint any single reason behind the horrors of the 20th Century. The tragic perspective 'allows us *not* to see a shape or logic [...] to the last hundred years'.[18] There is thus no attempt to find a cause for the chaos. We should give up trying to give shape or form the catastrophe. The Left will inevitably end up empty handed. It is impossible to revert the process or take control of it without further escalating the destruction. That is Clark's verdict. No escape, no compensation but instead a wasteland of meaninglessness. Revolutionary programmes and tragic formlessness become inseparable. Nina Power has aptly described this as a kind of

'Left Burkeanism' (no more future, no more bold novelty, and no more dramatic metaphysical principles).[19]

In the end, Clark's project resembles a disillusioned post-revolutionary enterprise, left with nothing but melancholic reformism bordering on the reactionary. It is quite telling that he urges the Greek Left to come up with a 'persuasive' plan for how to proceed, 'a year-by-year vision of what would be involved in taking "the Argentine Road"'.[20] But that would no doubt only amount to yet another attempt at relative surplus production, which has nothing to do with revolution and an abolition of capital but would just represent state-capitalism anno 2015. The trajectory of SYRIZA, not yet clear when Clark wrote his text, is unfortunately very revealing for such a strategy. Despite its 'anti-authoritarian' rhetoric, SYRIZA has quickly shown itself to be a pillar of the system, protecting the interests of capital and contributing to the preservation of the authority of the bourgeois state. This might be described as Leftist, but it is the Left of capital.

Clark's necessary critique of the euro-modernist Left stops short and foregoes the possibility of leaving the Left in favour of a problematic return to a politics of 'small steps', disconnected from any idea of an anti-capitalist movement. His vivid description of the total breakdown of the Left is in many regards spot on, but the attempt to abandon Marxism in favour of some kind of tragic Weber/Nietzsche-inspired position goes terribly wrong. Clark rightly points to the strange fact that reformism no longer seems possible, that in the capitalist heartland, reformist demands today almost take on the form of impossible revolutionary demands, but he fails to historicise the reasons for this, preferring instead to advocate a 'moderate' and 'grown-up' reformist project along the lines of the Committee of 100. But it is not because the reformist Left has somehow become revolutionary or because the distinction no longer matters; it is instead because the reformist position is no longer possible. The conditions of possibility for a reformist Social Democratic and reformist Leninist strategy have simply withered away. The restructuring of the global capitalist economy that has taken place over the past 40 years – the outsourcing to Southeast Asia and parts of Africa thanks to new technologies (computers and containers, hand-in-hand), the smashing of previous strongholds of militant working class resistance, and the introduction of credit and rise of finance capital – has effectively pulled the carpet from under the particular working class composition that made these models possible in the first place. That is the real meaning of the 'no future' phrase: A whole generation of people across the globe have become redundant to capital, and the euro-modernist working class movement's project of taking over the apparatus of production no
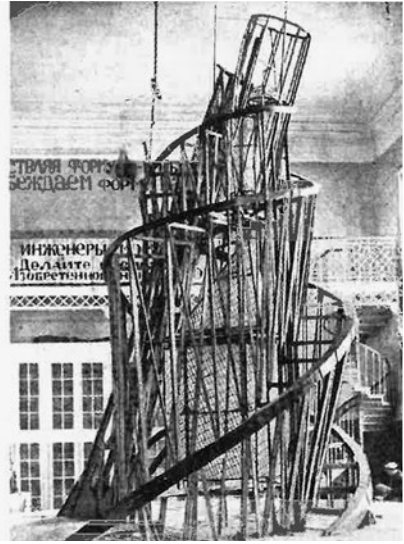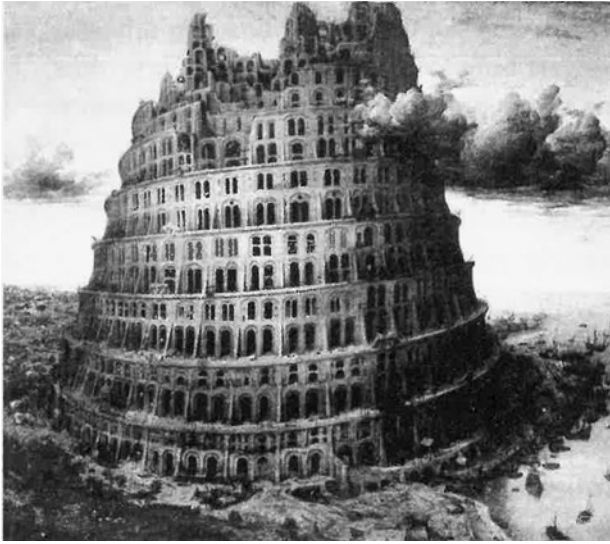
T.J. Clark's juxtaposition of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 'The Tower of Babel' (c. 1565) and Tatlin's Monument to the Third International (1919–20). *New Left Review*, no. 74 (2012), p. 57.

longer makes sense. We are living through a transformation in people's relationship to exploitation, tending towards the exclusion of more and more people from the extraction of surplus value, hollowing out the 'programmatic' and reformist Left politics of the 20th Century.[21] Workers across the globe are confronted by an objective limit to which their class belonging has somehow become external and can no longer constitute a point of departure for a political project. That is why reformism is no longer possible. The class struggle has taken on a new form and can no longer be a 'making of the working class'. The era of the Left, the period in which the European and USA working class could somehow engage in struggle within the capitalist system, is thus quickly coming to an end. As Clark himself puts it, 'If the past decade isn't proof of that there are no circumstances capable of reviving the Left in its 19th and 20th century form. Then what would proof be like?'[22] Indeed. Let it go, there is nothing left of the Left. But that does not mean the revolutionary perspective has disappeared. The revolution will not be and in fact never was 'Leftist'; time will tell if it will make sense to call it 'Socialist' or 'Communist'.

A New Beginning

In 1963, the Situationist Michèle Bernstein made a series of paintings titled 'Victories of the Proletariat' in which she engaged in a kind of counter-factual history painting, imagining that the Paris Commune and the Spanish Republicans had won. What if the proletariat had indeed prevailed in 1871 in Paris, Bernstein asked? Had been able to hold the French army at bay and had finally seized the National Bank? If the experiment had not ended after 72 days but had been allowed to develop and expand? Or if the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist workers had managed to defend the revolution against domestic and international counter-revolution and even extend it, had actually won the Spanish Civil War and beaten Franco as well as the Stalinist and Social Democratic forces that not only undermined but eliminated POUM and the other revolutionary groups and parties? Whereas Clark takes leave of imagining a different future and prefers to engage in a backward-looking non-utopian reformist activity, thereby creating a kind of retracted 'political' space, Bernstein was engaged in imagining a communist future through a different past.

Bernstein's paintings were part of a strange exhibition in which the Situationist International sought to engage in a tricky and complicated endeavour of reconnecting a new revolutionary offensive with past failed revolutionary experiments. By imagining a past that could have been different, they sought to imagine a different future, a non-capitalist and communist future. They sought to imagine the end of the spectacle.

'Victories of the Proletariat' was part of an exhibition titled 'Destruction of RSG-6', which took place in a small squat in Odense in Denmark, called *Huset* (The House). The squat was the headquarters of the local CND and was a hangout for a large group of rebellious Danish youths and self-proclaimed socialists who were critical of both the booming Western capitalist societies, with their new commodity-based identities, and the Soviet party dictatorship. The youths were trying to find an alternative position beyond the self-confirming binarity of the Cold War, and they engaged in a series of activities, including campaigning against the rising Danish tourism to Franco's Spain.

The squat was thus an ideal setting in a Scandinavian context for the Situationists, who needed to counter the Bauhaus Situationist movement run by the former member of the Situationist International Jørgen Nash, who was busy staging provocative stunts that both outraged and entertained the Scandinavian public. The Situationists had to make sure people knew Nash was not a Situationist and did not express the project of the Situationist International, which was not some kind of ludic
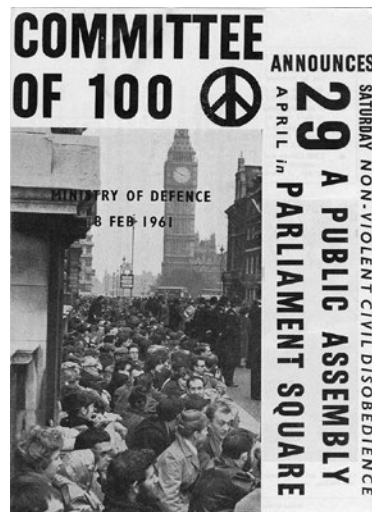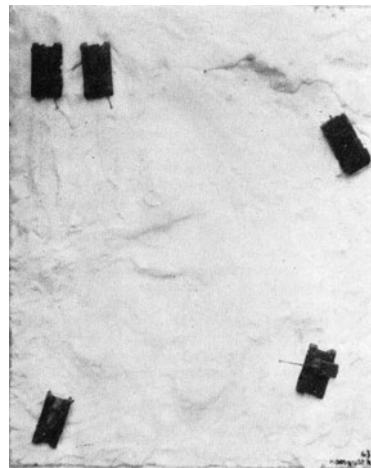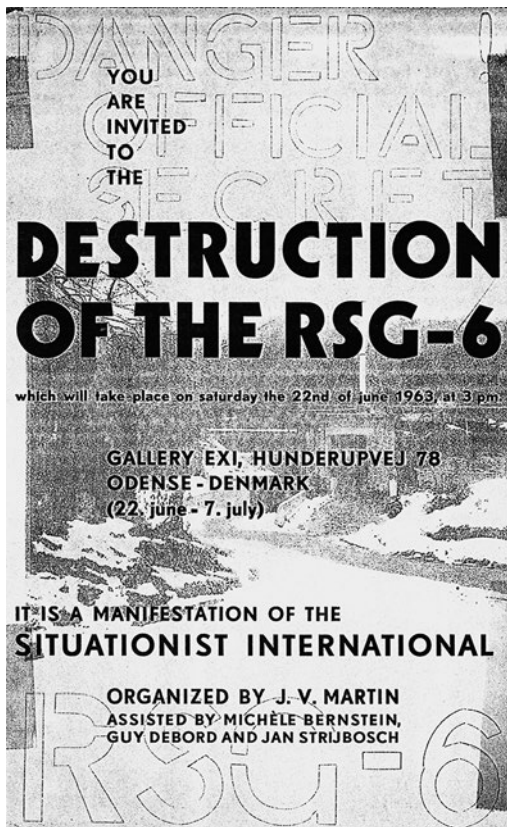
The Situationist International, invitation to the 'Destruction of RSG-6' manifestation at Galerie Exi, Odense, 1963.

Michèle Bernstein: 'Victoire des Républicains Espagnols' (Victory of the Spanish Republicans), 1963. The painting was part of the 'Destruction of RSG-6' manifestation staged by the Situationist International at Galerie Exi, Odense.

The Committee of 100, leaflet announcing a sit down demonstration for nuclear disarmament in front of the Ministry of Defense, 18 February, 1961.

here-and-now art activism but instead a comprehensive revolutionary critique of capitalist society and its means of control and domination including the state, wage labour, and money. The Situationists' use of the small gallery in the basement of the squat in Odense was risky business, and they sought in various ways to make explicit their indifference to dominant aesthetic standards and highlight their dismissal of the art world. 'Destruction of RSG-6' was not an ordinary art exhibition but was conceived of as a revolutionary use of an occupied territory: According to Bernstein, Debord, and the Situationists, the art world now functioned as a safety valve through which seemingly critical gestures were exhibited to little or no effect. The individual artwork could only express a formal pseudo-liberty, and it was thus necessary to leave art behind.

According to the Situationists, who subscribed to a Hegelian-Marxist reading of history in which the proletariat was the historical subject that placed pressure on the world and especially on the way the world was to be interpreted, historical development had made artwork obsolete. Art was destined to either fuse with established tastes, which the Situationists termed 'recuperation', or art would be left behind in favour of an expanded artistic critique outside the institution of art. It was simply no longer possible to create individual works of art with an individual signature and author. In order to be true to the genuinely transgressive nature of modern art from Rimbaud to Breton, one therefore had to ditch not only the cultural establishment but also the role of the artist as well foregoing the writing of poetry and making of paintings in favour of overcoming art. In Hegelian terms, art had to be suppressed and realised in revolutionary theory and practice. This is the kind of all-or-nothing approach with which Clark has difficulties. When confronted with the overwhelming defeat of the Left, he prefers to hold onto the few remaining spaces of resistance. For the Situationists, on the other hand, this amounts to complete surrender.

The Situationist position on art had become especially clear during heated debates within the Situations vanguard in 1961 and 1962, when more or less all artists left or were expelled from the group and when it was decided to label all artworks made by Situationists 'anti-Situationist'.[23] The event in Odense was thus not an art exhibition in any ordinary sense but was intended to be what the Situationists termed a 'manifestation' in which they would use the gallery in the squat's cellar to clarify the Situationist analysis of the historical situation and to intervene in an ongoing discussion regarding the threat of nuclear war and the way the threat was being used by the ruling elites in Western society.[24]

One and a half months prior to the opening of 'Destruction of RSG-6', British anti-war activists had revealed secret plans to hide the British government in case of war. They had discovered and revealed the existence of a series of secret bunkers where officials were to seek shelter in the event of nuclear attack.[25] The Situationists had already analysed this politics of fear in articles in their journal *Internationale situationniste*, critiquing how the threat of nuclear war was being used both to reduce politics to a question of being against a dangerous Communist Soviet Union (and thus unquestionably for the West and its leaders) as well as to create a whole new series of nuclear war commodities, such as the family shelter.[26] The function of the accelerating Cold War nuclear arms race was to deter not the enemy but the state's own population, the Situationists argued, trying to convince the CND movement that was gaining momentum at this time in a number of Western European countries to expand its critique beyond the threat of annihilation. The real risk was the silencing of critique. It was important to connect the anti-nuclear position to a radical critique of capitalism; retaining the spectre of annihilation would only serve the interests of the existing political economic forces. The Situationists argued that any kind of limited anti-war stance, like the one Clark is now advocating, was not enough.

The manifestation in Odense was thus a continuation of this critique, combining it with a critique of modern art's inability to come up with anything new, i.e. Nash's silly pseudo-critique. In order to confront the audience with the bleak future of a nuclear war (the threat of nuclear annihilation), the Situationists transformed one room of the exhibition into a shelter with plank beds and sirens. This was risky business as it was dangerously close to subscribing to the politics of fear that the Situationists were critiquing. It was an experiment in testing the ruling representations, trying to subvert them, and using them in an attempt to present the Situationists' analysis. In order to move beyond the doom and passivity of the shelter, the audience was led into a next room in which they were meant to become active participants in a critique of the politics of fear. In this room, the Situationists had hung a series of targets with photos of politicians attached, enabling the audience to react by firing air guns at the leaders of the Cold War: Kennedy, Khrushchev, Adenauer, de Gaulle, etc. The manifestation also included a series of small slogan paintings by Debord with phrases from the revolutionary tradition like *Réalisation de la philosophie* (The Realisation of Philosophy) and *Abolition du travail aliénée* (Abolition of Alienated Labour), the last written across a painting by the former Situationist member Pinot Gallizio, putting the painting to

use as a blotting pad for quick propaganda scribblings. The artwork was to be deployed in the struggle against the new means of control of commodity society. If Debord's small word-paintings (termed 'Directives') in catchphrases outlined the contours of the Situationist International's project, the Danish member and individual responsible for setting up the exhibition, J. V. Martin, contributed with a further dramatisation of the doom-ridden prospect of the present world. In a series of large paintings termed *Termonukleare kartografier* (Thermonuclear Cartographies), Martin painted maps depicting the world after the outbreak of a third world war: 'På anden dagen siger de, der vil være 82 megalig' (On the second day, they say there will be 82 mega-corpses). Alongside Martin's maps of a bomb-struck world, Bernstein's so-called 'Victories of the Proletariat' were installed.

There were three pictures by Bernstein in the show: *Victoire de la Commune de Paris* (Victory of the Commune of Paris), *Victoire des Républicains Espagnols* (Victory of the Spanish Republicans), and *Victoire de la Grande Jacquerie* (Victory of the Great Jacquerie). Bernstein's pictures depicted historical battle scenes where the proletariat had lost to counterrevolutionary forces. In Bernstein's rendering, things were turned upside down, and the proletariat emerged victorious. On a formal level, the paintings were just as unpretentious and hastily made as Debord's signs and Martin's maps: They were constructed with toy soldiers and plastic tanks pressed into plaster and splashes of paint on top. As such, they had the look of three-dimensional kindergarten projects, yet this was not, of course, so unlike other contemporary artworks, such as those by artists associated with the *Nouveaux Réalisme* (New Realism). Artists such as Niki de Saint-Phalle and Arman were also using toys and other low culture objects in their work. But where there was a kind of uneasy fascination associated with the new consumer objects in the works by the *Nouveaux Réalisme* artists, Bernstein's 'Victories of the Proletariat' were intended as a radical dismissal of the present order of things. It was not a matter of some kind of aesthetic or 'plastic' quality but of the effect or impact of the creative expression. When it worked, art became part of a collective historical practice that showed that it was impossible to produce anything new *as art and as an individual*. Instead of individual artworks that would necessarily become instrumentalised by the spectacle, we have a radical critical distillate, a transgressive effect or subversive impact that is not art but that is nonetheless similar to the transcendental edification often ascribed to works of modern art. Ambiguity or depth had to be replaced by the precise interventions of the avant-garde, expos-

ing capitalist society's subsumption of human relations. That was also the meaning of the term 'situation': A constructed situation was the recreation of moments of revolutionary self-consciousness in which art and theory were superseded. Of course, a manifestation in a cellar in Odense, Denmark could not in itself constitute a constructed situation, but the Situationists made the attempt. Debord described the project as characterised by 'heavy-handedness', and the Situationists were well aware of the awkwardness of the exhibited objects, their failure qua artworks. And they did not engage in a similar display again, not even in Denmark. The difficulties they faced in combining a critique of modern art and the nuclear politics of fear were almost too great.

If we return to Bernstein's contribution to the manifestation, we must, of course, acknowledge the same uneasiness that characterises the description of the project as a whole. How are we to discuss these objects? It is no straightforward task to inscribe Bernstein's 'paintings' into a discussion about paintings, history paintings or battle paintings. Neither Bernstein nor Debord were painters. Martin was a painter and continued to paint pictures while he was in charge of the Situationist project in Scandinavia though this was most likely merely in order to survive outside of wage labour. By now, of course, even Debord had ended up in the National Library in Paris, but the Situationists really managed for quite a long time to resist or prevent their inclusion in the art institution. And most of the objects used in 'Destruction of RSG-6' no longer exist. Some of them went up in smoke in 1965 when a bomb exploded in Martin's house. A couple of Debord's 'Directives' still exist and now occasionally tour the world as part of exhibitions devoted to the Situationist International that are mounted from time to time. Yet Bernstein's objects no longer exist and were never intended as distinct works of art. The various elements in the show depended on each other: the mock shelter, Debord's slogans, Martin's maps, and Bernstein's battle scenes. They each had a specific function outlined by Debord in the catalogue.

In 'The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art', Debord begins by stressing the necessity of fusing 'an experimental investigation of possible ways of freely constructing everyday life' (the artistic avant-garde) with 'the theoretical and practical development of a new revolutionary contestation' (the revolutionary project). Only in so far as these two strands are combined will it be possible to counter the spectacle, he writes. What is needed is what he terms 'a general struggle' in which the set of artistic experiments ('the construction of situations in life') 'is inseparable from the history of the movement striving to

fulfil the revolutionary possibilities contained in the present society'. Bernstein's objects were part of this ambitious endeavour to surpass art and politics.

Of course 'Destruction of RSG-6' was not the revolution, the event in Odense was not really a constructed situation, people were after all primarily only shown an image of resistance, yet it was nonetheless an attempt to use art and the new protests against the nuclear threat. As such, it was an ambiguous attempt to deploy art to Situationist ends. As Debord writes in the catalogue, 'Destruction of RSG-6' was 'an immediate action [...] undertaken within the framework that we want to destroy'. The Situationists used art but wanted to supersede it.

With their stunt in Odense, the Situationists sought to analyse what Debord in the catalogue termed 'the new forms of action in politics and art' (including those enacted by Danish and British activists), which strove to challenge the new modes of production that separated man from the capacity to shape and direct history. The manifestation and the presentation of Situationist theory would ideally give activists 'a new language' as well as 'a new memory'. For the Situationists, it was very much a question of history. The society of the spectacle was a society that refused history. History had been broken down into isolated soundbites and self-contained images that were disconnected from any kind of historical continuum. The revolutions of the past had been completely forgotten. The spectacle was precisely a kind of representative auto-eroticism totally lacking historical depth. Everything took place in a strange closed universe where only de Gaulle and Bardot lived onscreen. The Situationists sought to break out from this closed image sphere and recreate a historical continuum, reignite the historical development, handing back self-determination to a proletariat that was being held hostage by the mesmerising spectacle. It was therefore a question of creating a connection between the present and the past, exposing the continuation between present-day resistance and past challenges to the status quo, such as the communards in 1871 or the Spanish Republicans in the 1930s. It was in this sense the Situationists argued they were continuing the project of the interwar avant-gardes and the revolutionary tradition. They were trying to reach back into history and reconnect with past radical negations but in a completely new context that necessitated a radical overhaul of these past projects and their 'surpassing'. A new revolutionary offensive had to start with the acknowledgement that 'the entire revolutionary project in the first three decades of this century' ended in complete 'failure'.[27] Only on the basis of this understanding would it be possible to re-

sume the revolutionary project. We are thus confronted with a complex overlapping of present and past radical gestures that did not follow a straight line but were the demands of yesterday producing the possibility for transcending the present and realising a different present. In this way, the past exposed an alternate possible reality. Where Clark is forced into giving up on the possibility of a revolutionary perspective when confronted by the present impasse of the Left and seemingly never-ending historical disasters, the Situationists desperately maintained the possibility of a radical break from the present.

Bernstein's 'Victories of the Proletariat' do just that. Her paintings are alternative memorials, turning history upside down. As Debord writes in the catalogue, the series 'corrects the history of the past, rendering it better, more revolutionary, and more successful than it ever was'.[28] It engages in an aesthetics of repetition in which Bernstein rewrites historical defeats as victories. They are, of course, not just any historical defeats but ones where there was a massive popular dimension and participation, in contrast to state coups such as that in Russia in 1917, where a small cadre of professional revolutionaries grabbed state power. In Paris in 1871, a city was turned upside down and taken over by its inhabitants, who engaged in a radical transformative process, and in Catalonia in Spain in 1936 and 1937, a whole region was turned into a self-managed society by worker's factory collectives and peasant collectives. With her three-dimensional plaster models, Bernstein was restoring the possibility of what once was, rendering the possibility anew. She was salvaging past revolutionary negations of the ruling order. Lost battles in which counter-revolutionary forces brutally shut down popular social experiments are replayed with toy soldiers and plaster. History is rewritten, and the proletariat comes out the victor. This rediscovery of past episodes from the ongoing epic clash between the classes opens up a different view of the present, exposing a new trajectory through history into the present. What if the proletariat had won in 1871 or 1936? History, in the Situationists' Hegelian-Marxist view, is not only a catalogue of events or the study of the past, but is instead something to be self-consciously made or remade. By imagining 1871 as a victory, Bernstein is directly attacking the spectacle that refuses history and prevents people from actively shaping not only their existence but also history, locking them into a closed eternal present. In a radical gesture of disavowal, Bernstein opposes this postcard time with a self-conscious creation of history. History is suddenly opened up and haunted by what might be. This is not a nostalgic gesture through which Bernstein seeks a return to the past; it is

a radical gesture that explicitly strives to highlight the dialectic of revolution and counter-revolution, to turn both history and the present into an open-ended battlefield of class warfare. 'Victories of the Proletariat' is not the return of the identical, of the historical facts of proletarian experiences and defeats; it is the return of the possibility of what was, making the past possible again. This is 'repetition' in the sense outlined by Giorgio Agamben in a short text on Debord's films: 'Repetition restores the possibility of what was, renders the possibility anew.'[29] Bernstein is engaged in a similar venture, repeating the adventures of Communards and Spanish Republicans not as an act of nostalgia (or 'memory' in Pierre Nora's sense) but as an attempt to render the past possible again, restoring these lost possibilities of anti-capitalist negation. What if we have already won the Situationists playfully ask: 'Victories of the Proletariat'. The ruins of the future lay before us. Capitalism is dead, its subjectless logic already abolished. This is what victory looks like. We have already won. 'Forward! Not forgetting!'[30]

Bernstein's 'Victories of the Proletariat' is an act of resistance against the spectacle and its indisputableness (the spectacle 'says nothing more than 'that which appears is good, that which is good appears''), de-creating the closed world of the spectacle, disputing the facts of history. Bernstein de-creates what exists in a playful but determined act of negation using the debased existing means of cultural expression, refusing the facts in front of her, entering a zone of indifference between the past and the present, a zone of undecidability between the real and the possible where the past was put back into circulation again, where the Paris Commune and the Spanish Republic were suddenly re-played by commodity capitalism's own kitschy toy soldiers. By showing us the historical defeats of the proletariat as victories, Bernstein makes them possible again. We have the exact same situation with the exact same antagonists – yet it is completely different. The point is that everything is possible, not only the horrors of the spectacular commodity society but also another world.

Have We Already Won?

What is to be done, then? On the one hand, we have Clark and his refreshingly circumspect and forthright dismissal of the Left's future-oriented conception of history, which according to Clark has shown itself to be a nightmarish doppelgänger of the most brutal forms of capitalist modernisation. Clark is to be applauded for confronting the crisis of the Left head-on. The depth of the crisis is visible in every sentence of his text. A previous vocabulary is no longer available. The

very temporality of modernity has foundered, leaving only the past as a place of secret resistance. The breakdown of a whole tradition of Leftist thinking and practice is indeed the starting point for any serious discussion of an alternative politics. Clark is right in this respect. The two great competing fronts of the Western working-class movement, Social Democracy and Leninism, have disappeared. Leninism did not survive the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the Social Democratic parties in Europe have lacked a vision of a better future for some time and seem utterly incapable of developing such a vision following their complete neoliberal makeover. The promise of the Russian Revolution is long gone, and the Left no longer sets the agenda. Clark's proposal is to develop 'a kind of middle vision', arguing that the Left must abandon the future and rediscover the past, 'looking the world in the face'.[31] Contemporary capital is so infatuated with the future and everything young and adolescent that the Left should not just turn to the past but somehow make itself a thing of the past: 'The Left, always embattled and marginalized, always – proudly – a thing of the past.'[32] Clark thus ends up so strongly affirming the experience of defeat that he builds a new?/old? politics around it: 'There will be no future without war, poverty, Malthusian panic, tyranny, cruelty, classes, dead time, and all the ills the flesh is heir to, because there will be no future.'[33]

In contrast, we have the Situationists and their attempt to rebuild a new capital-negating offensive beyond art and politics in the 1960s. There is no doubt that the conditions the Situationists were confronting have only further deteriorated, that the stakes have only heightened. But is the game significantly changed? Does not capitalist society remain characterised by a fundamental contradiction between capital and labour? This contradiction has in fact been further intensified with the 'neo-liberal' restructuring in which more and more people are not even able to access capital's metabolism but instead survive outside or on the margins of the extraction of surplus value.

At a time when revolutionary events primarily resurface and circulate as empty signifiers, it is of course difficult to imagine the world turned upside down by a victorious proletarian revolution. Even the biggest capitalist crisis since the 1930s and the outbreak of a new global protest wave spreading from North Africa to the USA and onwards have failed to shatter the capitalist realist dogma in the West, according to which the world is more likely to disappear in a biospheric meltdown than capitalism is to be replaced by another economic system.[34] Today, the notion of revolution has more to do with the unfailing ability of capitalism to

McQ's autumn/winter campaign 2007 featuring photos
from May–June 1968 in Paris.

stage yet another commodity-object as *the* new thing not to be missed.
'Revolution' is more likely to appear as a description of washing powder
or a pair of jeans than a break with the ruling order and transformation
of society. The way revolutionary historical events suddenly surface and
just as quickly slip away is indicative of the present situation.[35] These
range from fashion designer Alexander McQueen's fall 2007 McQ cam-
paign using photos from May–June 1968 (the spring campaign of that
same year featured American cheerleaders) to the sudden explosion of
interest in the late 2000s in *Rote Armee Fraktion* (Red Army Faction),
which featured in movies and exhibitions.

The point is not that revolutionary events are somehow repressed qua
invisible but rather that they circulate as images in an expanded memory
culture that flattens out historical events, reducing them to decontext-
ualised signifiers, which lack any function beyond 'pimping one's style'.
If the nostalgia cultures of the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by a
fascination with the popular cultures of the 1950s and 1960s, from adven-
ture stories to go-go girls and staying away from a more politicised past,
as Fred Jameson argued in his seminal analysis of the postmodern, pres-
ent-day nostalgia culture has no problem mining more militant events,
emblems, images, and styles, converting them into fashionable signs like
Che and Guy Fawkes.[36] But the end result is the same: historical amnesia
and the commodification of history.

The process Jameson analysed in the mid- and late-1980s seems only
to have accelerated in the interim, taking on a new dimension in which
the past is now only present as memory. Pierre Nora has aptly described
this as the substitution of history with memory: 'Memory has taken on

a meaning so broad and all-inclusive that it tends to be used purely and simply as a substitute for history.'[37] The result is that we are living in an age of 'passionate, almost fetishistic memorialism' in which 'every country, every social, ethnic or family group, has undergone a profound change in the relationship it traditionally enjoyed with the past'. This development is visible in how the historian (and historiography in general) has lost a monopoly on interpreting the past; access to the past has in this sense been 'democratised'. Today, the witness and the media as well as the judge and the politician share in manufacturing the past, replacing history with memory as collective meaning. One result of this change is that the decisive break formerly designated and constituted by revolutionary upheaval has now been generalised to such an extent that the sense of historical continuity has been replaced by the experience of constant change. The present is now unable to connect the past with the future. The line binding the present and the future to the past has been snapped, Nora argues. We are thus forced to stockpile, 'in a pious and somewhat indiscriminate fashion, any visible trace or material sign that might eventually testify to what we are or what we will have become'. The present is no longer a bridge between the past and the future but has become autonomous: Echoing Jameson's terms from his description of postmodernism, Nora writes that we are living an '*autonomising* of the present', with the future unforeseeable and the past shrouded in darkness or mist. The future is thus locked away in an irretrievable past. The revolutions of the past are unapproachable and only resurface as one-dimensional pieces of fashionability put into circulation by a global nostalgia industry. A revolutionary politics of memory appears difficult today as memory is not a neutral medium of politics but is an ideologically biased politics of post-history. 'No more monuments'...

It is thus surely difficult today to comprehend or even re-perform Bernstein's gesture of reversing history or the Situationists' rhetoric about a fusion of art and life in a revolutionary abolishment of capitalism. Although contemporary art is not only the object of an intense neo-liberalisation in which art has, especially since 1989, become a haven for newly accumulated capital across the globe but also remains a place for the ongoing dramatisation of activist art and political curating, the phantasmatic world-historical dimension present in the Situationists seems distant. The contradictions are obvious: On the one hand, 'political' artists and curators use the art institution as a space for political discussions of a sort that rarely take place elsewhere, but on the other hand, we have a booming art market – a particular market that seems to have been able

to dodge the crisis completely! – in which art institutions are deeply inscribed in the global circuit of finance capital.

Of course, the point of Bernstein's 'Victories of the Proletariat' was precisely that it was already pretty damn difficult to imagine the revolution back in 1963. That the spectacle was already trying to turn past revolutions into oblivion was a central aspect of the Situationists' analysis of the spectacle. They were already confronted by an accelerated ending yet desperately sought to keep the revolutionary perspective alive. The all-or-nothing rhetoric of the Situationist International testifies to the enormous force of historical oblivion. They nonetheless strove to combat capitalism, the spectacle, connecting disparate struggles and making visible their virtual revolutionary dimension in the present.

Where are we, then? For good reasons, Clark seeks to abandon the future-oriented stance of the Left in order to combat the eternal present of contemporary capitalism. But this gesture risks depriving us of the means to combat capitalism. His attempt to get rid of the mesmerising images of the future slides into defeatism. Even worse, he never follows through on his intention to confront the Left because he is unwilling to let go of the very identity of the Left, preferring instead to drop the revolution, as if that would enable him to control the combined and uneven development (and underdevelopment) of capitalism. He ends up abandoning not just Marxism but also the revolutionary position in favour of a resigned Weberian analysis and anti-war/violence reformism. Clark's willingness to look the failures of the euro-modernist Left straight in the eye is extremely welcome, but he paradoxically ends up saving the reformist backward-looking Left that we need to abandon in order to develop a capital-negating political practice. Imagining a future is risky business, but so is imagining nothing at all. We cannot wash our hands of the future once and for all. A politics of 'the lesser evil' is definitely not a guarantee of lesser violence but more often than not ends up being a precondition for more violence.

What to do? The established workers' movement has disappeared. That much is clear. But the goal remains the abolition of the money-economy. And the disappearance of the 'Left' and the collapse of its programmatic project (producing a working-class culture and being in charge of the production of surplus value) are in fact a possibility. The crisis is deeper today than it was in 1929 and the revolution is further than in the 1930s when only Spain was in flames. The reformist position is gone, that's Clark's (experience of a) defeat. The state-capitalist solution is no longer a possibility. In the terms of the Spanish civil war: The anti-revolutionary

socialist Republic in Madrid has disappeared. Today there is only two positions left: A Christian militarism led by Franco or the revolutionary position of POUM and the anarcho-syndicalists that did not want to cooperate with Madrid. The situation is more clear-cut today; that might turn out to be an advantage for the revolutionary project, there is less room for reformist or centrist positions. In the context of art this will have to manifest itself in a gradual abandonment of the institution in favour of activities outside.

Notes

1. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Towards a New Manifesto* [*Diskussion über Theorie und Praxis*, 1956], trans. Rodney Livingstone (London and New York: Verso, 2011), p. 70.

2. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', *New Left Review*, no. 74 (2012), pp. 53–75.

3. Ibid., p. 54.

4. Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2002).

5. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 57. Clark thus continues a critique of the avant-garde that was also present in *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), co-written with Iain Boal, Joseph Matthews, and Michael Watts under the name of Retort, in which al-Qaida is analysed as the last vanguard. 'The Left should approach al-Qaida in the same spirit [as Nietzsche did] – with the words and actions of bin Laden resonating against those of Lenin, Blanqui, Mao, Baader-Meinhof, and Durruti'; p. 173. Note the lumping together of quite different historical figures, from Mao to Durruti, whose 'politics' cannot easily be described as the same. This is, of course, Clark's argument, that the tenor is the same from Blanqui via Lenin to bin Laden, that they all share the same futuristic rhetoric and that they all ultimately exhibit the same merciless instrumentalism.

6. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 54.

7. 'The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part. [...] It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors", and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment". [...] The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers. [...] The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. [...] Con-

stant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social con-
ditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch
from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient
and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones
become antiquated before they can ossify. [...] [But today] [t]he weapons with
which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the
bourgeoisie itself.' Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist
Party* [*Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, 1848], trans. Samuel Moore, https://
www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf

8. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 62.

9. Ibid., p. 63. Clark refers to Nietzsche's famous note on European nihilism
from 10 June 1887, posthumously published by his sister in *The Will to Power*,
in which Nietzsche writes: 'Who will prove to be the strongest in the course of
this? The most moderate; those who do not require any extreme articles of faith;
those who not only concede but love a fair amount of accidents and nonsense;
those who can think of man with a considerable reduction of his value without
becoming small and weak on that account; those richest in health who are equal
to most misfortunes and therefore not so afraid of misfortunes – human beings
who are sure of their power and represent the attained strength of humanity
with conscious pride.' *The Will to Power* [*Der Wille zur* Macht, 1901], trans. Walter
Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), pp. 38–39.

10. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 66. 'Aggression and human vio-
lence have marked the progress of our civilization and appear, indeed, to have
grown so during its course that they have become a central problem of the pres-
ent. Analyses that attempt to locate the roots of the evil often set out with short-
sighted assumptions, as though the failure of our upbringing or the fatal devel-
opment of a particular national tradition or economic system were to blame.
More can be said for the thesis that all orders and forms of authority in human
society are founded on institutionalized violence.' Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans:
The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* [*Homo Necans*,
1972], trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley and Los Angeles and London: University of
California Press, 1983), p. 1.

11. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 67.

12. The formulation belongs to Pierre Nora, who describes this memoralism
as 'a kind of tidal wave of memorial concerns that has broken over the world,
everywhere establishing close ties between respect for the past – whether real
or imaginary – and the sense of belonging, collective consciousness and indi-
vidual self-awareness, memory and identity'. Pierre Nora, 'Reasons for the Cur-
rent Upsurge in Memory', *Eurozine* (April 19, 2002), http://www.eurozine.com/
articles/2002-04-19-nora-en.html

13. T. J. Clark, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review*, no. 2 (2000), p. 85–96.

14. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 57.

15. Cf. Alberto Toscano, 'Politics in a Tragic Key', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 180 (2013), pp. 25–34.

16. Clark was a member of the Situationist International in 1966–1967. He has rarely directly engaged in a reading of the Situationist project or directly used the terms and concepts of the Situationists, although Debord does crop up at strategic points in his art-historical works, most notably in *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985). *Afflicted Powers* is the primary exception, where Clark analyses the concepts of spectacle and the critique of everyday life. With Donald Nicholson-Smith, Clark has written one longer text about the Situationists, attacking Peter Wollen and others for being overly focused on art and for misunderstanding the Situationist project: 'Why Art Can't Kill the Situationist International?', *October*, no. 79 (1997), pp. 15–31.

17. Susan Watkins makes a similar critique in her rebuttal to Clark in 'Presentism? A Reply to T. J. Clark', published in the same issue of *New Left Review* as Clark's article. *New Left Review*, no. 74 (2012), pp. 77–102. Clark's use of a Weberian language really took off in *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 7) in which Weber's 'disenchantment of the world' is described as the best summing up of modernity.

18. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', pp. 60–61.

19. Nina Power, 'The Pessimism of Time', *Overland*, no. 209 (2012), https://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-209/feature-nina-power/

20. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 55.

21. Cf. Roland Simon, *Fondements critiques d'une théorie de la révolution: Au-delà de l'affirmation du prolétariat* (Marseilles: Senonevero, 2001). The so-called communisation theory developed by various post-ultra-left groups after the defeat of May '68 in France, notably Théorie Communiste, discusses the 'programmatic' phase of the working-class movement in which the class struggle of the proletariat took the form of a liberation of the working class from capitalism. The goal was to increase the strength of the working class within the capitalist mode of production through the taking of power. This phase is now over, Théorie Communiste argues.

22. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 55.

23. 'There is no such thing as *Situationism* or a Situationist work of art or a spectacular Situationist'. 'The Fifth SI Conference in Göteborg' ['La cinquième conférence de l'I.S à Göteborg', 1962], trans. Ken Knabb, in *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), p. 88.

24. For a more in-depth analysis of 'Destruction of RSG-6', including its recep-

tion in the Danish press, see my article 'To Act in Culture While being against All Culture: The Situationists and the "Destruction of RSG-6"', in *Expect Anything Fear Nothing: The Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*, eds. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen (Copenhagen: Nebula; New York: Autonomedia, 2011), pp. 75–113.

25. The activists called themselves Spies for Peace and were associated with the Committee of 100. For a presentation of the project, see 'The Spies for Peace and After', *The Raven: Anarchist Quaterly*, no. 5 (1988), pp. 61–96.

26. 'Geopolitics of Hibernation' ['Géopolitique de l'hibernation', 1962], trans. Ken Knabb, in *Situationist International Anthology*, pp. 76–82.

27. Guy Debord, 'The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art' ['Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action dans la politique ou l'art', 1963], trans. Thomas Levin, in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2002), p. 159.

28. 'Geopolitics of Hibernation', p. 165.

29. Giorgio Agamben, 'Difference and Repetition in Guy Debord's Films' ['Le cinéma de Guy Debord', 1995], trans. Brian Holmes, in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonough, p. 316.

30. Bertolt Brecht, 'Solidaritäts Lied' [1930], in *Kuhle Wampe: Protokoll des Films und Materialien*, eds. Wolfgang Gersch and Werner Hecht (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 62.

31. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 75.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. This being the by now classic example of what Mark Fisher dubbed 'capitalist realism' in his short pamphlet from 2009: *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero, 2009). Fisher builds part of his description on Fredric Jameson's and Slavoj Zizek's oft-quoted statement about the inability of conceiving another society. 'It seems to be easier for us to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism.' Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. xii.

35. For an analysis of the development that the term 'revolution' has undergone over the past four decades, see Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, 'The Revolution Turned Upside Down', in Bolt Rasmussen, *Crisis to Insurrection: Notes on the On-Going Collapse* (Wivenhoe and New York: Minor Compositions, 2015), pp. 49–71.

36. Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp. 111–25.

37. Pierre Nora, 'Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory'.

The Politics of Exclusion, or, Reanimating the Archive

Ernst van Alphen

ABSTRACT The notion of the archive covers two kinds of knowledge: knowledge and memories that can be articulated and objectified by convergent discursive rules, and knowledge that remains overlooked because of the same discursive rules, now working as rules of exclusion. Many contemporary art practices foreground these exclusions from the archive by presenting them as yet another archive. Artists highlight this residue of the archive by collecting images that were until then not considered to be archivable, that is, of any value or importance. In this article I will discuss work of Santu Mofokeng, Akram Zataari, Walid Raad, and Darius Jablonski as examples of such archival artistic practices.
KEYWORDS Archive, Exclusion, Classification, Archival organization, Artistic archiving

Since the 1990s, an archival boom has been spreading through the academic as well as artistic domain. At first it is difficult to assess this interest in the archive, because the notion of the archive is used literally as well as figuratively. Literally it refers to the institution or material site, in short a building filled with documents and objects. Figuratively, it concerns a much more general and ungraspable notion of knowledge and memory practices not bound by or located in an institutional organization. Especially Michel Foucault's notion of the archive seems to be responsible for this figurative use of 'archive'. He used the term archive for 'the law of what can be said', or a set of discursive rules. Such a set of discursive rules consists of specific conceptual distinctions that determine what can be said and what cannot be said. In that sense, discursive rules imply always at the same time exclusions. Those exclusions concern memories, documents, practices of knowledge production that are overlooked, not taken seriously, considered as unimportant or without any value. Exclusions from the archive are inherent to any archival organization. This explains why memories and knowledge 'outside the archive', are also part of the archive, in the sense of produced by archival rules of exclusion. As a consequence an archival organization has by definition an inside as well as an outside.

This implies that archival organizations are by definition selective. French philosopher Jacques Derrida has shown how this selectivity comes

about. In his book *Archive Fever* he argues that he archive marks an institutional passage from the private to the public. Even private archives, like family archives, demonstrate this, not in being publicly accessible, but in what they store. Even private archives usually store that which is storable and worth storing in the eyes of the public or the culture at large.[1] It is in the archive that the singularity of stored objects and documents is, or better: becomes, at the same time representative for the category under which the objects have been classified. The status of the archive as a place of transition of private to public, and a place where the general (the rules or laws of classification) and the singular intersect, has fundamental consequences for the nature of that place. It implies that not everything can be sheltered in such an archive. The archive is a selective place. It should be more than a storage place of heterogeneous items or objects.

Because it intersects with the public and with the law, the archive is ruled by the functions of unification, consignation, and classification. The acts of unification and consignation imply that the archive is not passive; it is not a place that stores uncritically. These acts imply the distinction between archivable content and non-archivable content, and on the basis of that distinction one can even say that the archive produces its own content. It is not just a passive receiver of content but an active producer of it.

This active, regulatory force is implied in the functions of unification as well as consignation. That implication explains why according to Derrida consignation is a power. In his words:

> By consignation, we do not only mean, in the ordinary sense of the word, the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve (to consign, to deposit), in a place and on a substrate, but here the act of *con*signing through gathering together signs. [...] *Consignation* aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration.[2]

The storing and gathering together in an archive pursues the formation of a unity, a planned unity that decides what is archivable and what is not. The objects stored are the result of 'gathering together signs' which means that each object is not just stored because of its singularity, but because of what it means and does in relation to the other stored objects.

The Politics of Classification

One fundamental way of establishing the distinction between what is archivable and what is non-archivable is by means of classification. It is not Derrida but Michel Foucault who in his *The Order of Things: An*

Archaeology of the Human Sciences addresses the issue of the coherence of the established classifications. This coherence (or lack thereof), is the result of grouping and isolating, of analysing, of matching and pigeon-holing concrete contents, in other words of establishing an order among things. But this grouping and isolating is not the result of a 'spontaneous' ordering:

> In fact, there is no similitude and no distinction, even for the wholly untrained perception, that is not the result of a precise operation and of the application of a preliminary criterion. A 'system of elements' – a definition of the segments by which the resemblances and differences can be shown, the types of variation by which those segments can be affected, and lastly, the threshold above which there is a difference below which there is a similitude – is indispensible for the establishment of even the simplest form of order.[3]

This simplest form of order can be recognized in the fundamental codes of a culture, according to Foucault. He mentions the codes governing a culture's language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices, as examples of such codes that harbour an order.

On the deepest level, Foucault's entire oeuvre is devoted to the critical analysis of the idea of order and the practices it inspires. This focus explains the wide range of his disciplinary frameworks as well as his enormous historical scope. In *The Order of Things*, but in fact also in his other works, Foucault attempts to analyse the experience of order and its modes of being. He analyzes which modalities of order have been posited and recognized 'in order to create the positive basis of knowledge as we find it employed in grammar and philology, in natural history and biology, in the study of wealth and political economy'.[4] He is bringing to light the epistemological field, or what he calls the 'episteme', in which knowledge grounds its positivity. His 'archaeological inquiry' has revealed that the 'episteme' or system of positivities was transformed radically at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. An earlier discontinuity had inaugurated the Classical age; the second discontinuity, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, marks the beginning of the Modern age. These transformations of episteme were not a matter of gradual development or progress; it was 'simply that the mode of being of things, and of the order that divided them up before presenting them to the understanding, was profoundly altered'.[5] In his bringing to light of a specific episteme, either the Classical or the Modern one, he is concerned with a history of resemblance, that is, with the conditions on the basis of which

such an episteme was able to reflect relations of similarity or equivalence between things; relations that provide a foundation and justification for the episteme's words, classifications and systems of exchange.

When Foucault writes about the episteme (the order of things), or heterotopia as a subversive variation on an episteme, he is not referring to archival organizations in the literal sense. An episteme is a more fundamental or 'simpler' form of order than an archival organization. But archives are examples of 'techniques' or 'practices' in which the operations of an episteme can be recognized easily. The episteme governs the principles according to which archival organizations are structured in such a way that archives can be seen as emblematic examples of the nature of an episteme. Also, archival organization is structured on the basis of resemblance and distinction, on categories to which items belong because they resemble the other items in their category, or they do not because they are different.

But because of the increasing importance of the archive in the Modern age, Foucault has also written extensively on the role of archives in that period. For, what changed radically then is the so-called 'threshold of description', the minimum of importance a piece of information must have to be worthy of archiving. This threshold was lowered dramatically in order to include common people. In the words of Foucault:

> For a long time ordinary individuality – the everyday individuality of everybody – remained below the threshold of description. To be looked at, observed, described in detail, followed from day to day by an interrupted writing was a privilege [...] The disciplinary methods reserved this relation, lowered the threshold of describable individuality and made of this description a means of control and a method of domination. [What is archived] is no longer a monument for future memory, but a document for possible use. And this new describability is all the more marked in that the disciplinary framework is a strict one: the child, the patient, the madman, the prisoner, were to become [...] the object of individual descriptions and biographical accounts.[6]

Foucault argues that a variety of new ways of examining and describing individuals was developed. The question, which then emerges is in which sense this accumulation and processing of the new data differed from the knowledge production of earlier centuries. For, scientists from earlier centuries also had had an obsession with classifying objects and archiving the results of these classifications.[7]

Foucault's answer is that while it is true that plants, animals and even human beings had been the subject of study before the examination

regime was in place, they entered a field of knowledge as general categories, as a species for example, and not as singular individuals.

> What was innovative about the new archives was precisely that they objectified individuals not as members of a pre-existing category, but in all their uniqueness and singularity. Far from being archivable in terms of their shared properties, human beings became linked to all the unique series of events (medical, military, educational, penal events) which made them who they are as historical individuals – a history which could now take the form of a file while the individual became a case.[8]

In other words, whereas in the old archives individuals were used to build or substantiate categories, in the new archive, categories are being used to build or substantiate the individual. This leads to a situation in which human bodies, events and archives interact, and it is this interaction, which brings about individual identity. This identity is then not seen as a subjective interiority, but as an objective exteriority. All the facts about people accumulated in the files and dossiers of databases and archives, extracted from us via a variety of examinations, provide people with an identity. This identity is not a matter of interiorized representation, like an ideology, but of an external body of archives within which we are caught and that compulsorily fabricate an objective identity for us. This 'archival identity' may perhaps have little to do with our sense of identity, but this may not be the case for an insurance company, for example, for whom archived medical facts are the key to our identity, whether we like it or not.[9]

One of the radical implications of this new archive is that what, or who, is not in the records does not really exist. This drastic consequence is understandable when we realise that archival administrators do not observe, describe and classify reality, but the other way around: they shape people and events into entities that fit the categorizations and that are recordable. This kind of reification entails that there are virtually no other facts than those that are contained in records and archives.[10]

Reanimation

The notion of the archive covers then two kinds of knowledge: knowledge and memories that can be articulated and objectified by convergent discursive rules, and knowledge that remains overlooked because of the same discursive rules, now working as rules of exclusion. As a consequence any archival organization has by definition an inside as well as an outside.

Many contemporary art practices foreground these exclusions from the archive by presenting them 'as yet' another archive. Artists highlight this residue of the archive by collecting images that were until then not considered to be 'archivable', that is, of any value or importance. These images excluded form the archive are still there but cannot be looked at because according to the accepted discursive rules they do not show or articulate anything worth knowing. An example of such an artistic practice transforming exclusions from the archive into an archive in its own right is the *Black Photo Album* by South African photographer Santu Mofokeng. The *Black Photo Album* is the result of an investigation of images that were commissioned by black working and middle-class families in South Africa in the period between 1890–1950. It was in this period that South Africa developed and implemented a racist political system. In this period it was still common practice to depict African people in the same visual language as animals, as part of the fauna in their own natural habitat. In the ideologies of authorative knowledge, they were considered as 'natives' and the official, 'archivable' images had to confirm such a notion of African people. The photographs commissioned by black people and representing them as bourgeois families did not fit this ideology and were excluded from the archives of official knowledge.

Santu Mofokeng, *Black Photo Album / Look at Me 1890–1950*, c. 2011. Copyright Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz.

These images remain scattered in the private domain and are largely invisible. In the words of Santu Mofokeng:

> They have been left behind by dead relatives, where they sometimes hang on obscure parlour walls in the townships. In some families they are coveted as treasures, displacing totems in discursive narratives about identity, lineage and personality. And because, to some people, photographs contain the 'shadow' of the subject, they are carefully guarded from the ill-will of witches and enemies. In other families they are being destroyed as rubbish during spring-cleans because of interruptions in continuity or disaffection with the encapsulated meanings and history of the images. Most often they lie hidden to rot through neglect in kists, cupboards, cardboard boxes and plastic bags.[11]

Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album* reverses the exclusion of these images from the authorative public domain. He collects these images and the stories about the subjects of the photographs. Within the context of the gallery and the museum he presents them in a new format in combination with the stories. By doing this the neglected memories and images are inserted into the public domain, and form the archive from which until now they had been excluded. This reanimation of the invisible exclusions from the archive implies much more than bringing to life almost forgotten memories. By making these images into archival objects the ideology that subjected African people to the lower orders in the 'family of men', is rewritten.

Another example of an artistic practice compensating earlier exclusions is the work of Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari. In 1997 he co-founded the Arab Image Foundation (AIF). Based in Beirut, this archival foundation has collected thousands of photographs and negatives from countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Zaatari himself has conducted research in photographic practices in Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria and collected also images from those countries. Zaatari envisions his collecting of images not as appropriation of overlooked material but 'as an intervention in the social life of waning photographic images'.[12] Because of civil and other kinds of wars in the Middle East it is urgent to preserve these images from destruction. In Beirut for instance, most commercial photo studies, which were located in the downtown area, were destroyed in the civil war. The only remnants of the production of these studies are prints collected from Beirut families. The collections of commercial studios, not only in Beirut but throughout the Middle East, have faced their peril in their commercial decline. Many studios have sold off their negatives because of the value of the silver content. But as destructive as wars and commercial decline is the

fact that until AIF started to collect these images and negatives the photographic practices of these commercial studies was largely invisible because not included in the public register of archivable knowledge.

Zaatari's effort to preserve the photographic heritage of the Middle East has resulted in a variety of projects. He made a documentary about the studio photographer Van Leo from Cairo, titled *Her + Him: Van Leo* (2001). Van Leo was professionally active in the fifties and sixties of the last century. He had an eroticised relationship with his amateur models who would make secret appointments at the studio to explore different identities, also in the form of pornographic images. Zaatari also published a book about Hashem El Madani, a studio photographer from Beirot, who also used the studio as a site where clients explore new identities through portraiture. Cross-dressing, dressing up and dressing down, and pornographic self-images belonged to an almost standard repertoire of imaginary identities. His archival research resulted also in another book titled *The Vehicle* (1999). In this book Zaatari has collected images of studio clients who pose with their recently acquired automobile. In new modern lifestyles identity is also constructed by means of the portrayal of the ownership of a car.

Yet another strategy to reanimate forgotten images was chosen by Zaatari by pursuing the history of a set of images back to the people photographed.[13] He interviewed the people about the context and situation in which the photo was taken but also asked them to pose again in exactly the same pose as they were in in the photos taken so many years earlier. A variation of this strategy was deployed for the series of images titled *Another Resolution* (1998). For these photos he asked Lebanese artists to pose in the same way that photographers had asked children to pose a generation earlier. The original photograph and the re-enacted photograph were installed together. The re-enactments were not made by Zaatari in order to recreate an original moment but 'to measure the limits of accepted behaviour in age and gender'.[14] It is through the comparison of original and re-enacted images that this social dimension of the images is revealed. When the re-enacting adult artists stick out their tongues, recline in the nude or drop their pants, one becomes aware of the fact that this kind of behaviour in front of the camera is acceptable when it concerns children, but not for adults. Also this social knowledge was so far invisible.

It is yet another Lebanese artist who has had great impact on the rethinking and of the archive and its impact: Walid Raad and his fictional collaborators of 'the Atlas Group'. These collaborators donated work to the Archive of the Atlas Group. To give an example, *Missing Lebanese*

DJENANE BALADI. Beirut. 1966
Fotógrafo / Photographer: anónimo / anonymous
© AIF. Beirut / J. Farina

ANOTHER RESOLUTION. LARA BALADI, 1998, fotografía / photograph

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Akram Zaatari, *Another Resolution*, 1998, Lara Baladi, photograph. Copyright Akram Zaatari and the Arab Image Foundation. Image Courtesy Sfeir-Semeler Gallery, Beirut.

Wars, consisting of plates and a notebook, was deposited in *The Atlas Group Archive* by a well known (but fictional) Lebanese historian, named Dr. Fadl Fakhouri. Other fictive legatees of the archive are Asma Taffan (*Let's Be Honest, the Weather Helped*, 1992), Habib Fathallah (*I Might Die Before I Get a Rifle*, 1993). Walid Raad himself also donated work to the archive (*We Decided to Let Them Say, 'We are Convinced', Twice*). The project of the Atlas Group unfolded between 1989 and 2004. In the 2004 Raad decided to end this 'collaborative' project. In 2006 a retrospective exhibition was organized that showed the complete Atlas Group Archive in one single place, the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin.[15]

By means of the works in *The Atlas Group Archive* Raad questions the mediation and archiving of information. The artistic, fictional archive enables the exploration of new epistemic and cognitive models. This new knowledge challenges the kind of knowledge that is disseminated by the dominant mass media and by Western discourses about terrorism, colonialism and orientalism. The presentation of artistic works as belonging to an archive directs the attention to the cognitive conflicts and problems thematized by these works. Walid Raad explains why the archive as place is the necessary framework for his cognitive project:

> I like to think that I always work from facts. But I always proceed from the understanding that there are different kinds of facts; some facts are historical, some are sociological, some are emotional, some are economic, and some are aesthetic. And some of these facts can sometimes only be experienced in a place we call fiction. I tend to think in terms of different kinds of facts and the places that permit their emergence.[16]

Besides fiction, the other place in the work of Walid Raad that permits these facts to emerge and become visible and knowable is the archive.

The documents and images presented by the Atlas Group are not inherently fake or fictional. The texts and photographs were not manipulated. But it is their montage and assembling into a narrative or specific historical situation that propels them into fiction. The montage of image and text, or of different images is a specific mode of producing knowledge. The texts and images are never presented at face value, but they always 'trouble each other'.[17] A good example of this use of montage of the *Notebook Volume 38: Already Been in a Lake of Fire* donated to the *Atlas Group Archive* by the already mentioned Dr. Fadl Fakhouri. This file contains 145 photographic images of cars. These cars are of the same brand, model and colour as those used in car-bomb attacks during the Lebanese wars of 1975 to 1991. Notes and annotations made by Fakhouri are attached to
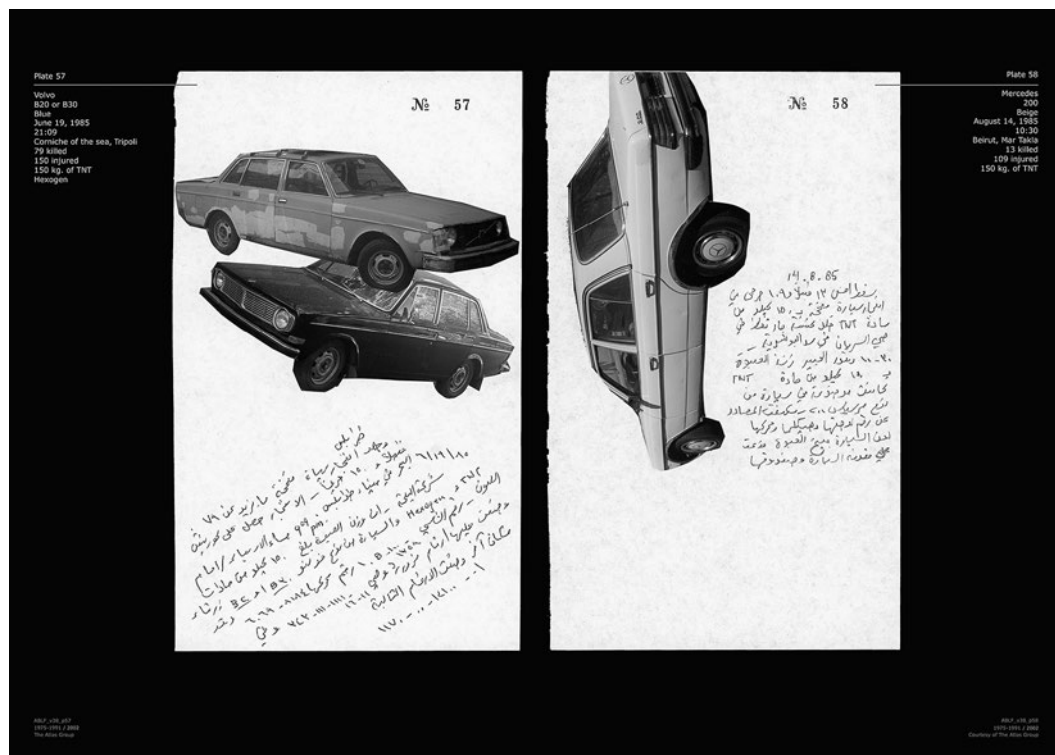
Walid Raad, *Notebook Volume 38: Already Been in a Lake of Fire*, plate 57 and 58, 2003.

the images. They specify information such as the number of casualties, the location and time of the explosion, the type of explosives used. The documentary information is all real and true. What is fictional however, is the bringing together of these different elements in the notebook of the imaginary character of Dr. F. Fakhouri. And of course, the notebook is an archival genre. By using the notebook as the framework where factual images and notes are presented, a cognitive status is assigned to them. It is thanks to this archival genre that the images and notes are no longer disparate elements without any cognitive value. They become knowable and visible objects through the newly acquired status as archivable objects. The fictional archive of the Atlas Group present, in the words of Chouteau, 'latency, lapse, and speculation as vectors for historical truth equal to those of verification, authenticity and proof'.[18]

But in the case of *Notebook Volume 38: Already Been in a Lake of Fire*, the ultimate goal of this artistic project is not conveying knowledge about the kind of cars that were used in car-bomb attacks during the Libanese

wars. What is much more important are the layers of transmission due to which this kind of knowledge was lost; and subsequently, the archival framework thanks to which this knowledge can be retrieved. What is important is that the documents in the *Atlas Group Archive*, whether they are photographs, texts or videos, are never authentic or original, but always digital reproductions. They are always scanned, increased but often also decreased in size, and multiplied. The point is that 'their original state is lost in the layers of transmissions, exhibitions and repetitions, and metaphorically in the *rumours* of history'.[19] After the cognitive impulse has been installed by means of these inauthentic reproductions, what should be verified is not the materiality of these artefacts, but the structures through which knowledge is lost or transmitted.

The works of Santu Mofokeng, Akram Zaatari and Walid Raad are examples of artistic archival practices that pertain to a larger category of memory practices, meant to reanimate excised histories. Since the 90s of the last century the spread of memory practices in art and literature has been enormous. These memory practices manifest themselves around issues such as trauma, war, Holocaust and other genocides, migration, but also in the increasing use of archival organisations combined with media and genres like photography, documentary film and video. The primary question raised by this flourishing of memory practices, which intend to reanimate lost or invisible knowledge and memories, is if we should see this as a celebration of memory, as a fin de siècle, and in the meantime debut de siècle, as an expression of the desire to look backwards, or, in contrast, as a symptom of a severe memory crisis or a fear of forgetting? The answer will depend on how these memory practices are articulated. As we have seen, these memory practices converge also in a specific aesthetics. It is on the basis of this aesthetics that we can evaluate the nature but also the effectivity of these memory practices.

Reanimating Still Images

Either way, the contemporary art practices I just discussed, like other memory practices so typical of our moment, may point to the meaning of the present itself. In order to approach an answer to this question of the meaning of the present through art practices, I will wind up by focusing in the rest of this article on the work of Polish filmmaker Dariusz Jablonski. He uses old, almost forgotten archival images for the making of his film *Fotoamator* (1998) (Photographer). Jablonski based his film on a collection of colour slides of the Jewish ghetto of Lodz which were found in 1987 in a Viennese antique shop.

The fact that this filmmaker uses presumably authentic material for his films does not, however, guarantee the effectivity of his work as reanimation. He had to frame and even manipulate the material profoundly in order to convey the historical dimension of this material effectively. In this respect his work is congenial to that of the three artists discussed above, especially to Zaatari and Walid Raad's. Zaatari's re-enactments and Raad's montage of authentic material and facts within fictional archival frameworks were necessary devices in order to foreground the imaginary structures responsible for loosing as well as transmitting historical knowledge. But, I contend, it is precisely their explicit work on this authentic material that safeguards this historical material from oblivion. Jablonski highlights his manipulative work on the authentic material even more than Zaatari and Raad. But it is in the tension between the authenticity and manipulation of material that the political life of the knowledge it contains becomes prominently visible.

Jablonski made his film on the basis of a collection of several hundreds of colour slides of the Jewish ghetto of Lodz in Poland. These slides made during the Second World War belong to the first generation of colour photographs. So, they are exceptional in a double respect: because of their subject matter and because of the fact that they have colour. They were made by the Austrian chief accountant of the ghetto, Walter Genewein. Jablonski's film consists for the major part of close-ups, zooms and pans of Genewein's slides. These images are accompanied by a voice-over that reads from letters written by Genewein and from his administrative records. He was not only recording life in the ghetto by means of his camera, but also, as accountant, by making endless lists. It is on the basis of these lists that we learn that the inhabitants of the ghetto produced in the factories in which they were employed 59.000 tooth brushes, 321.262 bras and 426.744 braces. But we also learn about the number of people who died in the ghetto, subdivided in victims of tuberculosis, of heart diseases, of malnutrition. The different deportations are mentioned and the number of vans that were needed to transport the belongings of the new inhabitants of the ghetto. These numbers alternate with information about Genewein's career, the promotions he made and the raises of his salary. We get an image of him as a perfectionist administrator and archivist. His records are utterly impersonal and distant and detailed in the most surprising ways. In his correspondence he also tells his addressee that he has decided not to use carbon paper anymore and to change to a semi-automatic administration device.

The voice-over of the impersonal administrator is in sharp contrast

with the vividness of the colour slides we see at the same time. This vividness is even enhanced by the addition of realistic background noise, such as that of traffic and the buzz of voices. The scenes showing the colour slides accompanied by the voice-over of the administrator/ archivist alternate, however, with moving images showing the surviving doctor of the ghetto, Arnold Mostowics. He is being interviewed about his memories of the ghetto. In fact, the film opens with footage that shows the doctor in an old archive, probably the archive which houses the former administration of the ghetto. These images are in colour, like the slides, which are only later introduced into the film.

Before we get to see the slides, the doctor gives his reaction to these slides and what they convey:

> It was a shock, it was a shock, it was a shock that they existed. Please understand, this was some 45 years after the war had ended. Suddenly I find out about the existence of several hundreds of photographs taken by Germans. And these were not ordinary photographs. Immediately these photos provoked a feeling of unease in me. Unease at the fact that although they showed the ghetto, it was not the ghetto. Although they were real, they did not show the truth.

The nature of the doctor's unease is not further explained at this moment. A self-evident explanation is that his memories of his past ghetto experiences are not reconfirmed by the slides. The slides show something different, less horrific than we later hear him tell. But the unease also seems to be caused by the colour and vividness of the slides. The way the slides are framed in the film suggests that the doctor responds to the fact that these images are too vivid to belong to the past, whereas his own memories of the ghetto do.

Immediately after this introduction of the doctor the moving images transform from colour into black and white. From then on, each time the doctor is interviewed, we see him in black and white. Also other footage that shows present Lodz is in black and white. This results in a rather confusing, but also penetrating situation: black and white connotes the present, whereas colour footage connotes the past. This is so confusing, because out of convention we associate colour or the lack thereof, with the opposite. Black and white has an aura of pastness, whereas colour refers to the present. Watching *Fotoamator* we constantly have to readjust our expectations of the significance of colour.

But there is more to it: the colour slides showing the ghetto are accompanied by the voice-over of chief accountant Genewein. His sentences

are in the present tense. He is not talking about the past but from the past. The doctor, however, describing or recalling the situation in the ghetto talks in the past tense. He is clearly talking from another temporal dimension than the time he is talking about. One would think that the vividness of the colour slides and the presentness of the accountant's voice-over is countered by the fact that the slides are stills and that time in it is frozen. But this effect is not achieved because of the zooming and panning movement of the animation. Although the slides show frozen moments of time, what we as get to see as viewers is always moving.

In this film, the movement of time is in all respects the reverse of what the ontology of time prescribes. This is, of course, first of all because of the fact that the images contemporaneous to the ghetto are in colour. Film director Jablonski is not responsible for this. But a variety of devices he employed intensify the effect of the colour slides, bring past time more definitely into the present, and distance the present from the past. When, in the literal sense of the word, memory is a form of re-calling, the film *Fotoamator* succeeds most effectively in bringing this past back into our present. It does it so effectively that this past looks even more present than do moments that are contemporaneous to the viewer's time.

It may be clear by now that Jablonski's film is highly self-reflexive about colour, the lack thereof, and its effects. There is a recurring motif in the film that foregrounds this issue of colour in unexpected ways. Chief accountant Genewein is quoted three times from letters he wrote to photography company AGFA. He complains about a red-brownish shade that covers all his slides. He asks for an explanation for this shade and for a solution to prevent it from happening again. The moments that his complaints about the quality of the colour are quoted are far from neutral. It happens at moments that the most horrifying slides are being shown: slides of famished inmates of the ghetto, or of the deportations. The contrast between what the images show and what the chief accountant comments on is enormous. He is literally blind to the horror that he documents and archives. Although the colour has now the effect on us that it makes the images vivid in unusual ways, for Genewein, the colour was not vivid enough. He could not see what he had registered. In this film colour separates times.

Understanding the Memory Crisis

The archive boom since the 1990s but also the spread of memory practices in the artistic domain, of which I presented some examples, raise the following question: are these symptoms of a memory crisis or are they the opposite of that, rather a celebration of memory. I contend

that they seem to be the expression of a situation in which memory is under siege. This conclusion concords with that of other cultural critics. Scholars such as Benjamin Buchloh and Andreas Huyssen have argued that this memory crisis is first of all historical and specific. According to Buchloh mnemonic desire is activated especially in those moments of extreme duress in which the traditional bonds between subjects, between subjects and objects, and between objects and their representation appear to be on the verge of displacement if not outright disappearance.[20] In the 1990s especially massive migration due to economical reasons or political wars resulting in genocides, have caused such moments of extreme duress. But the memory crisis is not only historically specific in the socio-political sense. I contend that it is also caused by media culture, by its overwhelming presence since the 90s and by the specific forms this culture develops. The enormous impact of photographic and filmic media culture has not worked in the service of memory, but on the contrary, threatens to destroy historical memory and the mnemonic image.

Already in the 1920s, German sociologist and cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer explained how media culture can have this devastating effect. In his essay simply titled 'Photography', he makes a diagnosis of his own times that seems to be at the same time a prophetic diagnosis of our time:

> Never before has any age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resembles them in a photographic sense [...] In reality however, the weekly photographic ration does not all mean to refer to these objects or 'ur-mages'. If it were offering itself as an aid to memory, then memory would have to make the selection. But the Hood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory. The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potential existing awareness of crucial traits. Artworks suffer this fate through their reproductions. [...] In the illustrated magazines people see the very world that the illustrated magazines prevent them from perceiving. [...] Never before has a period known so little about itself.[21]

Relevantly for our discussion, Kracauer sees historicism, the scholarly practice that emerged more or less at the same moment as modern photographic technology, as the temporal equivalent of the spatial mediations that take place in photography. In Kracauer's words:

> On the whole, advocates of such historicist thinking believe they can explain any phenomenon purely in terms of its genesis. That is, they believe in any case that they can grasp historical reality by reconstructing the course of events in

their temporal succession without any gaps. Photography presents a spatial continuum; historicism seeks to provide the temporal continuum. According to historicism, the complete mirroring of an intertemporal sequence simultaneously contains the meaning of all that occurred within that time. [...] Historicism is concerned with the photography of time.[22]

How can we consider a medium and a scientific discourse as parallel? Photography and historicism regulate spatial and temporal elements according to laws that belong to the economic laws of nature rather than to mnemonic principles. In contrast, Kracauer argues, memory encompasses neither the entire spatial appearance of a state of affairs nor its entire temporal course. Nor does memory pay much attention to dates; it skips years or stretches temporal distance. Kracauer writes in this respect:

> An individual retains memories because they are personally significant. Thus they are organized according to a principle which is essentially different from the organizing principle of photography: memory images retain what is given only in so far as it has significance. Since what is significant is not reducible to either merely spatial or merely temporal terms, memory images are at odds with photographic representations.[23]

Memory images are also at odds with the principles of historicism, concludes Kracauer later in his essay.

Historicism's temporal inventory corresponds to the spatial inventory of photography. Instead of preserving the 'history' that consciousness reads out of the temporal succession of events, historicism records the temporal succession of events whose linkage does not contain the transparency of history.[24] It is in the daily newspapers that photography and historicism join forces and intensify each other in their destruction of memory. In the 1920s daily papers are illustrating their texts more and more and the numbers of illustrated newspapers increased. For Kracauer those illustrated journals embody in a nutshell the devastating effects of the representation of spatial and temporal continuities, mistaken for the meaning of history.

Clearly, Kracauer's diagnosis of a memory crisis as caused by the phenomena of photography and historicism, relatively new in his day, seems also highly relevant for an understanding of the position of memory in the 1990s and after. His bleak prophecy seems to have come true.[25] For Huyssen, the spread of memory practices especially in the visual arts, is symptomatic of a crisis, not of a flourishing of memory. The memory crisis that started at the beginning of the twentieth century seems to have ac-

celerated and intensified at the end of that century. The reasons for this are again twofold. First of all, there is a historical and specific reason; second, this acceleration is a result of the impact of developments in media culture.

I will focus, here, on the second reason. The principles of mediating historical reality introduced by photography and historicism are intensified through film, advanced electronic technologies such as computers and internet, mass media, by the explosion of historical scholarship and an ever more voracious museum culture. It is the abundance of information that explains the memory crisis of the 1990s. Huyssen writes:

> For the more we are asked to remember in the wake of the information explosion and the marketing of memory, the more we seem to be in danger of forgetting and the stronger the need to forget. At issue is the distinction between usable pasts and disposable data.[26]

Yet, it is not only this very specific mediation of (historical) reality that has its devastating effects on memory; it is also the nature of the historical and political reality of the 1990s itself. Historical memory used to give coherence and legitimacy to families, communities, nations and states. But in the 1990s these links that were more or less stable have weakened drastically. In the processes of globalization and massive migration, national traditions and historical pasts are increasingly deprived of their geographic and political groundings. Whereas older sociological approaches to collective memory, most famously represented in the work of Maurice Halbwachs, presuppose relatively stable communities and formations of their memories, these approaches are no longer adequate to grasp the current dynamic of the fragmented memory politics of different social and ethnic groups.

It is against this background of a century-old, but now accelerated memory crisis that the memory practices in the visual arts, archival or not, should be understood. It is in these practices that memory becomes an issue of transforming aesthetics. To assess the political value of such transformations in the aesthetics of memory, the question that remains is how effective these practices are in countering the threat of oblivion.

Mofokeng's, Zaatari's, Raad's, as well as Jablonski's work are strong examples of what I called the spread of archival memory practices that have become so prevalent since the early 1990s. Of course, it is impossible and undesirable to generalize about this art and the cultural practices that are performed in it. It is more important to distinguish productive from unproductive memory practices, and try to understand in what respect memory practices are productive or unproductive. Because some

and perhaps even most of these practices show a kind of naïve, nostalgic and sentimental celebration of the past, usually limited to a personal past, without actively engaging this past in our political present, it is imperative to stop at attempts such as Jablonski's to overcome these distancing practices. My reading of Jablonski's *Photographer*, suggests, however, that the media and genres used for these memory practices are themselves deeply implicated in the crisis of memory they appear to counter.

If used conventionally and uncritically the archive, but also media such as photography and film and genres like documentary, the family album, or home movies, lead to a memory crisis. They embody the principles of traditional historicism Kracauer criticized, for they are based on the kind of temporal or spatial continuities that are easily mistaken for the meaning of political situations or of personal lives. It is only when the use of these media and genres is performed critically and self-reflexively that they are transformed from embodiments and implements of that crisis to alternative practices that counter the very same crisis. It is only then, in the words of Jill Bennett, 'that art does not represent what already occurred, but that art sets up conditions for relating to the event'.[27]

Notes

1. See for a discussion of how and why archival records are socially constructed and maintained entities, Ciaran Trace, 'What is Recorded is Never Simply "What Happened": Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture', *Archival Science* 2, no. 1 (2002), 137–59.

2. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.

3. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), xx.

4. Ibid., xxii.

5. Ibid.

6. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 191–92.

7. For clear descriptions of the history of archival science, see Fernanda Ribeiro, 'Archival Science and Changes in the Paradigm', *Archival Science* 1, no. 3 (2001), 295–310 and Hermann Rumschöttel, 'The Development of Archival Science as a Scholarly Discipline', *Archival Science* 1, no. 2 (2001), 143–55.

8. Manuel DeLanda, 'The Archive before and after Foucault', in *Information is Alive*, eds. Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder (Rotterdam: V2 Publishing and NAi publishers, 2003), 11.

9. Manuel DeLanda, 'The Archive before and after Foucault', 12.

10. In archives interfaces function as the critical nodes through which archivists enable and constrain the interpretation of the past. The interface is a site where power in the Foucauldian sense is negotiated and exercised. It is power exercised over documents and their representation, over the access to them and over the uses of archives. See for archival interfaces, Margaret Hedstrom, 'Archives, Memory, and Interfaces with the Past', *Archival Science* 2, no. 1 (2002), 21–43.

11. Santu Mofokeng, 'The Black Photo Album / Look at Me: 1890–1900', in *Chasing Shadows*, ed. C. Diserens (Munich: Haus der Kunst, 2011), 230.

12. Mark Westmoreland, 'You Cannot Partition Desire: Akram Zaatari's Creative Motivations', in *Akram Zaatari: El molesto asunto / The Uneasy Subject*, ed. Juan Vicente Aliaga (Mexico City: León, 2011), 43.

13. Ibid., 43.

14. Akram Zaatari, 'Interview', in *Indicated by Signs*, eds. Aleya Hamza and Edit Molnár (Bonn: Bonner Kunstverein, 2010), 120.

15. The complete contents of the archive are published in the following book: *The Atlas Group (1989–2004): A Project by Walid Raad* (Köln: Walther König, 2006).

16. Quoted in Gunilla Knape, 'Afterword', in *Walid Raad: I Might Die before I Get a Rifle* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011), 99.

17. Hélène Chouteau-Matikan, 'War, There, Over There', in *Walid Raad: I Might Die Before I Get a Rifle*, 104.

18. Ibid., 105.

19. Ibid.

20. Benjamin Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's Atlas: The Anomic Archive', in *Atlas: The Reader* (London: Whitechapel, 2003), 109.

21. Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography', in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, translated and edited by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 58.

22. Ibid., 49.

23. Ibid., 50.

24. Ibid., 61.

25. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1.

26. Ibid., 18.

27. Jill Bennett, Lecture at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, 18 July 2005.

The Coming Together of Times

Jean-Luc Godard's Aesthetics of Contemporaneity
and the Remembering of the Holocaust

Jacob Lund

ABSTRACT This article reads Jean-Luc Godard's film essay *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–1998) as a contemporary artistic endeavour to resist the synchronising, standardising time of global capital, the pervasive uniformity of the global super-present, brought about by today's televisual and digital communications, which threatens to trivialise the different processes of memory and history, as well as art and culture in general. Taking its point of departure in Bernard Stiegler's observation that the final stage of capitalism is the control and synchronisation of "available brain time," the article argues that Godard's work opposes this control and synchronisation of our minds through an aesthetics of contemporaneity. The argument is based on the development of a theoretical framework that combines recent theories of contemporaneity with reflections on the politics of images. Focusing on the ways in which the Holocaust is remembered in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, the article deals with Godard's image-political creation of temporal contemporaneity through a montage of clips of old films and newsreels, photographs, stills, images of paintings, new footage, advertisements, music, sound and voice recordings, textual citation, narration and commentary.
KEYWORDS Jean-Luc Godard, Contemporaneity, Holocaust, Image-politics, Time-experience

Towards the end of his grand film essay *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Jean-Luc Godard declares himself an 'enemy of our times', an enemy of 'the totalitarianism of the present as applied mechanically every day more oppressive on a planetary scale', and of the 'faceless tyranny that effaces all faces for the systematic organization of the unified time of the moment. This global, abstract tyranny, which I try to oppose from my fleeting point of view'.[1] The aim of this article is to argue that *Histoire(s) du cinéma* can be seen as what Godard calls 'a thinking form' that tries to resist the synchronising, standardising time of global capital, the pervasive uniformity of the global super-present, brought about by today's televisual and digital communications, which threatens to trivialise the different processes of memory and history, as well as art and culture in general – instead of allowing for a contemporaneity of difference.[2] According to philosopher Bernard Stiegler, the final stage of capitalism is the control and synchronisation of what the former CEO of the major French TV channel TF1, Patrick le Lay, called 'available brain time':

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Our era is characterised by synchronisation. The programme industries attempt to synchronise the activities of everyone's consciousness; a control over the life of souls through marketing and television, which establishes the psycho-power characteristic of our time. [...] From now on wherever you go, you have the same modes of production and distribution. This globalisation comes at the price of a synchronisation of modes of life and thought. Today, this becoming is extended to all aspects of our lives and destroys the singularity of existence through consumerism, which liquidates life skills [*les savoir-vivre*].[3]

I will try to argue that Godard's work opposes this control and synchronisation of our minds through *an aesthetics of contemporaneity*, and will also consider how such an aesthetics of contemporaneity relates to the case of the memory of the murder of the European Jews during World War II.

As has been remarked by the philosopher Giorgio Agamben and others, one of the principal concerns of Godard's work is the constitutive link between history and cinema. Godard – following up upon the question, which was posed initially by fellow post-World War II filmmaker Guy Debord – addresses the historical task of cinema.[4] Therefore what interests me here is also related to the question of the image, history, and our relation to images, which has gained ever more importance since Guy Debord's classic analysis of the 'becoming-image' of capital that gave us the name of the society of the spectacle, where our very communicative nature, our language and images are separated in an autonomous sphere, and in which the entire social production has been falsified.[5] It seems, however, that our relationship to images is even more complex than it appeared to be in 1967. The spectacle is not merely separated and external to us, it is part of who we are, part of our consciousness, and it strongly influences the ways in which we experience the world, each other, and ourselves. Thus, the new forms of image production and image circulation in contemporary media culture, not least on the Internet, bring the issue of circulation, or what filmmaker and theorist Hito Steyerl terms 'circulationism', to the fore. Circulationism is connected not with the art of making images, but with the postproduction, launching, and acceleration of images – and with the public relations of images across social networks that both establish and tear apart 'communities loosely linked by shared attention deficit'.[6] How is it possible for contemporary artistic practice to critically react to this circulationism, the uniformed time of the global super-present, and its concomitant attention deficit? And how might something like the events to which we refer by the name of Shoah or the Holocaust still be actualised and remembered in our historical present?

I

Recent studies in the aesthetics of memory have been occupied with the changes in our conception of memory where we have substituted a model of recall – or what has been called the original plenitude and subsequent loss-model that sees memory as something which is fully formed in the past, and thus which is assumed to have been experienced once in its completeness, and as something that it is subsequently a matter of maintaining and keeping alive – by a more constructivist understanding of the work of memory.[7] The latter stresses – among other things – the fact that memory is always an act of the present. Our relations and images of the past are always conditioned by the present, and our point of departure is always the present, not the past in itself.

In the following I would like to turn my attention to the quality of this present, to the quality of *our* present, as I would claim that the present present is different from past presents – so the present from which *we* try to remember the Holocaust is different from the present from which our predecessors tried to remember it. It is different from Primo Levi's presents of 1946 and 1986, it is different from Anselm Kiefer's present of the 80s and maybe also from his presents of the 90s and 00s. I will do this through a reading of Godard's film.

A crucial difference is of course the difference between the living memory of the firsthand witnesses and the so-called postmemory of the second and subsequent generations, but I think that this generational change within Holocaust memory should also be seen in relation to a broader change of the temporal quality of the present if we want to understand Holocaust remembrance today.[8] Not least when the topic is Holocaust remembrance in contemporary art – and how the Holocaust might relate to our very understanding of the contemporary. In relation to memory, the temporality of the survivors is necessarily different from that of the postgenerations. As firsthand witnesses and thus as contemporaries with the historical events, the survivors occupy a different temporal register – which also has its own internal differences regarding gender, language, victim, perpetrator, bystander etc. Therefore contemporary art dealing with the aesthetics of memory in relation to the Holocaust needs to try to thematise or reflect this condition of contemporaneity between different temporal registers, their co-existence.

The change of the temporal quality of the present, I will argue, drawing upon philosopher Peter Osborne's and art historian Terry Smith's recent theories, has to do with the fact that the general condition of our everyday life and of artistic production today is one of contemporaneity,

where the urgent question of being with time, or being genuinely 'contemporary', is a matter of grasping a coexistence of different temporalities and various 'ways of being in relation to time'. Thus, in recent decades we have seen a worldwide shift from modernity and postmodernity to contemporaneity, perhaps most evident in the fact that 'contemporary art' has substituted 'modern art' as a descriptor of the art of our historical present. It should of course be noted here that the historical beginning of the present present is debatable: Did our – or perhaps more objectively *the* – present begin when WWII ended, with '68', the fall of the Berlin Wall, 9/11 or some other time? And what about the so-called Second and Third Worlds?

Thus, before turning to the question of the aesthetics of memory and discussing Jean-Luc Godard's video work *Histoire(s) du cinéma* as a contemporary artistic work of Holocaust memory, I would like to begin with some general reflections on the quality of *our* present understood as being defined by *contemporaneity*, that is, the coming together of different times, and the temporal complexity that follows from the coming together in the same cultural space of heterogeneous cultural clusters generated along different historical trajectories and in other localities. As an integral part of the shift from modernity and postmodernity to contemporaneity, cultures and art worlds have become global phenomena in the sense that they have become interconnected and contemporaneous with each other, forming global networks. As Peter Osborne and Terry Smith observe, the idea of contemporaneity as a *condition* is new, and Osborne stresses that:

> what seems distinctive and important about the changing temporal quality of the historical present over the last few decades is best expressed through the distinctive conceptual grammar of con-temporaneity, a coming together not simply 'in' time, but *of* times: we do not just live or exist together 'in time' with our contemporaries – as if time itself is indifferent to this existing together – but rather the present is increasingly characterised by a coming together of *different but equally 'present'* temporalities or 'times', a temporal unity in disjunction, or a *disjunctive unity of present times*.[9]

This global contemporaneity means that new communication technologies and social and mass media play a decisive role both in shaping the field of art and culture and in the ways in which art and culture themselves function and create meaning. The internet in particular has produced an extreme spatial and temporal compression, which alters the ways in which we experience places, events and time as everything happens as

if contemporaneously. This geopolitical condition of contemporaneity not least occasions negotiations of identity, subjectivity and community on a range of different levels as it becomes increasingly evident that our being is a networked and connective being – which also raises the important question of the praxis of memory on these contemporary conditions.

The shift from the modern to an era of contemporaneity is connected to the realisation that time is not an empty duration unaffected by the events that fill it, and that time itself has a history. Time is constructed, multiple and asymmetrical, neither homogeneous nor blank, and there are many different co-existing ways of being in time and belonging to it. Ernst Bloch referred to the alternative, unseen and according to the modern nation-state untimely pasts as the temporality of 'non-contemporaneous contemporaneities'.[10] As Osborne observes, the term 'contemporaneity' should not be seen as a simple periodising category, but rather as a designator of the changing temporal quality of the historical present, which is not simply a coming together *in* time, but *of* times. 'The contemporary' points to an awareness of what it is to be in the present whilst being attentive to the presence of other kinds of time. It designates a multi-chronicity and a thickening of the present in contemporary experience, an extension of the present beyond the immediate instant back and forward in time and across the globe. 'Contemporaneity', Terry Smith claims, 'consists precisely in the constant experience of radical disjunctures of perception, mismatching ways of seeing and valuing the same world, in the actual coincidence of asynchronous temporalities, in the jostling contingency of various cultural and social multiplicities, all thrown together in ways that highlight the fast-growing inequalities within and between them'.[11]

Thus, the idea of contemporaneity undermines the modern orientation towards a particular future and the concomitant understanding of history as a linear teleological development in time. As Osborne has argued, modernist art must be understood according to 'a temporal logic of negation [whereby] it makes its claim on the present, through its negation of past forms, in the name of a particular, qualitatively different future'.[12] The temporal logic of modernity is oriented towards a qualitatively different future and thus implies an idea of historical linearity. The all-encompassing history authorised by modernity claims to have unified a vast plurality – in particular in the 'imagined communities' of the nation-states – but, as historian Harry Harootunian has pointed out, this history 'is actually undermined by the special histories and coexisting mixed temporalities that have steadily resisted its assimilating ambition'.[13]

What we seem to be witnessing now is an extension of the present

with no orientation towards one particular all-encompassing future. As the editors of a recent issue of the *e-flux journal* remarks, 'The phase of contemporary art has [...] been characterized [...] as a reformatting of time into a perpetual present. The contemporary is the now that never ends, the art that circles itself at the tail end of history looking back on defunct ideologies, archiving and polishing them for a future that never arrives'.[14] One could argue, with Terry Smith, that we live in a time of unsettlement in which the modern sense that all societies were moving toward a better future has been irrevocably lost (Auschwitz made that very clear); and that we have come to realise that we are all living in a condition of permanent transition, facing uncertain, unclear futures. Our highly differentiated and multidirectional contemporaneity within this shared uncertainty is what makes us no longer modern. Contemporaneousness is 'the pregnant present of the original meaning of *modern*, but without its subsequent contract with the future'.[15] Contemporaneity, Smith remarks, includes within it many revived pasts and wished-for futures that are all being lived out as live present. They are all possible, and, as distinct from the modern era, there is no overriding narrative to decide which is which – a world-picturing that thereby also runs the risk of becoming too permissible in its affirmation of pluralism.

This global or planetary uncertainty about the future (and having entered the so-called anthropocene the uncertainty includes the planet itself) is one of the main reasons for the recent upsurge in memory and memory culture. Historian Pierre Nora speaks of 'the age of commemoration', which he sees as intersecting with two major historical phenomena: a temporal 'acceleration of history' and a social 'democratization of history'.[16] The democratization of history is related to the marked emancipatory trend 'of all those forms of memory bound up with minority groups for whom rehabilitating their past is part and parcel of reaffirming their identity'.[17] The acceleration of history, which is the most important notion in our context, signals that the most continuous or permanent feature of the contemporary world is no longer continuity or permanence but change, which is an increasingly rapid change, 'an accelerated precipitation of all things into an ever more swiftly retreating past'.[18] A condition of permanent transition, as Smith calls it. This development has broken the unity of historical time, whose straightforward linearity traditionally bound the present and the future to the past. In the past it was a particular image or idea of the future that determined what different communities needed to remember of the past to prepare that imagined future. The imagined future gave meaning to the present,

which was merely a link between the past and that future, which could either take the shape of a restoration of the past, the shape of progress, or of revolution. Today we are uncertain as to which shape the future will take and we no longer use such interpretations of the past to organise history to the same degree. Because of this uncertainty about the future and our inability to anticipate it – and thus to anticipate what coming generations need to know about us in order to understand their own lives – the present puts us under an obligation to remember any phenomenon, trace or sign that might be significant. 'In other words, it is the end of any kind of teleology of history – the end of a history whose end is known – that places on the present this urgent 'duty to remember' [...] that is so much talked about', Nora remarks.[19] The historical and temporal continuity of modernity has been broken and the present no longer just functions like a bridge between the past and the future. The present has emerged as an autonomous category for understanding our own lives – which is why memory, as an act of the present, a re-presentation belonging to the present, has become so important.

The intensified global temporal and cultural interconnectivity and the changing perceptions of time and space also affect the status and memories of the events to which we refer by the name of the Holocaust. As cultural critic Andreas Huyssen observes,

> memory of the Holocaust as image reservoir, cipher of ultimate suffering, and model for working through the past [has] migrated into other historical contexts: Latin America after the military dictatorships, South Africa after apartheid, and Asia in relation to past and present-day instances of massive violence such as the Indian partition, the Korean comfort women, and the recent Hindu pogroms on Muslims in India. Today, the history of the violent twentieth century is being commemorated in very diverse artistic works across the globe.[20]

The idea of contemporaneity as an intensified global interconnectedness of different times is therefore inseparable from the circulation of images and the role of images in the global spectacle. The world is becoming 'uniformed' or 'common' not least because of the global circulation of images.

On the background of this general diagnosis of the historical present from which we remember the Holocaust as being defined by contemporaneity – understood as the coming together of different times, which at the same time are subjected to synchronisation and standardisation, I will now return to Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinemá* as a work of Holocaust memory.

II

In continuation of Osborne's observation: 'To claim something is contemporary is to make a claim for its *significance in participating in the actuality of the present*',[21] we might ask how the Holocaust may be said to be made contemporary in Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*? How does the temporality of the Holocaust appear as active in the historical present? How does the time of the Holocaust come together with other times in the present contemporaneity?

Histoire(s) du cinéma is a 264-minute video essay on the history or histories of cinema and its relation to the 20th century, which was completed in 1998 – making it still somewhat contemporary also in a more quotidian sense: Godard may be said to have had an intuition of the changes in our current experience of time. It consists of four chapters, each one divided into two parts, making for a total of eight episodes, and originates from an experimental series of improvised talks and lectures Godard gave at the Montreal Film School in the late 70s. Rather than delivering traditional lectures, Godard proposed a form of historical cinematic montage where he showed one of his own films along with clips from a range of other films as a basis for reflections on cinema history and his own place within it.[22] The opening two long episodes were eventually broadcast on French television in 1988 and 1989, and the subsequent six episodes were screened at festivals and museums in 1997 and 1998. In 1998 the work was released as a complete and re-edited whole on VHS, and in 2008 it became available on DVD. Made for TV and later VHS and DVD, the work is meant to be seen in the everyday environment of the viewer: on her TV or computer where she encounters or is bombarded with a dizzying number of images every day – where her brain is made available by the programme industries, according to Stiegler.

The video essay weaves together clips of old films and newsreels, photographs, stills, images of paintings, new footage, advertisements, music, sound and voice recordings, textual citation, narration and commentary, primarily by Godard himself, but also by the actors Juliette Binoche and Julie Delpy, and writers like André Malraux, Ezra Pound and Paul Celan. Every now and then we also see Godard at his desk with his books and his typewriter, smoking a cigar while orchestrating it all. In an experimental form which abandons the linear development of narrative cinema in favour of a kind of contemporaneity, as I will argue in the following, the work layers, superimposes, and juxtaposes all the filmic, musical, textual, voice-over, and art historical citations on top of

each other, dealing with a number of different subjects ranging from film and politics to globalisation, memory, genocide, art and God.[23]

The work is characterised by an emphatic use of iconic images from mostly the liberation of the concentration camps and the cinematic representation of the Holocaust. Speaking of cinema as a fallen medium, Godard remarks 'the fact of the concentration camp, that it was not shown [by cinema], it wasn't answered'.[24] In fact, it was of course recorded on film – apart from George Stevens, to whom I shall return, e.g. by Samuel Fuller and Alfred Hitchcock – but it was not *shown* by cinema in Godard's understanding. Thus, a recurring accusation in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* concerns the failure of cinema to fulfil its duty to be 'present' at the Nazi death camps, and he famously claims 'cinema did not manage to fulfill its role':

> Naïvely, it was thought that the New Wave would be a beginning, a revolution. Well, it was already too late. Everything was over. It ended the moment the concentration camps were not filmed. At that very instant, the cinema totally failed in its duty. Six million people were killed or gassed, principally Jews, and the cinema was not there. Yet, from *The Great Dictator* to *La règle du jeu*, it had announced the entire drama. By not filming the concentration camps, cinema gave up completely. It is like the parable of the good servant who died from not having been used. Cinema is a means of expression in which the expression has disappeared. It has remained the means.[25]

'Forgetting extermination is part of extermination', as he says in Chapter 1A, and the video-essay is to a large extent an endeavour to think critically about the images, writings, histories and the lack thereof that have reflected and commemorated the Holocaust.[26] Abandoning traditional narrativity, he explores cinema as a way of rethinking time, memory and history when fractured by atrocity.

Godard's history writing is based on a plural concept of history that also reflects the condition of contemporaneity. The unified big history is unachievable, but all the innumerable potential histories contained in it are not. They are all possible histories that do not pretend to be the only possible one, but merely possible.[27] The parenthetical 's' in the title *Histoire(s) du cinéma* indicates in itself the contemporaneity of a number of different histories: there is no *one* history – and there is also a double-meaning of the s in the sense of the histories of cinema as well as *its* histories, that is, history through or *as* cinema. Furthermore, the title of Chapter 1A, 'Toutes les histoires' (All the Stories), suggests not only that history, like public memory, is constituted by multiple histories

from a variety of competing perspectives, but also that history must include all perspectives and voices, including the voices of Hitler, Himmler and a number of other perpetrators.[28] I therefore understand philosopher Jacques Rancière to a certain extent when he criticises Godard for linking heterogeneous elements into a homogeneous layer of mystery, 'where all yesterday's conflicts become expressions of intense co-presence', and for 'constructing the world of "images" as a world of general co-belonging and inter-expression'.[29] I would argue, however, that this co-presence is not to be deplored, but to be appreciated as a possible actualisation of different temporalities and pasts, and of different relations to these temporalities and pasts. By juxtaposing documentary footage, photographic evidence next to fiction film – also including pornographic movies, popular songs, propaganda, recorded voices and testimony – and by mixing texts, soundtracks, music and double exposures, by not hesitating to mount the historical archive with the artistic repertory of global cinema, the assemblages of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* invite us to reflect upon how to distinguish 'a just image' (*une image juste*) from 'just an image' (*juste une image*) of different pasts, not least of the Holocaust.

III

One of the references to the filmic representation of the Holocaust is the use of two clips from Claude Lanzmann's nine-hour documentary *Shoah* from 1985. In accordance with the author of *The Postmodern Condition*, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's claim that the Holocaust defies images and cannot be represented without slipping away, Lanzmann's film rejects representation in images and music in favour of the unfolding of the memories of the survivors and witnesses in the present. Thus, all archival images are banned and the sublime art of the unpresentable is the only art adequate and ethically proper to the Holocaust.[30]

The first citation of *Shoah* is the monumental image of the railway tracks leading to Auschwitz, which is also a citation of Alain Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*) from 1955. The image signifies all that cannot be seen: the millions of victims that Lanzmann's survivors give testimony to, and the destruction of evidence of the genocide, of which the image has become an icon. The second citation of *Shoah* is the recycling, in extreme slow motion, of the image of Henryk Gawkowski – a retired Polish train driver hired by Lanzmann to drive a locomotive to Treblinka – leaning out of the locomotive making a gesture by drawing his finger across his throat to symbolise the immanent death of the passengers who were to arrive in Treblinka. Godard dissolves Lan-

zmann's ban on images by installing the very image used to advertise the film *Shoah* into a sequence of archival images, which were the very ones Lanzmann refused to show. He emphasises the ambiguity of Gawbowski's gesture between an image of the past, a reanimation of the past and a reenactment of the past even more strongly by mounting the image from *Shoah* between two iconic photographs of the Holocaust and two movie clips of Hitler. The first photograph that enframes the image from *Shoah* is taken from the liberation of Bergen-Belsen and shows survivors waiting for their ration of soup. The second photograph shows a line of naked women holding on to their infants before being murdered by the Einsatzgruppen – taken either during the massacre of the Jewish population of Kiev in September 1941, or during the massacre of the Jews from the Mizocz Ghetto, then in Poland, today in Ukraine, in October 1942.[31]

Through the montage of Lanzmann's film, photographs, and movie clips of Hitler Godard implies that the ban on images imposed by Lanzmann and Lyotard among others in the 1980s is no longer an adequate way of representing and actualising the Holocaust. The ethics of silence and the sublime aesthetics of the unpresentable, which was an important contribution to the debates on the representation of the Holocaust at that point in time, cannot stand alone any longer. Today, if we do not actualise the images that do exist in spite of all – to use the title of a seminal book by art historian Georges Didi-Huberman – the generations born afterwards run the risk of losing sight of the actual historical events and of not being able to imagine what it is that cannot be represented and put into words, music and images.

There is thus an important temporal-historical dimension of the difference between the history writing and Holocaust memory work of Lanzmann and Godard. The present of the 1980s is different from the present present because of the time distance to the events and the dying out of a living memory of them, but also because of the changing status of the Holocaust, which has migrated into other historical contexts and has been supplemented by a number of other genocides and war atrocities, adding a greater complexity to what might be called the prehistories of the present. For instance, this situation is depicted in a sequence in chapter 3A where images of the Holocaust are mounted with images of the Vietnam, Bosnian and Gulf wars, while elsewhere images of the Rwandan genocide appear.

One of the most widely discussed sequences in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* occurs in the last minutes of chapter 1A, when Godard declares: 'and if George Stevens hadn't used the first 16 millimetre colour film at Ausch-

witz and Ravensbrück, Elizabeth Taylor would never have found a place in the sun'. The fragment involves the superimposition within a single frame of Stevens's images of Holocaust victims, a stop-started sequence from Stevens's film *A Place in the Sun* (1951) with a swimsuit-clad Elizabeth Taylor, and Mary Magdalene from Giotto's *Noli me tangere* (1304–6). Giotto's painting is tilted ninety degrees so it looks as if Mary Magdalene is descending like an angel to draw Elisabeth Taylor up towards the heavens. Godard's voice accompanies two images from Goya's *Disasters of War* series of etchings (1810–20) and pauses before the line about Elizabeth Taylor's happiness. During the pause the screen fades to black, and a colour image of bodies of Holocaust victims piled in railway wagons at Dachau appears out of the darkness, while gradually the black and white image of Taylor caressing the head of Montgomery Clift in *A Place in the Sun* is superimposed over the colour image of the Holocaust victims. The head of one of the victims seems to rest on her arm close to her chest along with that of Clift's. The colours bleed into the image of Taylor as Clift's image disappears. Rather than suggesting a replacement of the figure of the victim for Clift or vice versa, this fading in and out offers a shocking contrast to this same image.[32] Commenting upon the historical connection between the two recordings in 1988, Godard explained: '[W]hen I learned that Stevens had filmed the camps and that for the occasion Kodak had lent him the first rolls of 16-millimeter color film, I couldn't figure out how he was then able to make the great shot of Elizabeth Taylor radiating a kind of somber happiness'.[33]

Still from Jean-Luc Godard, *Historie(s) du cinéma* (*1988–1998*), Chapter 1A.

In this way Godard uses montage – what he calls 'mon beau souci', my beautiful care – as a technique for articulating the past. According to Godard, only montage can produce historical connections because history is always a matter of juxtaposing one thing with another. Time-based audio-visual media like film and video thus produce specific modes of historical articulations through techniques of movement, decomposition and superimposition of images.[34] By incorporating both moving and still images, Godard creates a complex assemblage of perspectives from different temporal strata. Painting and photography in particular are often perceived as a slice of time, suspended time, or time at a standstill, while film, as a time-image, is linked to a temporality that endures, to a time that reproduces the flow of 'real time'. By basing his video essay on photographs, paintings and film, Godard blurs these apparently opposite time economies for the benefit of a contemporaneity of multiple, heterogeneous temporalities that compete with and overlap each other, suggesting a notion of a fractured, layered, multiple temporality.[35]

IV

As in other works and texts, Godard draws upon Walter Benjamin's critique of the historicist conception of time only in the abstract form of an 'empty, homogeneous continuum' that the historian only needs to fill with a succession of facts, thereby producing a 'history of events'. The problem with this abstract notion of time and the historicist notion of history as a linear development is that once time is divided into a chronological series of instants, any moment in the past becomes unreachable as it is irrevocably severed from the present by an infinite number of instants.[36] It becomes a dead object of knowledge, something that can be accumulated without end, but which will never form what Benjamin calls the 'true picture of the past'. 'The true picture of the past flits by', Benjamin writes in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History':

> The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. [...] For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.[37]

Godard's artistic practice in *Histoire(s)* is defined by montage as the bringing together for the first time of elements that are not predisposed to be linked. It creates singular images by connecting well known but previ-

ously unconnected elements and images. Godard thus uses montage as an experimental method for the production of historical intelligibility, and to construct what Benjamin called 'the image in the now of its recognizability'. As Benjamin writes in one of the notes for his *Arcades Project*:

> Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each 'now' is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time. [...] It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather image is that wherein *what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation*. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural ‹*bildlich*›. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical [...]. The image that is read [is] the image in the now of its recognizability.[38]

Historical knowledge only comes about through the 'now', that is, through a state of our present experience from which emerges, from amongst the immense archive of texts, images and testimonies of the past, a moment of memory and readability.[39] According to Benjamin, this critical moment appears as an *image*: a dialectical image in which 'what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation', i.e. a coming together of times, a contemporaneity of past and present.

By speaking of the image that is read and recognised, Benjamin – whose thinking on history and memory, at a pre-globalised time, obviously has paved the way for the understanding of the idea of contemporaneity that I am trying to outline here – points not only to the formal aspects of the image, but also to the time of its reading and recognition, that is, to the recognising spectator. This understanding of the image as something that develops out of the spectator's relation with the image is also made explicit in Godard's own comments on his artistic practice of montage: 'But an image doesn't exist. This is not an image, it's a picture. The image is the relation with me looking at it dreaming up a relation at someone else [*sic*]. An image is an association'.[40] The spectator so to speak animates the image. The montage and interruptions that allow the true picture of the past to flash up for an instant before it disappears irretrievably are a spacing of time and an opening in which memory can emerge. According to Godard's conception of the image, images only exist in the plural. Without reducing their differences or provoking a fusion between them, it appears in the intermediate space between two images, which can either be located in the many instances of black screens, or in the

intervals of the superimpositions where two images are co-present on the screen; in the difference between them. Godard comments: 'The basis is usually two, always to present from the start two images rather than one, that is what I call image, the one made of two'.[41] In this way the montage appears as a spatialising narrative into which the spectator can 'enter' – a spatialisation of time in which the time-connections are *felt* or *sensed*. With reference to the recurring sentence 'une forme qui pense', 'a form that thinks', the montage can be regarded as an epistemological and dramaturgical space in which various kinds of temporality may be produced or shown to coexist.[42]

It is thus not only about the time of the images. Godard *shows* us these images and movie clips. They are addressed to us as viewers, which means that *our* time, our present, is being involved – our historical present of the year 2015 as well as our 'phenomenological present' for the duration of our watching and listening to the film, four and a half hours. This adds another dimension to the time structure of the work, especially when we are concerned with memory too, and not only with detached historical material. The temporality of the viewer, who – to use the vocabulary of reception aesthetics – concretises the artefact of the video essay and gives it an individual form, plays an active part in the constellation of the dialectical image.

The montage is a production of historical knowledge. However, in the case of *Histoire(s)* this does not imply a knowledge production where the work of the spectator is controlled. The potential readings and recognitions of Godard's complex montage images are almost infinite, and the product of their combination cannot be predicted as it only appears in the here and now of each particular vision, that is, in each concretisation of the visual artefact, which each time gives it an individual form. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* demonstrates that memory is something that has to be made, not just received. It testifies to the fact that memory is an activity, a praxis, involving the spectator in the actualisation of different temporalities.

Godard's fleeting point of view and a-chronological movements through time and space bring together things and times 'that have not been brought together before, and do not seem disposed to be brought together at all', as the title cards reads in chapter 4B, *Les signes parmi nous*, thereby reconfiguring the material and media through which we remember the Holocaust in hitherto unseen images that come to participate in the actuality of our present. In this sense he is a true contemporary according to Giorgio Agamben's different – because personalised rather than historical – understanding of the contemporary as a person who, among other things, is 'the

one who, dividing and interpolating time, is capable of transforming it and putting it in relation with other times'.[43] *Histoire(s)* exhibits the globally circulating images of our everyday, including the images of Dachau, the Warsaw ghetto etc., while establishing a relation to these images and making the co-existence of their different temporalities, their contemporaneity in the historical present, *felt* – it is an *aesthetics of contemporaneity* in opposition to 'the systematic organization of the unified time of the moment. This global, abstract tyranny'.

Notes

1. Jean-Luc Godard, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* [1998], DVD (Paris: Gaumont, 2008), Chapter 4B.

2. Cf. James S. Williams, 'Histoire(s) du cinéma', *Film Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (Spring 2008), 10–16: 16.

3. Bernard Stiegler, 'Dans la vacance, on cherche à retrouver la consistance dans son existence', *philosophie magazine* no. 21 (2008),
http://www.philomag.com/les-idees/bernard-stiegler-dans-la-vacance-on-cher-che-a-retrouver-la-consistance-dans-son-existence

4. Giorgio Agamben, 'Cinema and History: On Jean-Luc Godard', trans. John V. Garner and Colin Williamson, in *Cinema and Agamben*, eds. Henrik Gustafsson and Asbjørn Grønstad (New York and London: Bloombury: 2014), 25–26: 25.

5. Cf. Giorgio Agamben, 'Marginal Notes on *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*', in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 73–90: 76.

6. Hito Steyerl, 'Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?' in *e-flux journal #49* (November 2013), 1–10: 7, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/

7. Cf. Ann Rigney, 'Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory', *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005), 11–28.

8. For an analysis of changes within Holocaust memory, see Jacob Lund, 'Acts of Remembering in the Work of Esther Shalev-Gerz – From Embodied to Mediated Memory', in *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era*, eds. Diana I. Popescu and Tanja Schult (Houndsmill, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 28–43.

9. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), 17.

10. Ernst Bloch, *The Heritage of Our Times* [1935], trans. Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge: Polity, 1991),

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31. Cf. Ravetto-Biagioli, 465 and 482, note 36.

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33. Jean-Luc Godard, '*Histoire(s) du cinéma*: Godard fait des histoires. Entretien avec Serge Daney' (1988), in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, II: 1984–1998, 172, quoted from Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 147.

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42. Cf. Terry Smith's description of contemporary exhibition curating, in *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012), 29–31.

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Defining Contemporaneity:
Imagining Planetarity

Terry Smith

ABSTRACT If the contemporaneity of difference seems the most striking characteristic of contemporary life today, its conceptual structure continues to elude definition. The same lack of clarity attends a frequently evoked parameter for the most desired resolution of such volatile differences: a cohesive, consensual world picturing, sometimes named "planetarity." My overall project is a close examination of these two concepts, aimed at finding productive connections between them. Previous attempts to think them, from the confessions of St Augustine to the New York Times columns of Thomas Friedman, reveal a plethora of illuminating insights, but the overall record reveals that both concepts remain inadequately imagined for current circumstances. Temporality and world-being seems to constellate around these concepts: contemporaneity, history, decoloniality, connectivity, artworlds, and planetarity. How might the contemporaneity of difference and the embattled yet emergent planetary commons be imagined in terms appropriate to present need –that is, as contemporaneous, differential and convergent? While this question is obviously of the broadest relevance, my specific goal within the history and theory of art and architecture is to articulate the conceptual structure underlying my recent accounts of the relationships between contemporary art and architecture and contemporary life.

KEYWORDS Contemporaneity, History, Decoloniality, Connectivity, Artworlds, Planetarity

What does it mean to think contemporaneity today, and to think contemporary art's relation to it? I begin from the concept of contemporaneity itself, which I will define, for the moment, as follows: the multiplicity of ways of being in time, at the same time as others, right now, but also at earlier and future times, in ways that open us to other, non-modern temporalities (including Indigenous knowing), and to other kinds of time. This possibility has been present since the first sentient making of distinctions of any kind. Sustained reflection upon it appears in St Augustine's *Confessions*, written in 398 CE and still resonant in current thinking about the structure of time, as a kind of default position: that is, humans best conceive past, present and future times as if they were present to them, in contrast to the eternality available to God, and the saintly. But let us begin to profile *modern* conceptions through a text dated June 25, 1820, written in Berlin by Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, the preface to his *The Philosophy of Right*, in which the famous owl metaphor occurs.

WORLDS-WITHIN-THE-WORLD: PLANOMENA
Earth, planet, natural histories, evolution, information
Sentient interiority (human, animal, thingly, machinic?)
Societies, social relations, local economies, nation states, cultures
Geopolitics and economics, international arrangements, ngos, civilizations

These are the irreducible *arenas* or *fields* of world being, perhaps the essential ones. They are arrayed, temporally, from the origins to the present. Each of them is distinctive, materially and conceptually, but they are also tied together, historically and pragmatically. Indeed, it may be the case that all worldy experience occurs and becomes visible on one or more of these planes, and all thinking is thinking about the nature of these planes, the relationships between the elements upon them, and their relationships to each other. What connects these planes, how were are they formed, how do they change over time, and do they interact with each other?

I was inspired to this proposal partly in reaction against the brutally simplistic modeling advanced during the 1990s by theorists of globalization and government such as Samuel P. Huntington and Joseph Nye Jr.[26] Nye suggests that we envisage the distribution of power throughout the world as a chess game played on multiple boards at once, in which actors moving pieces on one board (say, the geopolitical) impact on another (say, the cultural). He urges that, if the United States is to retain its preeminence it must act in awareness of the effects of power across all relevant domains, and do in a planned way, within frameworks of conscious policy (thus his concept of "soft power," avidly adopted as a tool of foreign policy by governments around the world today, not least the Chinese government). Being actually more concerned with coercive power, having forgotten their Foucault, and being unconcerned about climate change, both Nye and Huntington pay little attention to interiority and the planetary. They persist with the top-down "visuality" that Nicholas Mirzoeff traces as having competed with, and mostly dominated, a more democratic "right to look" since the seventeenth century.[27]

Let me complicate this strata-title approach with some suggestions as to the kinds of relationship that are commonly held to *connect* these planes. They will be a little more subtle, I hope, or at least less fictive, than the TRiD Chess regularly played by Captain Kirk and Commander Spock on *Star Trek* during the 1970s. I indicate only some of the most prominent *forms* that these relationships take, through the names that these relationships have attracted. I will do so in two steps, first by adding to the planes what I call *states of becoming*.

> To apprehend what is is the task of philosophy, because what is is reason. As for the individual, every one is a son of his time; so philosophy is also its time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as foolish to fancy that any philosophy can transcend its present world as that an individual could leap out of his time or jump over Rhodes.

He denies that this restricts us to "the particular and the contingent," that is, to presentism. Instead, he claims that "subjective freedom" – the goal of living – may be found only while remaining "present in substantive reality." He concludes with the famous metaphor: "Only one more word concerning the desire to teach the world what it ought to be: for such a purpose, philosophy at least always comes too late. Philosophy, as the thought of the world, does not appear until reality has completed its formative process, and made itself ready … When philosophy paints its grey in grey, one form of life has become old, and by means of grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known. The owl of Minerva takes flight only when the shades of night are gathering."[1]

From a technical, or territorial, point of view, this is a warning about what happens when ontology takes itself to be deontology. More broadly, it is a reminder that the world itself has primacy in the production of thought, and that every philosopher is a messenger who fades to black upon delivery. Hegel may have wished to strike a metaphor opposite to that of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. So, if we were to seek visualizations of his metaphor, they would not be the implied narrative of being guided to the light shown in Jan Sanraedam's etching of 1604 (British Museum). Rather, they would be closer to the contrast between the use of *grisaille* compared to full color that was typical for academic painters in Hegel's time, as we would see if we were to compare the *Odalisque* painted by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres 1814 (Louvre) and the *grisaille* version made by him and students a decade or so later (Metropolitan Museum). An exact demonstration of Hegel's point about what happens when you paint grey on grey: to put it bluntly, you get knowledge but not life.

Most philosophers of consequence have used visual metaphors to make vivid the experience of what it is (like) to come to know the world's significance, and we can trace an uneven but gradually increasing compression of metaphor into actuality as we approach the present. Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* is, among other things, one account of this development in Western thought.[2] It is a topic in Peter Osborne's *The Politics of Time: Modernity and the Avant-Garde*.[3] But our goal today is to try to highlight what is most compelling, and most critical, in contemporary

thinking about contemporaneity, so let me leap to the present in four or five quick steps.

Søren Kierkegaard opens his 1846 polemic *The Present Age* with these words:

> Our age is essentially one of understanding and reflection, without passion, occasionally bursting into enthusiasm, and shrewdly relapsing into repose.[4]

He goes on to detail everything he hates about the institutionalized mediocrity and the "leveling" orthodoxies of his time. For him, the contrast is always with the compelling call to a quite different relationship to time, that is, to fully occupy The Instant, as he named the broadsheet to which he devoted the last months of his life, and in which he reiterates his belief in the kind of "sametimeness" that is to be most desired: contemporaneity with Christ.[5]

Walter Benjamin reflected on this topic constantly – most famously his last text, the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), in its opening passage about Paul Klee's watercolor *Angelus Novus* (1920) which he owned for a few years. Another painting, *Crashing Bird* (1919), also shown at the exhibit from which Benjamin bought the painting, suggests that Klee's focus was the impact of World War I, rather than Benjamin's interpretation of the angel being the dismayed at "storm blowing in from paradise" that we know as progress. I will cite a statement about the dialectical image from the "N" folder of *The Arcades Project*, on which Benjamin worked during the later 1930s.

> Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronous with it: each "now" is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time... It is not that which is past that casts its light on what is present, or what is present that casts its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical – that is, not archaic – images. The image that is read – which is to say, the image in the now of its recognizability – bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded.[6]

The dialectic in operation here is not a process that synthesizes opposites as an absolute historical process, but a revelatory event, one that brings Hegel's knowing and rejuvenation together in a conjunction that

is experienced as a radical rupturing. Jacques Derrida was among those who have noticed this. In the midst of his most intense discussion of the concept of *différance* in *Margins of Philosophy* he argues that:

> The structure of delay (*Nachträglichkeit*) in effect forbids that one make of temporalization (temporization) a simple dialectical complication of the living present as an originary and unceasing synthesis – a synthesis constantly directed back on itself, gathered in on itself and gathering – of relational traces and protentional openings. The alterity of the "unconscious" makes us concerned not with horizons of modified – past or future – presents, but with a "past" that has never been present, and which never will be, whose future to come will never be a *production* or reproduction in the form of presence.[7]

Which leads him to not only reconstrue – actually deconstruct – Hegel as a speculative philosopher, but also to reformulate Benjamin's metaphor in a way that retains its eruptive character but loses the presumption that the dialectic is foundational. Thus, in the "Exergue" to *Of Grammatology*, he writes:

> The future can only be anticipated in the form of absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and this can announce itself, present itself, only under the species of monstrosity. For this world to come and what in it will have shaken the values of the sign, of speech, and of writing, for what is guiding here our future anterior, there is no exergue as yet.[8]

The so-called later Derrida devoted himself to writing this very "exergue," but he had little to say directly in his published writings about contemporaneity as such. He was, however, directly influential on my posing "the contemporaneity question" to a group of scholars, theorists, artists, critics, and curators, meeting exactly ten years ago, in early November 2004, in Pittsburgh on the occasion of the 54th Carnegie International Exhibition. The question was posed in this form:

> *In the aftermath of modernity, and the passing of the postmodern, how are we to know and show what it is to live in the conditions of contemporaneity?*[9]

Like all such deliberately loaded interrogations, it carried a plethora of presumptions as to why it was being posed, about its acuity in having identified a problematic, and about the kinds of implied answer it would admit. Our preface was explicit about the purport of the question, and where it was heading:

This is a question about individual being and social belonging now, about how the relationships between them might be understood these days, and how they might be represented to others – in speech, in texts, in works of art, and in exhibitions. The editors of this book begin from the intuition that, when it comes to offering acute accounts of these relationships – in brief, of large-scale world-picturing and small scale world making – the time of postmodern doubt about modernity may appear to have run out. Does this mean that the kinds of large-scale world making and the various projects of totalization associated with modernity have returned to dominance, albeit in multiple, contingent and contradictory forms? Or does it mean that the world has entered a condition in which overarching frameworks, however internally differentiated and skeptical, have lost their power to shape the far reaches of thought and thus their purchase on the particularities of everyday life? This would leave us naked to the present. If so, it is a contemporaneity that is riddled with as much wary doubt as it is infused with watchful hope, that seems immured in utopian appeals to the futurity of various pasts, including that of modernity, yet everywhere and always poses itself to itself as a pressing question.[10]

The speakers at the conference, from Fredric Jameson and Antonio Negri through Rosalind Krauss and Geeta Kapur to McKenzie Wark and Nikos Papastergiadis, explored this question from a variety of perspectives. In my introduction, I drew on the layered complexity of meanings inherent in the word "contemporary" and their changes of priority over time, notably their displacement of the set of meanings associated with the word "modern," which now lingers as a subset within our contemporaneity. The core claim has been often cited:

If we were to generalize this quality (of course, against its grain) as a key to world picturing, we would see its constituent features manifest there, to the virtual exclusion of other explanations. We would see, then, that *contemporaneity consists precisely in the acceleration, ubiquity and constancy of radical disjunctures of perception, of mismatching ways of seeing and valuing the same world, in the actual coincidence of asynchronous temporalities, in the jostling contingency of various cultural and social multiplicities, all thrown together in ways that highlight the fast-growing inequalities within and between them.* This certainly looks like the world as it is now. No longer does it feel like "our time," because "our" cannot stretch to encompass its contrariness. Nor, indeed, is it "a time," because if the modern was inclined above all to define itself as a period, and sort the past into periods, in contemporary conditions periodization is impossible. The only potentially permanent thing about this state of affairs is that it may last for an unspecifiable amount of time: the present may

become, perversely, "eternal." Not, however, in a state of wrought transfigura-
tion, as Baudelaire had hoped, but as a kind of incessant incipience, of the kind
theorized by Jacques Derrida as *à venir* – perpetual advent, that which is, while
impossible to foresee or predict, always to come.[11]

A similar set of interrogations and insights inform Jacques Rancière's
collection of essays, *Chronicles of Consensual Times*, written between
1997 and 2005, but they are not developed into a broader theory, or even
speculation, about "the times" – rather, they counter its efforts to secure
hegemonic closure through a fake consensuality.[12]

Likewise, Giorgio Agamben, in his 2007 seminar at the European
Graduate School, asked "What does it mean to be contemporary?" He
sought to articulate "contemporariness" as it is experienced by those
who are most capable of understanding its true nature – a truth found
precisely in that experience, in the grasping of its inner registers. He
posed, mostly via metaphor, one paradox after another to demonstrate
the shadow play that comes into being whenever "the contemporary" is
subject to analysis. Although seeking to explicate a state of being that
has special relevance to our present times, he did not do so (as I attempt
to do) by showing how this state, however universal or preexistent as-
pects of it may be, has qualities that are characteristic of current con-
ditions, understood as a general or widely shared situation. Rather, he
sketched how "contemporariness" is experienced – at its most profound,
ontological register – by philosophers, poets and others. He took his ex-
amples from across the span of modern thinking about such matters,
from Nietzsche to contemporary astrophysics. Friedrich Nietzsche's *Un-
timely Meditations* (1873–76) – above all his passionate insistence that
overweening respect for the determinative power of History had reduced
his contemporaries to servile subjects, incapable of making their own
lives, let alone future history – is cited as a prime example of the appar-
ently paradoxical proposition that those who are "truly contemporary,
truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with
it nor adjust themselves to its demands." On the contrary, Agamben in-
sists, "Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's time,
which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it."[13] This
is a replay of Baudelaire's conception of *modernité*, and is inadequate to
the contemporary situation.

Yet it is precisely this buried familiarity, to say nothing of its simple,
circular ambiguity that has made Agamben's "definition" (actually, it has
the form of a postmodern de-definition) so attractive to contemporary

artworld discourse, which is congenitally devoted to immersion in its own hall of mirrors. Tim Griffin, ex-editor of *Artforum*, noted this with some acuity:

> Among the more puzzling preoccupations of dialogues around art during the past five years has been "the contemporary," a seemingly self-evident description that, to date, has operated largely in reverse – that has been put forward, in other words, as a meaningful denomination and subject of inquiry in advance of any actual, deductive relationship to the surrounding world. The hope, it would seem, is that the term employed by itself and evocatively will help tease out some general understanding of the conditions for art making and its reception today. Yet, unlikely as this might seem, the impulse is easy enough to fathom: artists, art historians, curators, and critics alike wish to find historical trajectories in art today where none immediately announce themselves; a disorienting air of atemporality prevails instead. Indeed, the imperative for historical precedence or distinction becomes only more urgent in light of the speculative obsessions with the "new" in a radically expanded art system whose borders have become so porous as to erode the very ideation of art. If there is a substantive sense of "the contemporary" to be employed here, it is likely to be the "out-of-jointness" that philosopher Giorgio Agamben ascribed to the term: Something is contemporary when it occupies time disjunctively, seeming always at once "too soon" or "too late," or, more accurately in terms of art now, seeming to contain the seeds of its own anachronism.[14]

In the face of such pervasive mindlessness, I am delighted that Peter Osborne has joined in a quest to think the nature of our present contemporaneity, and to identify certain kinds of contemporary art practice and thought as central to our understanding of it. There is no doubt that his *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* is a landmark book in thinking the relations between contemporaneity and contemporary art. From my perspective, however, rather than amounting to an overall "philosophy of contemporary art," his account offers a theoretical grounding for art produced within a significant sub-current of one of the three main currents that I identify in my approach to art made in the conditions of contemporaneity – namely, the tendency within the first current, within EuroAmerican Contemporary Art, that I have dubbed "Remodernism." That is, the on-going (and market-dominating) recursive renovations of artistic media – especially painting, sculpture, film and photography—that were revolutionized by the avant-gardes of the early century and transformed again during the 1970s, so that these (post)mediums can continue to carry content as pertinent as that

explored in more contemporary modes, such as installations, video, performance, and digital platforms, along with the even more contemporary mashing of these mediums. As I can attest from my involvement in Art & Language, Adornian criticality is the philosophical approach most appropriate to the artists, theorists and institutions that form this sub-current, which he calls "post-conceptual."[15] A more complete philosophy of contemporary art would also address the conceptual enterprises that drive the larger currents that constitute contemporary art, which I will describe below.

En route to this larger picture, I need to propose a geopolitical framing of the contemporaneity question, as this is the route necessary to break open the self-contained conflation between art and ideas that prevails in much current art discourse.

Geopolitical Contemporaneity as the Construction of the Present While It Is Happening by Those Who Arrogate to Themselves the Power to Do So

In the years around 2000, questions about the current world condition were being asked, in all spheres, from the most public of media to the most esoteric the academic disciplines. Why? Where did such questions come from? What problems did they seek to pinpoint, which apparently definitive events were they describing? Above all, what kind of world was demanding this kind of answer?

A *New York Times Magazine* journalist reported the following remarks from a conversation with "a Senior White House aide" in the summer of 2002:

> The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors … and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."[16]

The senior aide is believed to be Karl Rove, long-term advisor on political strategy to President George W. Bush, who himself made the same general point often enough in the years following 9/11. In, for example, his State of the Union address, delivered on January 31, 2006, to the US Congress in Washington D.C.:

Fellow citizens, we have been called to leadership in a period of consequence. We have entered a great ideological conflict we did nothing to invite. We see great changes in science and commerce that will influence all of our lives. And sometimes it can seem that history is turning in a wide arc, towards an unknown shore... In a complex and challenging time, the road of isolationism and protectionism may seem broad and inviting, yet it ends in danger and decline. The only way to protect our people, the only way to secure the peace, the only way to control our destiny is by our leadership. So the United States will continue to lead.[17]

At this time, Bush was struggling against a democratic Congress hostile to the accelerating disaster of the war in Iraq, itself a disastrous dissembling of a nation state that resulted from the export to the Middle East of the brand of crony capitalism championed by Bush, Cheney, and their gang of neoliberal radicals as the universally valid model of progressive economic and social organization. Keeping the public placid – or, better, frozen in fear, locked into the instant, waiting for the next disaster to occur, that is, totally contemporary – was essential to the success of what Naomi Klein aptly dubbed "disaster capitalism" in her book *The Shock Doctrine* (2008).[18]

Bush was also appealing to a larger sense of the United States as a nation post-1989, as the world's only remaining "hyperpower," the sole survivor of the Cold War, the inheritor of the Hegelian mantle of the maker and shaper of World History, so bluntly expressed by Rove. In his 2012 essay "Making Modernity Work: The Reconciliation of Capitalism and Democracy," Gideon Rose, editor of the influential journal *Foreign Affairs*, defined a more benign version of this model, the "Washington Consensus" that, supposedly, would continue to absorb the destructive energies of the crony capitalism championed by Bush, Cheney, and the neoliberal crew, the depredations of the financial markets, and anything else the world could throw at it:

> The major battles about how to structure modern politics and economics were fought in the first half of the last century, and they ended with the emergence of the most successful system the world has ever seen ... the postwar order of mutually supporting liberal democracies with mixed economies.[19]

I suggest to you, however, that far from the consolidation of this post-War or Post-Cold War order, we are experiencing its implosion. None of the terms of Rose's simple formula are functioning, all are either self-destructing (finance capital) or self-immobilizing (governments), their mixture failing, and their support for each other has become anything

but mutual. Meanwhile, other kinds of huge-scale experiments are being undertaken by fragile national states around the world, and with increasingly unpredictable results. And, most importantly, we have reached the limits of the earth's capacity to sustain the material bases of these modern experiments.

The implosion will take decades, will take many strange, unpredictable forms, and will occasion many recurrences. But implode it will. The contemporaneity of irreconcilable difference, it seems, is all that remains. Is this so, and, if so, how might it be pictured?

Contemporaneity: A Meta-World Picture

In my view, three currents course through contemporary life and thought, isolating modernity's master narratives like beached whales, and proliferating divisive differences while at the same time channeling them into these powerful currents. This is a historical argument, about the shape of historical forces operating through the present. Underlying it is an intuition about a historical shift in the nature of human thinking about thinking, and perhaps in the nature of human thought (if such an object can still be imagined).

BECOMING CONTEMPORARY: WORLD CURRENTS

(A META-WORLD PICTURE)

CONTINUING MODERNITIES

Globalization, Post-Cold War Hyperpower; Clash of Civilizations, Spectacularity, Neo-conservatism, neoliberal economics, Posthistory, Invented Heritage,

Remodernisms

(between these, dialectical oppositionality but no prospective resolution)

TRANSITIONAL TRANSNATIONALITY

Decolonization; Indigenization; Anti-Orientalist and postcolonial critique, the movement of movements, anti-globalization; Postmodern pastiche, new realisms; inverse modernizations (China, Asian "tigers"); revived fundamentalisms; insurrectionary anarchisms
(between these, difference, adjacency, antinomic frictions)

CONTEMPORANEOUS DIFFERENCES

Contemporaneousness of incommensurable master narratives; Self-fashioning within Immediation; cosmopolitanism/planetarity, ranging from world citizenship to as-needed affiliative connectivity (Occupy); eco activism; open-form revolutions.

It will take decades to work through to what will doubtless be a different configuration of differences. But this, I submit, is what our contemporaneity looks like to us now, when we see it straight, when we frame it as historical occurrence in the present, with each of these concepts signaling a cluster of orientations towards world-being.

Contemporaneity and Contemporary Art

I have also argued for a number of years that these currents are manifest in contemporary art, most recently in a book – *Contemporary Art: World Currents* – that surveys how they developed based on the multiple modernities that actually prevailed during the twentieth century, and did so in distinct ways in the various art producing centers around the world. Deep difference is evident everywhere: for example, in the contrasting cover images chosen by the publishers of the English and US editions of my book.[20]

Developments in art since the 1950s can be schematized as three currents that take shape over the decades since then in distinct ways in different parts of the world, then spread through time, like the fingers of an opening hand, coming into conflict and convergence in particular ways, but always diverging, towards an open-ended future, never combining into a fist that could be named "global art," a "world art," or even "Contemporary Art." Rather, they maintain their contemporaneous differences, their internal contemporaneities and their cotemporality in relation to each other. This is an art historical argument, about the shape of historical forces operating through the present, and about how the ideational orientations mentioned earlier play out within art.

I. BECOMING CONTEMPORARY IN EUROAMERICA

(art movements, markets)

1. Late Modern Art becomes Contemporary

2. Postmodernism, Retro-Sensationalism and Remodernism

II. TRANSNATIONAL TRANSITIONS

(ideologies, issues)

1. Decolonization, Nationalism

2. Globalization, Internationalism

3. Cosmopolitanism, Translation

III. CONTEMPORARY CONCERNS

(strategies, imaginings)

1. World Picturing, Making Art Politically

2. Environmentalism, Catastrophe, Planetarity

3. Affects of Time, Mediation, Worlding

While this is a complex picture relative to the totalized or pluralistic models that are offered by others, it is not higher mathematics or rocket science. I was pleased to see that it was visualizable in spatial terms, or, more precisely, architecturally, as is evident in the design for the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University by Steven Holl Associates (2011-15). Holl's concept visualized contemporary art as moving through "the plane of the present" into "forking time," three parallel temporalities that open out to what Holl calls "scalelessness." At VCU, this will be a fourth gallery upstairs and a garden, a "thinking field," that links to the university campus.[21]

If it were possible to imagine the currents of contemporary art architecturally, what would it be to conceive them philosophically? We must begin from the recognition that "contemporaneity" is not a synonym for "the contemporary." On the contrary, "the contemporary" is an adjectival phrase missing its noun. Ask always, "The contemporary ... *what*?" In most cases, you will find that the speaker is using an abbreviation for "the contemporary world," "our contemporary situation," "the contemporary condition," "the contemporary experience," or some such. Uncertainty as to which noun is, in the case in point, most fitting has led art discourse in particular to leave the last word as a blank. More generally, those who feel that our times cannot name themselves without fearful consequence have left it empty. But it has been, all along, a space waiting to be filled. Actually, the contemporaneity of divisive differences has been filling in the blank since the 1960s. The real "blank," now, is the void in the place that should be being filled by a full consciousness of our connected planetarity. World picturing is becoming the preoccupation of artists everywhere. The contemporary question is: How can we shape our differences into the connections that the world requires?

The Planetarity to Come

My suggestion is that we need to set out on a broader search, from this premise. Picturing worlds in their real relation, making and sustaining a viable sense of place for each of us, establishing and maintaining a coeval connectivity between worlds and places – doing these things in circumstances where divisive difference prevails, and seems to be increasing exponentially – this is the challenge of contemporary world-being.

In her *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak called for something similar. Urging students of writing to "cross borders under the auspices of a Comparative Literature supplemented by Area Studies"

by imagining themselves as "planetary rather than continental, global, or worldy," she announced:

> I propose the planet to override the globe. Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. In the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve that abstract ball covered with latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines, once the equator and the tropics and so on, now drawn by the requirements of Geographical Information Systems. To talk planet-talk by way of an unexamined environmentalism, referring to an undivided 'natural' space rather than a differentiated political space, can work in the interests of this globalization in the mode of the abstract as such. (I have been insisting that to transmute the literatures of the global South into an undifferentiated space of English rather than a differentiated political space is a related move.) The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan. It is not really amenable to a neat contrast with the globe. I cannot say "the planet, on the other hand." When I invoke the planet, I think of the effort required to figure the (im)possibility of this underived intuition.[22]

In response to a question from me during a visit to the University of Pittsburgh in 2012 she disavowed this call for planetarity rather than globalism, as too generalized in form. It was too generalized as she formulated it in 2003, but, to me, it remains a valid – indeed, in our current crisis, the most valid – call. Let us try to make it at once more abstract and more concrete, more of a meta-picture in order to make it more real.

In attempting to do so, I am inspired by the claim of Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* that "What defines thought in its three great forms – art, science, and philosophy – is always confronting chaos, laying out a plane, throwing a plane over chaos."[23] They insist that these three "great forms" do so in parallel but fundamentally distinct ways. Thus, they distinguish the "plane of immanence" within which philosophical concepts are formed, the "plane of coordinates" that enables scientific observers to define states of affairs, functions and references, and the "plane of composition" on which artists "wrest percept from perceptions" and "affect from affectations."[24]

My quest, it turns out, is somewhat broader. It attempts to throw a few more secant planes, or conceptual cuts, across even more chaos, to bring into the meta-picture of world pictures that I outlined earlier something of what they describe as "nonphilosophy," "nonscience," and "nonart."[25]

As a first step, we might imagine four such planes, a set of *planomena*.

WORLD/WORLDS/WORLDING: <STATES> & PLANES
Earth, planet, natural histories, evolution, information
<Indigeneity, ecology, virtuality>
Sentient interiority (human, animal, machinic? things?)
<art, language, sexualities, belief, humanities, sciences, media, technologies>
Societies, social relations, local economies, nation states, cultures
<cooperation, diplomacy, war, criminality, networks>
Civilizations, geopolitics and economics, international arrangements, ngos
<temporality: modernity, globalization, globality, planetarity>

The terms I have inserted between the planes, or fields of being, are of course tremendously varied in kind, and in their historical valiance. I see them as the names of states of becoming, or modes of acting, that operate together as the groundwork of the planes of being. They are the conditions of possibility for each of them; they enable the planes to become immanent, to become fields on which being can appear, show itself becoming to other beings. For example, indigeneity is the most fundamental way of being for all that lives (humans, animals, and plants); art is the most profound social expression of interiority and sentience; cooperation is at the core of all social formation, from the smallest groups to world scale civilizations; while temporality is the state that registers contemporaneous difference and historical continuity and change – the modern and contemporary names for which are listed along the bottom line.

A similar pattern appears if you move through the terms on the right side, which presume that the world has also always existed as pure information, which then takes differentiated forms through time, appearing mainly in technological forms and organizational structures.[28] To move through the central sections is to start to see even more nuanced exchanges and patterns, most of which are not clear to me as yet.

When we sense these patterns moving down and up, we immediately ask: how do connections weave between the states of world becoming, and the planes on which being appears and acts? We grasp the need for a third set of terms, terms that I have yet to work out a way of visualizing, as they overwhelm any static image. But I know that they are there, and want to call them *connectivities*. I conceive of them as actions in space and time, as repeated and expanded patterns of acting, which change and develop over time. They have names that are instantly familiar: thinking, of course, first of all, but then, immediately, imagining, and figuring, and on to all of the other associated processes: such as feeling,

projecting, identifying, communicating. More blandly put: producing, consuming, prosuming. Or put in the language of power: warning, deterring, and negotiating, skirmishing, warring, surging, peace making, reconciling, watching. Or net actions: searching, networking, streaming, flocking. Or economies of various kinds, from bartering to high capitalism (this is where capitalism fits, as one kind of connectivity: very powerful, but contingent, and dependent, nothing like the default driver that remodernists and post-Marxists take it to be). Or ideologies, and hegemonic operations. There are many more, all specific to particular practices, and able to spread to others.

Usually, we conceive of these processes as things-in-themselves, or as having limited or local connection with similar processes. But if understanding how place making connects to worlding is our aim, then it is more useful to imagine them as threads weaving through these layers and forms of connection, or as folds that bring space and time into unexpected adjacency (which Michel Serres metaphorizes as connections across the surface of a crumpled handkerchief), as nodes that bring networks into being. This gives us a mobile, three-dimensional matrix.[29] If we have to name this activity – this weaving of connectivities between states and planes, this making of individual and collective place as a locating within constellations of worlds-with-other-worlds – let us call it "world-making" or "worlding."[30] We are, all of us, and constantly, *worlding*… including – indeed, especially – when we make, exhibit, and participate in works of art that make manifest, give form, to the connectivities. In this, Peter Osborne and I concur. He concludes a recent article by saying that "the successful postconceptual work traverses (crosses back and forth) the internal temporal disjunctions that constitute the contemporary, constructing them in such a way as to express them, at the level of the immanent duality – conceptual and aesthetic – of its form. Each a condensed fragment of the worlding of the globe."[31]

Worlding

Throughout this lecture, I have been asking: how does the multiplicity of time itself configure now, in our contemporary circumstances, as modernity splinters and recedes, and new modes of being come into existence? We know that the risk-taking to the point of self-destruction that is essential to all forms of capitalism has reached, yet again, significant limits. Among these: the pervasiveness, yet also cascading implosion, of globalization as a world system; the incapacity of most political systems to accommodate market extremism; the accelerating inequities between

nations and within them that is precipitating revolutions of many kinds everywhere; and, above all, the dialectic of mutually-assured destruction that seems wired into the Anthropocene.[32] These are the fundamental forces shaping our current contemporaneity of difference. Within these forces, but primarily against them, I am arguing, finally, that we need to build a viable planetary consciousness from the meta-picture of world picturing, placemaking and connectivity that I, and the artists and thinkers mentioned, have attempted to chart. If we can do this, we might be able to weave within the extinction that is slowly but inevitably enveloping us, and, perhaps, slow it down – or, at least, *face it* by working, from now on, to recover, not an undifferentiated, global consensus, nor an exacerbated incommensurability, but, rather, a differentiated, worldy compact between coevals that is our (impossible but also "natural") state of planetary being.

Notes

1. Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. S. W. Dyde (New York: Cosimo, 2008), "Preface," xx and xxi.

2. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985 and 1988).

3. Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995).

4. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age* [1846], trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1962), 33.

5. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* [1844], in *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 7, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), ch. 4 "The Case of the Contemporary Disciple", and the detailed exposition by "Anti-Climacus" in *Practice in Christianity* [1850] in *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 20, trans. Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

6. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), N, 3, 1, p. 463.

7. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 21.

8. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), 5.

9. See my "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, eds. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 1.

10. Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question," xiii.

11. Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question," 9. There are internal references here to Fredric Jameson's *A Singular Modernity: An Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002) and Jacques Derrida's later work, specifically *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and the interview following 9/11 in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

12. Jacques Rancière, *Chronicles of Consensual Times* (London: Continuum, 2010).

13. Giorgio Agamben, "What is the Contemporary?", in *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 40.

14. Tim Griffin, "Out of Time," *Artforum* 50, no. 1 (September 2011): 288–89.

15. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013).

16. Ron Suskind, "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 17, 2004, at http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/ 17BUSH.html?_r=0.

17. Cited *New York Times*, February 1, 2006, A20 and A21.

18. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2008).

19. Gideon Rose, "Making Modernity Work: The Reconciliation of Capitalism and Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 1 (January/February 2012), 2.

20. Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (London: Laurence King; Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2011).

21. Steven Holl Associates, Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, 2012–15. See

http://www.stevenholl.com/project-detail.php?type=museums&id=123.

In his 2012 Windmueller Artist Lecture Holl describes the design as meeting the change in art from the dominance of the "master narratives" to open-ended possibility, with artists being able to work in different mediums for different purposes, simultaneously, with each direction being "fine." Examples he uses are Doug Aitken, Brice Marden ("Now, no-one says painting is dead"), Eduardo Chillida, and Richard Serra. At http://ica.vcu.edu/events/past/video-windmueller-artist-lecture-series-presents-steven-holl/.

22. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 72.

23. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 117.

24. Ibid., 166.

25. Ibid., 218.

26. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1997), Joseph S. Nye Jr, *The Future of Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: PublicAffairs, 2011), and Joseph S. Nye Jr, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: PublicAffairs, 2004).

27. Nicolas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

28. James Gleick, *The Information: A History, A Theory, A Flood* (New York: Vintage, 2011).

29. See Jane Bennett and William Connolly, "The Crumpled Handkerchief," in *Time and History in Deleuze and Serres*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (London: Continuum, 2012), 153–71. I thank Judith Farquhar for this reference.

30. Of course, I draw on the brilliant tradition of thinking about worlds, that of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, Nelson Goodman, etc., etc., Ed Casey, etc., etc., Marc Augé, etc, etc. But we are coming to their thoughts on these matters from a perspective that is emerging after theirs.

31. Peter Osborne, "The Postconceptual Condition: Or, The Cultural Logic of High Capitalism Today," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 184 (March/April 2014): 26.

32. See, for example, Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

Existential Urgency

Contemporaneity, Biennials and Social Form

Peter Osborne

ABSTRACT What happens to the form of the biennial when biennials become part of a world system of art institutions, subject to the historical temporality of a global contemporaneity? In particular, what happens when the periodic rhythms of national narratives of biennial exhibitions are overcoded by a serial sequence of international biennials – competing for contemporaneity – seemingly without end? This essay approaches these questions via a consideration of the debate about the transitional symbolic significance of the 1989 Third Havana Biennale. It contrasts three historical problematics of 'the contemporary' as models through which to think the cultural function of biennials: (i) the critique of anthropology, or, the coeval; (ii) socialist post-coloniality, or the avant-garde construction of traditions; (iii) the historical contemporaneity of a global capitalist modernity.
KEY WORDS Anthropology, Biennials, Coeval, Contemporaneity, Contemporary art, Global capitalism, Modern, Postcolonial, Postconceptual, Tradition, Third World

1. Biennials

Art today lives – can there still be doubt? – in 'the age of the biennial': large-scale international exhibitions of contemporary art, which impose upon the artworlds of the world, the professionals who inhabit those worlds, and significant numbers of inhabitants of the cities that host them, a certain, very particular rhythm: the time of the every-other-year.[1] As we know, such events have proliferated exponentially since the late 1980s. The Havana Biennial, founded in 1984, was at that point only the 4th generally internationally recognized biennial in the world – following Venice (1895), São Paolo (1951) and Sydney (1975) – although there were several other less well-known ones, of course, between São Paolo and Havana. Today, 30 years after the First Havana Biennial, there are over forty-times that number: 175, at least. They extend across a proto-global space and the scope of their ambition is no longer primarily national, or even regional, but that of a geopolitical totalization of the globe, homologous with the ongoing, post-1989 expansion of the social relations of capitalism itself. (Fig. 1)

Since the end of the 1980s – symbolically, at a world-historical level, since '1989' – we have seen the emergence of biennials characterized by two main features: artistic 'contemporaneity' and geo-political 'globality'.

Fig. 1. Biennial Foundation website map.

These two features are inextricably linked, since it is the tendential global-ization of relations of social dependence, through the operations of trans-national capital, that has produced the new and distinctive temporality of con-temporaneity – a disjunctive unification or coming together of differ-ent social times – as a *historically actual* temporality, for the first time.[2]

If we understand the modern – the temporal logic of the new – to be a cultural expression of the temporality of capital accumulation ('the aes-thetic seal of expanded reproduction', in Adorno's phrase),[3] its tendential global extension brings with it not just a global modernity, but through the latter, a new temporal structure articulating the fractured temporal unity of this global extent. 'Contemporaneity' is the temporality of global modernity, the temporal product of globalization.[4] The temporalities of the modern and the contemporary are not successive historical stages (modernity has not been surpassed) but rather co-exist in complex and contradictory ways, transforming the conceptual shapes of the modern and the contemporary themselves.

As an art-historical periodization, then, 'the age of the biennial' may

be taken to be, for the first time, a genuinely, properly or fully 'historical' periodization – in the modern philosophical sense of 'history' in the collective singular (*Geschichte* in the German) that emerged in Europe in the course of the 18th century. 'Biennial' thus presents itself as the first category of an incipient global art history. Or at least, this is the theoretical ambition implicit in its current understanding: its *constitutive fiction*. And it corresponds to a certain practical, intellectual and cultural ambition associated with the recent practices of biennials themselves. In this respect, it is their *collective fantasy*, we might say: the fantasy of providing comprehensive artistic coverage of the globe, through something like a world system of art. It is a powerful, self-actualizing institutional fantasy. Within this system, the biennial would appear as the dominant form, articulating the relations between itself and other elements – museums, art centres, galleries of multiple kinds, festivals, fairs, markets, sponsorships and other forms of institutional funding; 'over-determining' these other elements and the relations between them, whilst being determined in its own development by them in turn.[5] The 'exhibitionary complex' will no longer be museological, it will be 'biennial' – a strangely simple temporal designation for what has become a highly complicated and contradictory institutional reality.[6]

What are the characteristic features, contradictions and prospects of this new biennial form? What are the deeper and wider histories of which it is the product?

To begin with, to stick with its literal temporal designation, one might note that the mechanistic chronologism dictating the periodic occurrence of biennials, every-other-year (or once-every-3 for a triennial; or every-5 for a quintennial...), projects a open-ended, serial, mathematical continuity, which installs a certain ideality, and with it, a comforting imaginary permanence. In combination with the recent exponential profileration of instances, this envisages a kind of utopian/dystopian, progressive filling-up of the world – and by extension of the lives of the occupants of the world art system, and of cities more generally – with biennials, until there is one in each major city of the world. Indeed, having a biennial is increasingly one criterion of the status of a city being a major city, one way of 'putting it on the map'. There are currently enough biennials to attend at a rate of more than three every two weeks, prospectively, for a lifetime. Every-other-year is now (for the global artworld) almost twice-a-week. As such, that is as a whole, '*the* biennial' is no longer a feasible object of experience for even the most energetic of artworld professionals.

The longevity of the founding instances – Venice and São Paulo –

helps sustain a sense of the continuity of biennials as a quasi-natural process. (Venice will be 120 in 2015, its 56th edition; São Paulo is 63 years old.) Indeed, thus far, terminations of a sequence once initiated are extraordinarily rare; the loss of face is too great, perhaps. Johannesburg lasted only two editions (1995 and 1997), but it was the uniqueness of its failure that was exemplary. In fact, biennials are also reborn. In Brazil this year, for example, the Bahia Biennale, forceably closed by the military dictatorship in 1968, was brought back to life for its third edition, after a 46-year hiatus. This raises the Christological spectre that every terminated biennial is only a biennial waiting to be reborn; just as every city without a biennial is the site of a virtual biennial-to-come. It is the *religious naturalism* of this spectre of an endlessly repeated structure – rapidly 'routinized' and hence culturally entropic, yet not just recurring but spreading: a religious temporality of expanded reproduction, one might say, a new form of 'capitalism as religion' – that has provoked declarations of a 'crisis of the biennial'; although these declarations have mainly emanated from ex-biennial curators, moving on to other parts of the art system, and so should perhaps be taken with more than a pinch of salt. And in any case, to every crisis comes its overcoming. 'To biennale or not to biennale?' was the clever question framing the 2008 international conference on biennials in Bergen, Norway – which gave birth to the 2010 Biennial Reader, an early staging post in the increasingly self-reflexive character of biennial discourse. But that conference was organized as part of the preparations for what was to become the Bergen Triennial (first edition, 2013): so whatever views were expressed, the answer was never in doubt: to biennale![7]

One of the interesting things about the proposal behind the 2014 Bahia Biennale is the way in which it mediated a return to its original regional project with its new global context; or better perhaps, the way in which its original regional project, retrospectively recoded, now appears as anticipatory of the newly global biennial form. Its title, 'Is Everything Northeast?', was a classical biennial title of rhetorical speculative totalization. The biennale, its Curatorial Proposal reads, 'aligns itself with the main aim behind the two other editions of the Biennale of Bahia: instead of being historically and artistically read by the "Other", it is the local experience, thought universally, that reads this "Other".'[8] 'Local experience thought universally', posited against the background of its inverse – international experience thought locally – has become a kind of chiasmic motto, or mantra even, of the self-consciousness of the form. It is the main, albeit the most abstract – because purely geographically formu-

lated – mechanism for producing those 'general socio-political questions' that Charles Esche, in his introduction to the Afterall book on the 3rd Havana Biennale, has argued is an important characteristic of the biennial in its post-1989 form.[9] Yet it is also problematic, precisely because of its abstraction: an abstraction from the political-economic processes through which, in the current historical conjuncture, locality is *produced by* a globalization that is not opposed to it, but which rather *circulates* the 'localities' that it produces as localities, as its own constituent internal elements. As Arjun Appadurai has put it: 'histories produce geographies and not [any longer – PO] vice versa'.[10]

I would like to dwell for a moment here on Esche's extraction of a series of distinctive features of the post-89 biennial form, from his interpretation of the Third Biennial of Havana (1989), which, as he points out, 'opened eight days before the Berlin Wall fell' – an event that has recently marked its 25th anniversary. From the standpoint of this anniversary, the Third Biennial of Havana represents a kind of historical hinge, or vanishing mediator: it introduced a series of innovations that would subsequently be taken up in a new and very different geo-political context, to be given new meanings that would become constitutent features of a new form.

The first five distinctive features of post-1989 biennials that Esche retrospectively finds in the Third Havana Biennial are:

(i)   a symbolic recognition of the art of the geopolitical periphery,
(ii) a shift towards thematic curatorial authorship, generally taking the form of …
(iii) posing socio-political questions, which leads to …
(iv) an emphasis on debate and a strong discursive or pedagogical dimension, along with …
(v)   a demographically based cultural self-definition in terms of 'the political and social mix of the cities that host them'.[11]

As Esche indicates, the Third Biennale of Havana was an exception to the model it inaugurated in two respects: first in being an international *socialist* mobilization of those regional art communities 'marginalized' from the main international networks in 1989; and second in being a self-consciously 'Third World' event. And, I would like to add, there is an internal relationship between these two aspects. The largest exhibition within the Biennial (at the National Museum of Fine Arts / Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes) was called 'Three Worlds' ('Tre Mundos'). Yet in the wake of the end of state communism in Eastern Europe (and with it, the 'Second World' of so-called 'historical communism'), 1989

was the very last moment that the concept of the 'Third World' could be mobilized. Subsequent, definitively post-communist biennials may have been increasingly self-consciously postcolonial, but this postcoloniality could no longer be thought as a 'third' world: the object of an ideological struggle between two world systems, struggling for its own, 'third' way (Bandung). This was not because the referent of 'Third World' disappeared, but because the Second World did, overnight, creating, on the one hand, a newly bipolar geopolitical system, symbolically named as 'North' and 'South', and on the other, more complicated economic and ideological divisions within capitalism: between China and the USA, and between increasingly religiously coded combatants, respectively. The purely 'economic' category of the BRIC countries to which Brazil 'belongs' – Brazil, Russia, India and China – is in this respect a somewhat spurious unity. China is a new global power in the way in which the others are not yet, while Russia is neither a country of the 'South' nor a prospective engine of the world economy. The recent addition to the group of South Africa, pluralizing the acronym, as BRICS, only draws attention to the incoherence and ideological over-determination of the idea by financial markets, in search of tidy packets of imaginarily mitigated risk. Geopolitics – and the geopolitical imaginary through which politics itself is so often conducted – continues to resist reduction to financial markets, however much these markets may come to dominate the relations between states.

Ironically, at an ideological level, socialism has remained more recalcitrant to global capitalism than Third Worldism. The general 'sociopolitical questioning' that came to characterize post-1989 biennials as a result of the recognition of the art of the geopolitical periphery, is grounded on a combination of postcolonial nationality and transnational capitalism. As such, it offers less of an alternative perspective to the latter than a new mode of its articulation. This resonates with the new political-economic function of the post-1989 biennials, to which we must add a final, sixth feature: namely, (vi) that they are declarations that particular cities are (in Esche's phrase) 'open for business'. The post-1989 biennial form is ineluctably tied up with corporate, municipal, national and regional development projects, and property markets in particular. The important role of biennials within the art market is, in this respect, by no means the main capital function at stake in biennials themselves.

The combination of the third of these features (the posing of social and political questions) with the first (the recognition of the geopolitical periphery by cultural institutions of the 'centre') is clearly in tension and poten-

tially direct contradiction with the sixth: the capitalistic political-economic function of corporate, municipal, national and regional development. It is this contradiction, I think – rather than the 'routinization' attendant upon repetition, generally cited – which is the more critical rationale behind the currently perceived crisis in the development of the biennial form. It has led to a displacement of the previously generally critical, socio-political questioning of the 1990s and early 21st century into increasingly intense self-historicizations of the biennial form – of which the founding of the World Biennial Forum, by the World Biennial Foundation, is an important institutional manifestation. Not only do we now have the verb, 'to biennial', and the concept of 'biennialization' – often a perceived threat to the so-called 'ecology' of local artworlds – but we also have a new proto-sub-discipline of art history: 'bienniology'. These self-historicizations have increasingly been accompanied by often quite vaguely defined curatorial poetics, which distance curatorial thematics from social and political themes, whilst also re-presenting such themes through various quasi-literary recodings. It is the academicization of the discourse of self-reflexivity, perhaps, that has provoked the poetic character of its supplement/compensation/consolation, as part of what appears to be a withdrawal, not from politics as such, but from a historically imagined critical-political curatorial thematics. This is the real, critical crisis in biennial curation, derived from the increasingly inassimilable legacy of the previous primacy of social and political questions in what we might call the early post-1989 biennial problematic. That problematic expressed itself artistically in the art-critical primacy of postconceptual work. This legacy continues, not at the level of curatorial thematics, but at that of the need to mine the archive of 'as yet unrecognized' formally and conceptually serious work from the 1950s–1970s, upon which biennials increasingly depend for their art-critical as well as their art-historical legitimacy. 'To each biennial its own art-historical discovery' is the new moral law of binennial curation here.

Such art – like much of the postconceptual work into whose canon it now enters, as 'contemporary' art in a critical serious sense – has an *immanently artistic* 'critical acceptance of art's relation to politics and social context'.[12] In this respect, one might say, at their best, biennials are places where the contemporaneity of art can engage its geopolitical conditions in the newly global, historical contemporaneity itself. (And it need not be especially chronologically recent to be activated as 'contemporary' in this respect.) When this happens, such works perform individual condensations of the cultural forms of historical (that is, political-economic, technological and socio-political) contemporaneity into artistic events.[13]

With regard to the historical structure of this new contemporaneity as it manifests itself within the biennial form, it is useful to contrast it with two other historical-temporal problematics, with which it is bound up, but which it definitively transcends: (i) the temporal dimension of the critique of anthropology, or the coeval, and (ii) the avant-garde temporality of the socialist postcoloniality, represented by the Third Havana Biennial. Schematically, as critical-theoretical formations, one might associate the former with the 1960s and 70s, and the latter with the 1970s and 80s. While that of contemporaneity, as the temporality of a global capitalist modernity, emerges from the 1990s onwards – with the postmodern problematic consigned to the past, not as a vanishing mediator, so much as a now-redundant historical placeholder for the new categorial form. (We should note here the fundamental critical irrelevance to historical contemporaneity of the whole 'postmodern' problematic.)

These are three successive problematics that incorporate the previous ones within themselves, not through a Hegelian sublation (negated and preserved, transformed), but in a much more contradictorily 'living' manner, as registers of subordinate but still (at certain times, in certain places) decisive contradictions. Each problematic has its own concept of 'the contemporary', but it is only in the third problematic that contemporaneity comes into its own as a historico-temporal structure, acquiring a distinctive and decisive temporal form. I shall briefly review these forms before ending with some concluding remarks about the temporality of the biennial form.

2. Three Historical Problematics of 'the Contemporary'

a. Critique of Anthropology, or, the Coeval

Classically, anthropology played a founding role in the establishment of a historical differential between cultures (the basis of all developmentalist and modernization theories) by virtue of positing the existence of non-European cultures in *another time*. The concept of the coeval takes centre stage in the critique of the time-consciousness of the discipline of anthropology via its identification as that which anthropology denies. In the words of Johannes Fabian, whose 1983 book *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* is the basic text here (summing up two decades of critique): denial of coevalness – characteristic of anthropology – is 'a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse'. Coevalness, then, would be a recognition that the referent(s) of anthropology inhabit the same Time as the present of the

producer of anthropological discourse', or 'a placing of the referent(s) of anthropology in the same Time as the present of the producer of anthropological discourse'.[14]

There are three things to note here. First, it is more than a simultaneous occurrence in *physical* time that is at stake here (which Fabian refers to instead as synchronicity, or *Gleichzeitigkeit*, in German). Rather coevalness is 'a common, active "occupation", or sharing, of time'. It is a social, inter-subjective concept. Second, this social time of communication is not an intersubjective given, or a transcendental form, given as a condition of communication. It 'has to be created' through a communicational relationship, and, in the case of anthropology, this is a relationship between different or 'other' social times. However, third, for Fabian himself, this shared time is *not* to be associated with contemporaneity. For Fabian, 'contemporary asserts co-occurrence in ... typological time.' I.e it is a sociologically periodizing category. For Fabian, coevalness marks the fact that contemporaneity itself is 'embedded in culturally organized praxis'. Or to put it another way, 'intersocietal contemporaneity' must be actualized as coeval praxis.[15] In other words, for Fabian, contemporaneity is not a theoretical category as such. Nonetheless, coevalness lays the groundwork for the subsequent construction of contemporaneity as a theoretical category, once it comes to critical self-consciousness in the course of the 1990s, in the context of globalization. As a category of the philosophy of historical time, contemporaneity projects coevalness at the level of the global social whole. In the process, its conceptual shape (and the shape of the coeval itself) changes. For, the open-ended global totalization of the multiplicity of relations of coevalness (sharings of time) can only be a fractured whole of relations that are as disjunctive (in their multiplicity) as they are conjunctive (in their intersubjectivity). Theoretically, its unity can only be speculatively projected, since it cannot be actually unified, in principle, within the purview of an actual subject. 'The coeval' thus anticipates but is structurally transformed by the globally 'contemporary'.

The second problematic, the avant-garde of a socialist postcoloniality, recognizes coevalness as the temporal ground for its construction of traditions, but maintains a much stronger sense of futurity.

b. Socialist Postcoloniality, or, the Avant-Garde Construction of Traditions
Here, I shall take Geeta Kapor's presentation to the conference of the 3rd Havana Biennale, 'Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories', as my exemplar. It was written on the cusp of the transition

from the dominance of the second to the third of these problematics, and although primarily concerned with contemporary art in India, it has a general theoretical significance marked by the context of its presentation in Havana. The two main polemical categories at issue are 'Tradition' and Contemporaneity' – the subtitle of the 'Three Worlds/Tres Mundos' exhibition within the Biennial – with the category of modernity as a background, mediating third term. All three categories are treated as 'notations within the cultural polemic of decolonisation', which function 'largely as pragmatic features of nation-building'. Kapur writes:

> the term 'tradition' as we use it in the present equation is not what is given or received as a disinterested civilizational legacy, if ever there should be such a thing. This tradition is what is invented by a society's cultural vangarde in the course of a struggle.

Indeed, since

> tradition even in its conservative allegiances emerged in the decolonising process as an oppositional category, it has the power of resistance... the power to transform routinely transmitted materials from the past into discursive forms that merit in consequence to be called contemporary, even radical.[16]

In the case of the Third Havana Biennale, it was the use of 'pre-Columbian traditions in contemporary Latin American art' that was at stake – especially its relations to Latin American constructivism, in the Argentinean context, as discussed by Louis Camnitzer in his review of the Biennale.[17]

What is of particular retrospective interest about Kapor's 1989 text, is the way in which term 'contemporary' is introduced, yet 'assumes a kind of neutrality'. It does not yet have a polemical force of its own. Rather, she argues:

> We can, if we want, 'correct' the situation by giving contemporaneity the ideological mantle of the term 'modernity'. [But i]mmediately, of course, complications arise, but that is perhaps the point: to induce the turmoil and give a definitional ambiguity to the present so that the future is predicated at a higher level of consciousness.[18]

The modern function here as 'a signalling device for the future', while the contemporary primarily marks off the historical presentness of the present, from the past whose elements it recombines and refunctions. Kapor continues:

> We have to bring to the term tradition... the concreteness of extant practice, and to make the genuine extension of small particularities into new and contemporary configurations. Also, at the same time, we have to bring to the term modern a less monolithic, a less formalistic, indeed a less institutional, status, so at least to make it what it once was, a vangarde notion leading to a variety of experimental moves. Only with such initiatives can Third World cultures begin to justify their worth as alternative cultures.[19]

'Alternative' here has the political sense of offering a political alternative to the current historical state of things (beyond a merely cultural meaning): 'Thus, positing a tradition-in-use in Third World societies encourages an effective method of politicising culture.' In the context of the post-1989 biennials, however, there has been an intensification of what was already an inherent danger: namely, (and I quote) 'the commodification of traditions as such, and of traditional forms and artefacts, to serve both the state and the market.'[20] The *trans*nationalisation of postcolonial economies, associated with the post-1989 globalization of capital, refunctions national identities forged in the struggle for decolonisation, into cultural commodities for international consumption. In the process, an established 'postcolonialism' (as opposed to an ongoing *process* of postcolonial decolonisation) takes the invented traditions *out* of one contemporary use (the building of alternative cultures) into another: using them instead as icons of an imaginary cultural continuity, the imaginary status of which is covered over and repressed. It is for this reason, Kapor concluded, that the task of what she was still calling the Third World intelligensia, including artists, should be 'to bring existential urgency to questions of contemporaneity'.[21] Her essay thus takes us, with an acute theoretical and political self-consciousness, to the threshold of the current period, in which the historical role of a globalising transnational capital has given both new meanings to the terms 'contemporary' and 'contemporaneity' and a newly generalized existential urgency to the experience of the temporal forms that they have come to denote.

In the internally fractured and multiple modernity of a globally transnational capitalism, the perspective of the agents of decolonization (of the 1970s) is folded back into the cultural-political dynamics of global capitalism as a residual, but still problematic and contradictory one. It is this set of contradictory relations that many of the biennials of the 1990s and early 21st century attempted to present through a new kind of curation of art, but which are rapidly being overridden by dynamics more wholly immanent to the logic of capital accumulation itself.

c. Global Capitalist Modernity:

The Contradictory Contemporaneity of the Biennial Form

The problem that biennials currently face, at the level of pure temporal form, is that the periodic rhythm of artistic-cultural definitions of the historical present, in each place, every-other-year (or every-three-years, or even every-five) has become overcoded, at the level of the whole, by the intensive serial sequence of biennials, the temporality of two-every-three-weeks, all of which are competing for the *same* contemporaneity – seemingly without end. Not only is every-other-year always this-year, but every-other-place is always next-week. This is the famous bad or 'spurious' infinite of the temporality of capital accumulation – expanded reproduction – subsuming the biennial to capital at the level of its temporal form. Terry Smith, among others, has referred to this as a problem of 'overproduction'[22] – the overproduction of biennials and hence of artworks for them to show. In a sense, this is true, at the level of the whole (and its intelligibility as a whole) at least, although not necessarily at the level of more local participants and audiences. However, we should remember that 'overproduction' is a necessary systemic effect of capitalist production as the production and accumulation of value; a driver of crisis as the mode of transformation of one regime of accumulation into another. Overproduction is not something that can be dispensed with while still producing and accumulating value, and biennials are now, even if only indirectly, very much an integral part of such production. The logic of contemporaneity as a historical-temporal form and the temporal logic of the biennial as a systemic form are varying *articulations* of the temporal logic of capital accumulation – although not reducible to it: they articulate its temporality with other temporal forms.

Perhaps it is time to stop thinking about the contemporary within the terms of historicism, to stop asking ourselves, 'When *did* the present begin?' – the question of the durational extension of the present backwards.[23] Rather, perhaps we should begin again to ask, in the present tense, 'When *does* the present begin?', the present as the time of utterance, of enunciation and of action.[24] (Fig. 2) Or better still, perhaps, to ask in the future tense, 'When *will* the present begin?': the present as the time of the production of a qualitatively different future.

When will the present begin again?

Fig. 2. Photo of Museum Rietberg Symposium Sign. Photo: Peter Osborne.

Notes

1. This is a revised version of a text first presented at the Colloquium, 'Contemporaneity and Contemporary Art', Aarhus Institute of Advanced Study (AIAS), Aarhus University, 3 November 2014. An intermediate version was delivered as the Keynote Lecture at the World Biennial Forum No. 2, Biennial Foundation of São Paulo/Institute for Contemporary Culture, São Paolo, 26 November 2014; and published in the proceedings of that event, as '"Every Other Year is Always this Year": Contemporaneity and the Biennial Form', in *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times: Essays from the World Biennial Forum No. 2, Sao Paolo 2014* (Biennial Foundation, 2015), 15–27; http://www.biennialfoundation.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Making-Biennials-in-Contemporary-Times_Home-Print.pdf

2. See Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), Ch. 1.

3. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Athlone Press, London: 1997), 21.

4. See Peter Osborne, 'Global Modernity and the Contemporary: Two Categories of the Philosophy of Historical Time', in *Breaking Up Time: Negotiating the Borders Between the Present, the Past and the Future*, eds. Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 69–84; and 'The Post-conceptual Condition, Or, the Cultural Logic of High Capitalism Today', *Radical Philosophy* 184 (March/April 2014), 19–27.

5. For the notion of overdetermination, see Louis Althusser, 'Contradiction and

Overdetermination: Notes for an Investigation', in *For Marx* (1965), trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977), 87–128.

6. See Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex' (1988), in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), Ch. 2.

7. See *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology of Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, eds. E. Filipovic, M. Van Hal and S. Ovstebo (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall / Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 292–375.

8. Third Bahia Biennale, 'Curatorial Proposal', http://bienaldabahia2014.com. br/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Vers%C3%A3o-em-ingl%C3%AAs.pdf

9. Charles Esche, 'Introduction – Making Art Global', in Rachel Weiss et al, *Making Global Art* (*Part 1*)*: The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2011), 9.

10. Arjun Appadurai, 'How Histories Make Geographies: Circulation and Context in a Global Perspective', in *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 66.

11. Esche, 'Introduction', 8–11.

12. Ibid., 12.

13. For an emphasis on the 'evental' character of the biennial, in distinction from the museum, see Terry Smith, 'The Doubled Dynamic of Biennials', http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/guest_author/368

14. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 31.

15. Ibid., 31–4 and 148.

16. Geeta Kapor, 'Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories', in Weiss et al., *Making Global Art* (*Part 1*), 194.

17. Louis Camnitzer, 'The Third Biennial of Havana', in Weiss et al, *Making Global Art* (*Part 1*), 211.

18. Kapor, 'Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories', 198.

19. Ibid., 201.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 203.

22. Smith, 'The Doubled Dynamic of Biennials'.

23. Cf. Peter Osborne, 'To Each Present, its Own Prehistory', in *Agency, Ambivalence, Analysis: Approaching the Museum with Migration in Mind*, ed. Ruth Noack (Milan: Mela Books, Politecnico di Milano, Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura, 2013), 20–32.

24. 'When the Present Begins' was the title of a conference held in Zurich, 10–11 October 2014, at the Museum Rietborg and Johann Jacobs Museum, organized by Roger Buergel, Director of the Johann Jacobs Museum.