ONCURATING

EXTREME

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Editorial
Hadas Kedar

The essays published in this issue of *OnCurating* under the title *Extreme* have been assembled and appear as a result of my ongoing exploration of art and curating in the margins of the globe. They relate to my curatorial research into artistic and curatorial methodologies that revisit subjugated, local, situated knowledges, specifically supporting local communities of the Naqab Desert in Israel.

The investigations that have been undertaken and presented in this issue by my colleagues from around the world are all, in many ways, tied together by specific circumstances that have continuously and mutually affected marginal areas and are rooted in a world dynamic based on the historical division of labour and the exploitation of certain countries by Western agents. The manifestations of the inequality of our world model in our everyday reality have brought about austere societal, territorial, and climate conditions that are experienced ever more harshly on the margins.

The issue begins with a section titled ***Art and Curating Celebrates Difference: Turning Towards Local and Subjugated Knowledge***, which provides the basis for the issue. The term *situated knowledges* developed by the American professor of the history of consciousness and feminist studies Donna Haraway[1] explains currents in feminism that build on vantage points of subjugated and embodied knowledges developing a feminist objectivity. The practice of developing ideas from local conditions is at the root of this section demonstrating how artists and curators turn to situated knowledges in order to develop a set of creative tools in the face of global crises.

In their contribution, "Art as Expanded Rationality," the visual artist **João Pedro Amorim** and philosophy and aesthetics scholar **Nuno Crespo** demonstrate how colonial and globalizing processes define Western relativism and how the positivist mission of the colonization of knowledge is a driving force that abandons experimental and open-ended forms of knowledge including what is unknown and unresolved.

In order to better understand how the driving force of the colonization of knowledge works, the writers explore a number of artists and collectives. These include the *Karrabing Film Collective*—an indigenous collective from the Belyuen community situated at the edge of Anson Bay in Northern Australia. By giving presence in their films to past lives in the present, Amorim and Crespo demonstrate how the situated knowledges that the *Karrabing Film Collective* bring into their films create a break within the value system of Western representation.

Celebrating a shift within the Western system of value is central to curator **Jacqueline Kok**'s contribution to this issue. In "Tracing Resistance", Kok argues that the "Miss First Nation Taiwan", the very first drag show in Taiwan (2018), serves as an effort to reconcile not only the gender binary in Taiwan but also a discriminatory tendency towards the indigenous population. Although Taiwan has proved to be one of the most progressive East Asian countries, recognizing same-sex marriage in 2019, Taiwanese individuals who identify as trans or intersex are required to undergo sex reassignment surgery to change their legal gender on official documents, and they are often the targets of sex-based discrimination. By reappropriating a longstanding form of Western

institutionalized culture, Kok asserts that the beauty contest titled *Miss First Nation* encourages cross-cultural collaboration that allows visibility for non-binary identities and indigenous people to meet, engage, and create.

In "General Nourishment: The Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts in Marawi," the curatorial researcher from the Philippines, **Renan Laru-an**, examines the country's first Islamic arts institution, The Museum of Islamic Arts of Marawi. Through attributes of the science of limnology, the study of lakes, Laru-an embarks on a poetic investigation into the museum's curatorial ethos by reflecting on the museum via the study of bodies of water. Analyzing the activities of the lake and its rivers, along with its ecological efficiency, Laru-an considers the museum lying on the shores of the large ancient Lake of Lanao, overlooking the city of Marawi, as neither central nor peripheral with regard to its geographical location and its activities. Through the notion of the tributary stream, a stream that flows into a larger river, Laru-an considers the museum as a drifting entity, a curatorial force of turbidity of tributaries that revitalizes curatorial ideas based in Western thought to which we continuously refer and which we uphold.

The issue continues with the second section**, *The Ecology Crisis: Can Art Fill the Enviromental Communication Gap?***, which investigates how art and curating may create the means to pull the audience back towards the everyday reality of global crises and to interrogate actual environmental damage. Based on the notion that the increasing environmental catastrophe is based on a failure of communication, this section explores art as a means to communicate the depoliticization of the catastrophic dimensions of the climate crisis and to reveal the growing normalization of its effect on subjectivities in susceptible areas of the globe.

"Wonders in the Heavens and in the Earth: Notes from the Dormant Exhibition," **Sebastian Cichoki**'s contribution to this section, is titled after a book that tells the story in which protagonists. The book tells a story in which protagonists from the future see in our era the shadow of anti-intellectualism that fell over the techno-scientific nations of the Western world, preventing us from acting on the scientific knowledge regarding the climate crisis that was available at the time. One of the key historical references in the exhibition *The Penumbral Age* is the Slovenian *OHO Group*, which began to operate in the mid-1960s. With a philosophical and artistic non-anthropocentric outlook, the group created interventions in nature using readily available materials. After a few decades of activities, members of the group collectively left the art world, continuing to operate through an esoteric and ecological approach. According to Cichoki, the positioning of *OHO Group*'s activities demonstrates a need for the art world to conduct a deep systemic transformation in the face of the environmental crisis; otherwise, according to Cichoki, we may end up in the scenario as described in the book *The Penumbral Age*.

In "Toward and Ecological Singularity," the researcher, artist, and curator **Dennis Dizon** draws on a personal historical connection with the climate. Growing up in Manila, the summer monsoon season was always a period of a mild climate catastrophe. Dizon conducts a techno-ecological inquiry that re-imagines the potential of communicating through difference and by destabilizing existing logics through queer sensibilities—among humans, with nonhumans. By practicing thought-queering as a tactical exploitation of delusion, Dizon visualizes ecology of communication as an infrastructure that maps existing pathways to look for possibilities beyond a linear transmission of information. According to Dizon, by analyzing communicating as *matter-ing*, we may arrive at the concept of an "ecological singularity" as an experimen-

tal and experiential repositioning to transcend human exceptionalism.

The artistic practice of the Rotterdam-based Spanish artist Lara Almarcegui is the focus point of "Lara Almarcegui and Extreme Unagitation" by cultural scientist and curator **Helene Romakin**. Over the last fifteen years Almarcegui has invested in the long process of acquiring underground iron ore deposits in order to prevent large companies from mining the land. She investigates the origins of construction materials by looking for their natural origins. In her exhibitions, the artist repeatedly challenges the engineering aspects of exhibiting institutions by exhibiting the maximum weight of material that the building's structure can carry. Her works don't elevate spectators to philosophical and sublime thoughts on landscape, but rather they pull them back to the ground, or even under the ground, showing the actual environmental damage.

In the face of the Covid-19 discourse that notably and quickly took up the comparison to the ongoing climate change problems, Romakin argues that the work of Almarcegui is never extreme in a sense of improbable or uncanny catastrophism—she shows us the world of extraction as it is without any exaggerations or exception.

The third section titled ***Art and Curating in Conflict Zones*** deals with art that operates within colonial narratives and through subjectivities that occupy conflict zones and borders. This section takes as its starting point subjectivities that are many times interpellated to become characters in a colonial discourse. By focusing on art and curating that place themselves inside tangible or conceptual conflict zones and barriers, this section opens up a discussion on the potentiality to propose paradigmatic counter-strategies of socio-cultural forms of resistance. It imagines art produced and exhibited beyond institutions—possibly in the geographical extremes—that permeate a reconstruction of identity and cultural narratives.

The contemporary art curator and researcher **Carla Gimeno Jaria**'s contribution to this issue considers art that has been situated in areas of material and conceptual borders. By exploring the breaches of the border as a constitutive body of possibilities of contact, "What Borders Can Do" asks how might the tangible border become a space to actively challenge, question, and reformulate imposed norms of division?

Through an example of one of the earliest artistic endeavors that challenged the tangible border between Mexico and the U.S., Jaria demonstrates how borders might become a site of possibilities and change. Founded in 1984, *Borders Art Workshop/ Taller Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAF)*, a bi-national group of artists, activists, and scholars, demonstrates how borders can be considered negotiated and transformable entities. Performing both in the city of Tijuana in México and at the border itself, *BAW/TAF* was the first of a line of collectives and artists in this region that conducted site-specific interventions and live art actions based on an engagement with the community. Through this example and others, Jania imagines a future that continues to challenge these limitations through collective artistic actions that reimagine and subvert the divisive conditions of the border.

In "Errant Curating," the art historian and curator **Nadim Samman** asks how is it that the site of the exhibition wandered so far from its historical locus—the home of the muses? Samman considers wandering as curatorial method—exhibition-making in an errant mode, beyond galleries, beyond cities that traverse the globe, from domestic settings to geographical extremes. Samman speaks to errant curators that leave centers for geographical extremes, not to escape, but to make the contemporary hearth more visible. He demonstrates errant curating through a series of examples that include the

exhibition *Treasure of Lima: A Buried Exhibition* (2014) involving the burying of an ensemble of commissioned works at a secret location on Isla del Coco (500 kilometers from the Costa Rican port of Golfit) and the *The 1st Antarctic Biennale* (2017) a biennale that took into consideration that nothing was to be left behind and that the on-site audience included only its artistic participants—it departed from standard models of perennial exhibition-making and viewing and included a landscape photography exhibition for penguins and an underwater installation for whales. Rather than arranging objects on the walls of a gallery or museum, the task of errant curating concerns selecting what powers are to be put on display in a given project and staging their relation to one another as a complex arrangement.

At the basis of architect and researcher **Ronny Hardliz**'s contribution, "'and here I am'—De-Colonial Aspects of Advanced Curatorial Work (of Art)," are three missed encounters that demonstrate the current global states of exhaustion. The three encounters that may at first seem disjointed, chosen by Hardliz through artistic intuition, are: a curious friendship between Georges Bataille and Walter Benjamin that has remained largely unexplored; an exploration into the cave keeper's daily control of measuring instruments in the prehistoric cave of Lascaux; and, thirdly, the exploration of artistic representation in the case of the Freedom Theatre of Jenin as a means of cultural resistance. According to Hardliz, the three cases have the potential to de-monstrate paradigmatic counter-strategies of socio-cultural forms of resistance that are rooted in the question of representation in art and specifically photography.

Summing up the trajectory of a decade of activities, from Sabreen in Jerusalem, the Holon Digital Art Center (DAL), the Palestinian Association of Contemporary Art (PACA) in Ramallah, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, and the International Academy of Art Palestine (IAAP) in Al-Bireh, the curator **Galit Eilat** emphasizes trust and social imagination as crucial for soft power's negotiating methodologies. Amidst the conflict between Israel and Arab nations, Eilat regards soft power as an effective and sustainable method in contrast to hard power's attempt to change people's behavior through schism, intimidation, and coercion. As an example of how soft power was implemented in the art scene in the occupied territories of Palestine and in Israel, Eilat unfolds the local conditions that produced the chain of events that eventually led to the Palestinian artist Khaled Hourani's *Picasso in Palestine* project. *Picasso in Palestine* has been regarded as a triumph over the Israeli limitations on the occupied territories of Palestine's cultural activities. Eilat questions the possibility that Hourani's project, along with other soft-power art initiatives in which she was involved, will eventually lead artists and curators to lean towards a much broader social imagination that envisions the breaking down of barriers enforced by the West on the rest rather than automatically continuing the tradition of the glorification of the unique art object and the genius creator.

The title of curator **Johanne Løgstrup**'s contribution to this issue is based on a chapter in History of Consciousness scholar James Clifford's book *Museums as Contact Zones* (1993). To the title of her essay "Museums as Contact or Conflict Zones," Løgstrup adds the word "conflict" due to the fact that she believes that there is a need to acknowledge that conflict is inherited with the very idea of the museum. Løgstrup raises a series of ethical questions regarding the museum and collection practices, specifically asking who has been excluded from the history that has been told so far in order to encompass the culture of Western history and how do we decolonize our museums and radically transform them from within? In order to deal with the above questions, Løgstrup expands on the example of the temporary opening of the Sámi

Dáiddamusea (the Sami Art Museum) based in the closed Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum in Tromsø, Norway: "Finally, Sápmi, Norway and the world has a museum dedicated to Sami art! After almost 40 years of activism, acquisition, negotiation, lobbyism and stubbornness, the world of art enters a new era. A big day for Sápmi. A big day for Norway. A big day for the world."

These emotionally charged opening lines of the museum announcement shed light on the history of oppression of the Sami people and their culture. The title of the opening exhibition, *There is no.*, carries several meanings: one was that there is no permanent institution to present the Sami art collection, and the second refers to a long discussion surrounding the hierarchy of art and the dismissal of indigenous cultures that are not considered art, but have different relationships to art objects, for example, regarding them as crafts or as relics.

In the aftermath of the temporary takeover of the Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum by the Sami collection, the museum is slowly but steadily changing its collecting activities through a curatorial agenda with a local and global awareness in order to nourish the differences and multiplicities of voices, and hopefully in the future changing the collection's mandate to include Sámi art.

The curator **Anastasia Chaguidouline** interrogates dissident and subversive artistic practice in Russia by focusing on the contemporary artist Petr Pavlensky. Pavlensky's rapidly gained international visibility brought him to spend roughly eleven months in prison—most of the time in solitary confinement—where he held two hunger strikes. Chaguidouline reports how Pavlensky invited her to a house "opened" for his ex-partner and his two children, shared with two political refugees.

In Pavlensky's double-performance *Threat* (2015) (fig. 1) and *Lighting* (2017), Pavlensky set fire to the Russian Federal Security Services (former KGB) and to the office of the Banque de France in Paris. Both actions, which shared a similar aesthetic, caused him to be arrested by the police. Chaguidouline asserts that as cultural practitioners, we should allow Pavlensky's actions speak for themselves and let time reveal what they have set out to do. She believes that our role as collaborators, allies, and supporters in solidarity with the artists we care about and write about are important in order to create space for the emergence of unexpected art to take root.

The fourth section, titled ***Free Culture: Post-Humanist Technologies and Algorithms as Alternatives to Techno-Capitalist Industrial Society,*** discusses the horizon of creative anti-capitalist approaches to technology of political and economic systems founded in technological organizations. This section discusses collaborative practices on the borders between art, science, and technology that make use of extreme anti-capitalist methodologies that include hacking and DIY, and are critical to technology companies and to the desire of technological devices by consumers.

In "Vitalist Materialism—Life Mining," the curator **Laura Netz** aims to create a critical basis for the practical development of art and technology relations, focusing on practices beyond pure digital art, based on innovation and scientific evolutionary progress.

Artistic-technological practices are put in the relational context of the post-human conception of matter as an agency that produces a re-engagement with the geopolitical and socioeconomic structures. Netz demonstrates how ecology and personal and social relationships become an integral force and a critical proposal to promote

alternatives to the techno-capitalist industrial society. However, in the context of late capitalism, any alternative practices are also subsumed in the economic system, through concepts of precariousness, intellectual work, immaterial labor, and new subjectivities that are under the influence of cybernetics and computer control. Netz continues to assert that there are almost no pure anti-capitalist approaches involving technology because they require the structural organization of political and economic systems founded on networks, servers, and other technological deployments. Potentially, there are rival forms of production based around what is called social production, based in hacking and open-source methodologies, but their arguments consistently fail to surmount the structural similarities with late capitalism.

The focus of "Algorithmic Extremes in *Terram in Aspectu*" by the curator **Park Myers** is Liliana Farber's work *Terram in Aspectu*, which is concerned with the structure of thought in the age of the algorithm. The work, produced through machine learning, provides a thought experiment in how truthfulness is determined in the extreme state of the post-truth era. *Terram in Aspectu* is a series of Google Earth screenshot images of various islands purported to exist in extreme locales. The machine learning process that produced the work is unsupervised in that it automatically recognizes patterns and creates labels from that data to generate new images.

According to Myers, the work exemplifies a shift in critical thinking, pointing out that the means through which knowledge, intention, and expectation in exhibitions are communicated prioritize only a pointedly human subjectivity. The linearity of this interpretive thinking seems to be increasingly incongruent with the complex state of globally networked social and political relations. In his contribution to this issue, Myers insists on the notion that thinking with uncertainty does not outweigh or diminish individual identities, instead it motivates an examination of the inherent means of determining truth in exhibitions. When faced with uncertainty, Myers asserts, the audience retreats to basic logic as a means of protecting a predetermined truth. Myers proposes a curatorial methodology that allows for speculative thought and thinking *uncertainty* to take place, thus challenging the prescribed means of public discourse that automatically reproduces unchallenged ideologies in the pursuit of maintaining dominant narratives.

The *OnCurating* issue titled *Extreme* focuses on the conditions that have cultivated unique modes of production and creation on the world's margins—modes of art and curating in remote areas resulting from an imbalanced framework that has historically developed through colonial realities. The compendium is a selection of partial, situated knowledges, originating from the four corners of the globe that, when combined, create a world view that envisions a future overcoming of the limitations of the cause-effect models of Western rationality. It creates, momentarily, a public or a community conjoined through a multitude of partial, situated knowledges, sustaining contradictions inherent to a variety of rooted partial vantage points.

Notes

1 Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 575-599.'

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She has participated in exhibitions including: *Summer Harvest* (Israel Museum) and *Rulers* (Camden Arts Centre, London, in collaboration with Alex Schady) and curated exhibitions, including *Anti Anti: Between Art, Knowledge and Power* (Tel Aviv University), *Time is Out of Joint* (ARTLV Biennale in Tel Aviv – Jaffa), and *Israeli Shots* (Asperger Gallery, Berlin). She has also chaired and participated in conferences, including "Art, Power and Knowledge" (Tel Aviv Museum of Art), "Protest and Art" (Israel Museum), "Contemporary Political Art" (Van Leer Institute), and "Warsaw Under Construction" (2015, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw). An essay of hers, "The Art of Free-Portism: A Disappearing Act" will appear in the volume *Collecting & Provenance* published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in mid-2021.

Since 2019, Kedar has been the director and curator of "Studio Bank"– a temporary art complex, a joint venture with the Tel Aviv – Jaffa municipality, comprised of work and exhibition space for over fifty artists from a wide range of disciplines. She is a staff member of The Mandel Center for Leadership in the Negev and is a lecturer in the Visual and Material Culture Department, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design.

Publisher's Note

While we acknowledge that a critical position towards certain Israeli party politics and their governmental practices has been expressed in this issue, we as publishers want to strongly emphasize that this or other criticism should not be misread in any form as questioning the state of Israel's right to exist.

Speaking from a critical stance against one's own government should be a given right. Not allowing any criticism on the other hand – as is the case in many states and governmental/administrative bodies in the Middle East – is always a very troubling sign.

1
Art and Curating Celebrates Difference: Turning Towards Local and Subjugated Knowledge

Art as Expanded Rationality
João Pedro Amorim and Nuno Crespo

Understanding the Parts

Appalled by the complexity of the world, rational thinking breaks the whole into a set of parts, in order to make analysis and understanding possible. "The multiplicity of forms is reduced to position and arrangement, history to fact, things to matter."[1] The hegemonic model of Western rationality[2] is indeed a "rationale for Western domination."[3] The West's attitude towards nature and non-Westernalized countries is one of domination. Its desire is to continuously expand until there is no outside. "The very idea of outsideness is the very source of fear."[4] Therefore, everything must be conquered, assimilated and normalized.

Through science, entertainment, religion, and capital, rationality fosters a process of equalization of every difference, which transforms qualitative differences into quantitative values. It entails the subjugation and reification of natural phenomena, communication, spirituality, and value. This system of domination doesn't descend from a specific entity, but it is itself a network of dominated individuals and disenchanted nature. A variety of intertwined factors—race, gender, class, nationality, etc.—defined historical divides of oppressed and oppressing people. "What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order to wholly dominate it and other men,"[5] recognizing a "sovereignty over existence."[6] And the hegemonic agency over knowledge and reason—hence defining in what consists rationality and what not—is the means of domination.

Ana Vaz, *Occidente*, 2016. Fotograma 16mm transferido para HD, 15 min.

The colonial expansion of the *West* is indebted to the excuse of a civilizing mission, "grounded [...] in philosophical prejudice"[7] conveyed through science, entertainment, religion and capital.[8] As the conception of modernization itself is "conceptually *dependent* on particular philosophical epistemologies,"[9] modernization and progress deemed all the forms of knowledge that don't fit the Western cannon not only useless, but dangerous. Magic, rite and the unknown, the unresolved, are made invisible—or adopted in a reified form.

In order to create the global, the subjected local cultures are assimilated into the broad sphere of multiculturalism. This global perspective is in fact "born as an effort to bring difference out of the negative column into the positive [while] attempting to render difference cosmetic."[10,11] Difference within the Same is a(n economic) value; difference from the Other provokes existential fear and abjection, in particular towards the way these cultures relate themselves with nature and the divine. In order to overcome this dangerous contact with the Other, assimilation and "cultural enslavement" of indigenous peoples across the globe guarantee the safety and "diversity" within globalized society.[12]

While Western art has provided a platform for consistent critique of many of the aspects discussed, it is nevertheless evident that the history of art in the West is deeply rooted in the hegemonic model of rationality that follows the hierarchization and simplification of epistemologies. Content has been central, and interpretation the privileged way to access artworks, through a "spectral world of 'meanings.'"[13] Whether a religious episode, the representation of some patron, or some political or aesthetic idea, logical thought is the dominant dimension involved in the reception of art. Even though the pure presence of an artwork and the impact of its forms has always existed, it is often tamed by its supposed meaning(s) and narratives. Such disenchantment of art echoes the disenchantment of nature. Interpretation, like a scientific methodology, breaks the whole into its parts to make artworks docile, understandable and graspable.

A Model to Conceptualize the Unresolved Reality

As some scientists and scholars try to define the historical duration of the Anthropocene,[14] the solution might pass by acknowledging "diverging ecological models that entangle and co-exist across historical time."[15] Against the *Anthropocene proliferation* of plantations and modes of existence that challenge ecosystemic survival, the *Holocene[16] resurgence.* This perspective contrasts a bureaucratic and anthropocentric notion of sustainability—whether we will have enough natural resources to survive and for the markets to keep functioning 'naturally'—with a 'meaningful' one that "requires multispecies resurgence, that is, the remaking of livable landscapes through the actions of many organisms."[17]

We must, however, start a bit earlier: who is this *Anthropos*—this man—and what does he stand for? The geological impact of humans? "But as we know, not all humans have an equal geological impact."[18] And while it is human activity that promotes such impact, "such a conception of humanity presupposes 'an internal, 'dumb' generality which naturally unites the many individuals', as opposed to a historical conception of humanity as internally differentiated and constantly developing via internal contradictions."[19] The more abstract model of the Capitalocene seems to solve this issue, by moving the emphasis from the human species to capital. While the first model ignores the specific role that race, nationality, gender, and class play in measuring the impact of human activity, the later criticizes the intertwinement of waste production with the racialization of waste disposing.[20]

Both concepts are still offspring of the system of domination they try to criticize. They are examples of "human exceptionalism and bounded individualism"[21] that acritically propose the human species—or capital—as the single agent of ecological impact. This model ignores that "from the start the greatest planetary terraformers (and reformers) of all have been and still are bacteria and their kin."[22] We cannot consider a conception that ignores the complex "assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors."[23] Anthropocene and Capitalocene alike seem to signal "a dark bewitched commitment to the lure of Progress (and its polar opposite) [that] lashes us to endless infernal alternatives, as if we had no other ways to reworld, reimagine, relive, and reconnect with each other, in multispecies well-being."[24] Indeed as global apocalypse becomes certain in the common unconscious, the solutions become 'unthinkable.' Many of the critiques to the model of Western rationality "share with the bourgeois thinking [they criticize] the same epistemological foundations." An "epistemological break"[25] is necessary to create a possible future that overcomes contemporary challenges. In order to more coherently adhere to a global reality, new concepts and theories should on one hand valorize "non-Eurocentric conceptions of emancipation or liberation," and on the other propose "counter-hegemonic understandings and uses of Eurocentric concepts."[26]

Haraway proposes a new story capable of making us think about new solutions that are not bounded to Western rationality. "We need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections."[27] Haraway proposes the Chthulucene, "an ongoing temporality that resists figuration and dating and demands myriad names" that undergoes constant change and transformation.[28] The Chthulucene, named after the spider *Pimoa cthulhu,* is a speculative model for a tentacular, networked temporality of sensation. By "entangling myriad temporalities and spatialities"[29] this model overcomes the limitations of cause-effect models that form Western rationality. The Chthulucene recognizes the complexity of connections and interactions between specific things, entities and beings that composes the whole planet. The Anthropocene and Capitalocene propose rational certainties—the certainty of a catastrophe if the current human development is not stopped. Instead of practical solutions, the Chthulucene proposes an ontological solution: to make kin, to reestablish relations with other biotic and abiotic critters, as "all earthlings are kin in the deepest sense."[30] This model expands the range of reason making visible aspects that Western epistemologies tend to make invisible —a reality made of "webs of speculative fabulation,"[31] unresolved and untamable.

Epistemological Break: Experiencing the Whole

Contrary to the old belief that the production of knowledge occurs independently of the "geo-political configuration of the world," "all knowledges are situated and every knowledge is constructed."[32] Rationality is not indifferent to its mode of production: "The production of discourse under conditions of unequal power is what Mohanty and others refer to as 'the colonialist turn.'"[33] Those who have agency to define the value of knowledge tend to set the parameters to define it according to their own interests. Thus, as Western rationality "transforms hegemonic interests into true knowledge,"[34] it rejects any other form of knowledge that doesn't fit the super-frame of Western cosmology.[35] Western rationality is rooted in theological and philosophical-scientific institutions, so all forms that don't fit such frame are disqualified as "places of non-thought."[36] The *civilizing mission* of the West was always rooted in these grounds, and as "certain representations become dominant and shape indelibly the ways in which reality is imagined and acted upon," it was the agent of a "colonization of reality."[37]

To resist the hegemonic epistemology, it is necessary to acknowledge that "the Western understanding of the world is as important as it is partial."[38] Western rationality "claims to be exclusive, complete, and universal," ignoring all other forms of rationality,[39] exerting itself through "productivity and coercion."[40] It arrogantly refuses to see or valorize outsider forms of experience.[41] Thus, its critique promotes "the expansion of the world through the expansion and diversification of the present."[42] This confronts the positivist principle that reduces reality to what "can be analyzed with the methodological and analytical instruments of the conventional [and convenient] social sciences."[43] The colonization of reality consists also in a reduction of reality and the possible.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos identifies *Five Modes of Production of Nonexistence*. According to him, "What does not exist is in fact actively produced as nonexistent."[44] This aims at reducing the possibility—and therefore the reality—, by claiming that the "alternative to what exists" is "noncredible." As a response, he proposes the sociology of absences, counteracting the five modes of production of nonexistence and the correspondent waste of experience with five ecologies. While each mode of production of nonexistence consists in a monoculture of the mind,[45] the answer must be to diversify the knowledges that are visible and recognized.

1) The first one, *the monoculture of knowledge and the rigor of knowledge,* claims that modern science and high culture are the only forms of knowledge capable of creating truth and aesthetic quality. It is therefore necessary to identify other "knowledges and criteria of rigor and validity that operate credibly in social practices pronounced nonexistent,"[46] that is, to foster the diversity of forms of knowledge and create an ecology of knowledges.

2) The *monoculture of linear time* takes the Western temporality—the one in which the concept of progress is rooted—and makes it the rule, ignoring other ways of being contemporaneous. The ecology of temporalities recognizes therefore the diversity of conceptions of time granting "the possibility of autonomous development" to different social practices.[47]

3) The *monoculture of the naturalization of differences* consists in the naturalization of hegemonic hierarchies and of domination. An ecology of mutual recognition proposes a "new articulation between the principles of equality and difference, thus allowing for the possibility of equal differences," that become hence naturalized.[48]

4) The *monoculture of logic of the dominant scale* states basically that only the global scale is relevant—therefore forms of knowledge that can't claim validity in that scale become nonexistent. The ecology of trans-scale leads to a "counter-hegemonic globalization" that elucidates "what in the local is not reducible to the impact of hegemonic globalization" and promotes knowledges that can become the seed to new particular universalisms.[49]

5) Finally, the ecology of productivities counteracts against the *monoculture of the capitalist logic of productivity*, by questioning capitalist economic growth—"an economic paradigm based on greed and possessive individualism"[50] —and proposing other forms of production.

Faria e Sousa, 1639, t. IV, colls. 291-292, Illustration of Xth Chant of Lusiads, by Luís Vaz de Camões.
In the text of Camões, the Portuguese sailors arrive in an Island of Love (Ilha dos Amores) where Venus and Cupid reward their effort of discovery. In this episode "The Machine of the World" is revealed to them, both glorifying knowledge and the future Portuguese Empire. This episode matches the ability of domination with the social production of knowledge (hence the power to define what is knowledge and what is non-knowledge).

The epistemological break proposed by this model expands the notion of reality by including "realities rendered absent by silence, suppression, and marginalization,"[51] and therefore "amplifies the present."[52] By enlarging realities, the horizon of possibilities widens, opening opportunities to different social groups from different geographies to seize the agency that had been taken away by Western rationality.

Expanding Rationality: Art, Magic, and Ritual
Rationality organizes reality in horizontal dichotomies, hiding the vertical axis that establishes a hierarchy between its two poles. One of the defining dichotomies that defines Western cosmology is the body-spirit/mind, with the latter pole being the ascendant. From Plato's Allegory of the Cave to the separation of body and mind proposed by Descartes, Western cosmology is cursed by an essential (traumatic?) split and based on the exceptionalism of the human mind and the "objective universality of bodies and substances."[53] This is also the principle that creates in Western discourses a division between culture and nature. As "the interval between nature and society is itself social" and "the relations between society and nature are themselves natural,"[54] we would stand with Viveiros de Castro to claim that "nature and culture are part of the same sociocosmic field"[55] hence refusing any ontological discontinuity between the two.

As we think of the Cartesian proposal—that one could have their body switched by a machine without any implication to the mind/soul—we recognize how absurd such a division is. Even in its logical-rational form, knowledge and "the multiple layers of meaning […] are rooted in unthinkable regions of the body, in physical phenomena, in the water of rivers, in the irrationality of chance."[56] Rationality, understood in its immaterial dimension, understates how much such knowledge is dependent on the physical. The movement of the body cannot be extracted from the movement of thought, as it doesn't belong only in the physical world. It is a "paradoxical agent of the passage between actual and virtual, matter and spirit, it is the *mediator that erases the mediations,* thus erasing itself when it operates a passage."[57]

A complete and holistic understanding of the world must obviously come from the proper articulation of body and spirit/mind. Due to its plasticity, art exists in this actualization of virtuals, and virtualization of actuals. Art is, like magic and ritual, a process of expanded rationality. Art plays with the tension within this dichotomy, and despite adhering to many of the rational discourses of contemporaneity, it does it so in a way of embodying forms (ideas) in material objects and practices. Art is not a mere mechanism of representation, but it is also perceived physically from a specific point of view. Art plays with perspective, which is a property of the body, and with representation and expression, properties of the spirit. Art, like magic, is the actualization of the symbolic, that is, "the symbolic becomes literal."[58] Art is a domain that "still has something in common with enchantment." As "an expression of totality art lays claim to the dignity of the absolute."[59] Expanded rationality involves a concrete bodily experience and engages with a subjective perspective. "The experienced experience transforms ordinary subjectivity, making it wed the movement of things itself, creating the surface of philosophical subjectivity."[60]

Magic and ritual are invisible/ nonexistent in Western cosmology. Yet, Western cosmology is full of myths and rituals. Mythologies make the human experience intelligible,[61] and Western rationality, despite claiming an intellectual superiority, also needs its mythologies. The mythologies and rituals of the West are, however, disenchanted, transformed in necessary actions subdued to productivity. For a start, one can think about the myth of the "invisible hand." More evident is the expression "magic of the marketplace", that Ronald Reagan appreciated to preach in every opportunity. Western cosmology is full of such beliefs and mythologies.[62]

In its history, art has been deeply connected to the means of its production—it couldn't be otherwise! Until the Industrial Revolution, artistic production deemed relevant was almost entirely supported by direct patronage and commissions from the Church,[63] hence making any form of criticality a liability for the artist's finances and life. It was only with the emergence of the bourgeoisie, and their desire to adopt the elites' "elevated cultural pursuits,"[64] that artists could assumedly engage in critical practices—with the recognition of the autonomy of art. That was possible first thanks to the art market and later to public funding. In all these forms, art was either instrumentalized as a symbolic instrument/agent of power (when supported by the Church or patrons), as a moral value of superiority (bourgeois, public funding), or as an economic asset (art market).

If Western rationality, in its dominant discourse, reduced art to a commodity (either economic, moral, or social), the backside of this story is that the transgressive nature of art remains intact in the artworks. Art "is meant to speak past particular understandings or narratives, and all the more so across national borders or creedal lines."[65] Images have a power that goes much far beyond its uses, its times, locations, and cultural contexts. That's why we can feel the power of religious images, even if we are unable to understand its codes.

But, if the contemporary regard gaze is able to find in artworks like *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci (the matrix of Western rationality[66]) a form of expanded rationality that resists Western standards, that is mostly because this attribute resides within the beholder. We will analyze how artists engage in their practices with the creation of new approaches to materiality and to the presence of the body; engaging with the imperfect, the unstable, the unsolvable; and making visible knowledges that rationality keeps invisible.

Joseph Beuys · Beyond Intellectual Understanding

In *Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt* [How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare] (1965), Joseph Beuys, with his face covered in honey and gold, whispers explanations about images (artworks) to a dead hare. One's first instinct is to interpret what is happening. The hare, a symbol of the renovation of ideas, while dead represents a state of stagnation, and the man, with a mask of gold and honey representing material transformation, verbally explains the meaning of images. Can it be that the attempt to verbally explain an image is the cause of the stasis? What's evident from Beuy's standpoint is that he's interested in "the connection between the visible and the tactual, the experiential work through the sense organs,"[67] and not merely its meaning or interpretation: "If the theory behind the work was the actual work, then [he] wouldn't have to make something which was to be perceived through the sense organs"; a couple of "logical sentences" would suffice.[68]

Matthew Gandy criticizes Beuys for invoking "a pre-Cartesian and antirationalist ontology embodied in his occultist claim to be able to communicate profound philosophical and historical truths with animals."[69] Gandy attributes this recent interest in occultism to "the contemporary dissolution of faith in science, rationality, and Enlightenment." It is most remarkable how he resorts to the dichotomy light–shadow that the West developed to discredit other epistemologies and impose its worldview. At the same time, Gandy uses the adjectives pre-Cartesian and antirationalist as pejorative. As Beuys rejects engaging in a self-explanatory artistic practice, Gandy claims he courts with incomprehensibility. The refusal of Beuys to explain his works refers to the impossibility of completely understanding an artwork simply by applying "the intellectual way of thinking in causality." In order for real understanding to happen the beholder and the work should "sink into each other."[70] For Beuys, understanding means "to stand elsewhere." Therefore, he doesn't provide "iconic clarity" as Gandy expected because that is the place of art before the aesthetic revolution—subdued to its symbolic value. If there are aspects of his work that can indeed be deemed pre-Cartesian, to claim Beuys to be an 'antirationalist' ignores he rejected the hegemony of thought, and not its existence altogether.

For Beuys, the term "visual arts" is "a symptom for the reduction of perceptional categories within the human creativity as a whole."[71] His (anthropological) conception of art follows its multidirectional spread, as "the human creativity potential as a whole doesn't only comprise the recognition criteria in thought."[72] Human creativity—and therefore art—articulates connections of will, sense/perception and thought categories. Rather than "antirationalist," Joseph Beuys was one of the most paradigmatic artists working in the expansion of rationality beyond positivism. As Beuys builds a "space of non-productive action, that criticizes the materialism of 'capital' and 'reason,'"[73] some of his critics—like Gandy—fail to fully access his work, by foraging for symbolism and meaning.[74]

Beuys believes that "art is there to sustain the organization of human sensory perceptions."[75] As he proposes the overcoming of reason as the sole means to produce knowledge, he introduces the possibility of engaging in a deeper ecological understanding. Indeed, for Beuys the dead hare recalls the ecological impact of humans. The hare's understanding ability means Beuys understands the hare—"and with it all of nature"—as "organs of human beings without which the human being cannot live." This "external organ" of the human being builds a more complete human being—expanded towards the outside of itself. As hegemonic rationality fails to strike problems that become more evident every day, art could stimulate the production of sensory knowledge and

develop "the inner creative powers [that] advance the present thinking structures through intuition, inspiration and imagination and don't end with pure intellectual understanding." On the other hand, Beuys defends a transition from the obsession with progress and its "urge of constant innovation" towards a "connection between the human being and his higher nature."[76]

Kader Attia · Embracing the Unresolved

Kader Attia's practice revolves around the idea of *repair*. Attia is interested in its physical dimension, but also in its conceptual, political, and referential sides.[77] Throughout a wide range of media—sculpture, photography, video—, his works collect a series of different "scars," trauma, and other indexes of a given wound. Because repair always supposes the wound, the artist believes that keeping a memory of trauma reminds us that the past is real. To make visible, and existent, the memory of a reality that hegemonic forces try to erase allows for the healing process that we need to build a future.

This belief in a traumatic repair, in the reminiscence of a physical index in the body, shocks against the normative understanding of the body in the West. While under several epistemologies, the body is itself a means of expression of one's individuality, with the inscription of memory on the flesh,[78] in the epistemologies of the West that doesn't happen. In the West, identity is conveyed by images created from specters of the body. Identity is then built ideally, designed to create the productive conditions for the future. That is, one projects onto their image their desired identity. As the West promotes a normative set of beauty ideals, upon which success is more often than not dependent, all (significative) marks of trauma in the body are perceived negatively. To underscore this point, it is curious to note how, during the late Enlightenment, the positivist criminologist Cesare Lombroso believed physiognomy could be used to identify criminals through physical anomalies.

In *The Repair from Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures* (2012)*,* which Kader Attia presented at *dOCUMENTA (13)*, he gathered a series of sculptures, objects, documents, and video projections that represent fifteen years of his work. One of the key works in this exhibition was the projection of photographs of soldiers that survived the Great War and underwent facial surgery. These soldiers had suffered violent wounds to their faces, which had healed and, through an incipient surgery, were reconstructed in a collaboration between surgeons and artists. The relation between these images to African ritual masks is magnetic: the body becomes a portal towards an immaterial dimension, a higher understanding of reality that includes the memory of traumas past and the embodiment of the world.

All the different elements were exhibited in a position of equivalence, irrelevantly if their origin or reference was Western or not. In fact, one of the fundamental aspects advanced by Kader Attia is this network of connections and mutual influences between cultures. The artist is particularly interested in "cultural re-appropriation," in the "logical continuity with the endless mixing process that cultural signs generate together."[79] According to the Lévi-Strauss principle that "a culture that remains isolated forever […] can't evolve,"[80] Attia believes that "all human culture needs to reinvent itself in order to evolve, adapt and survive in new environments."[81] That explains his interest in the uses that non-Western cultures make of Western technologies and objects to repair their own, like repairing a traditional bowl with a Western button or a mask with a broken mirror.

Kader Attia, *Repair of the Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures in documenta (13)*.
© Photo: Hakan Topal

The artist creates a possible platform for the contamination and cross-dialogue of different aesthetics. One might argue that this intertwining of different cultures is the normal tendency of evolution throughout history. And yet for non-Western cultures, to re-appropriate Western elements condemns them to invisibility in a time of Western hegemony. The West has the agency to change, to adopt, and to evolve. That doesn't apply to other cultures that exist in the West only under the specific category of the exotic and the primitive, and any attempt to evolve will be hidden from hegemonic narratives. These repaired objects "embody a sign that results from an act of cultural otherness which tries to re-appropriate the space that was taken from it to create a new state that could be understood as a kind of resurrection."[82]

For Attia, these objects threaten the stable coherence of the models of representation of the West and the stable ideas that we have about different dimensions of reality. As European philosophy throughout the centuries has discussed innate and perfect ideas, it is only natural that all its forms of production of knowledge—even the most critical and self-aware—have prejudices of what is ideal, beautiful, or interesting. With the reconnection of cultural usages of repair, Attia embraces the unresolved and the imperfect, thus expanding the field of the visible.

Karrabing Film Collective · Practices of Collectivity

> *"As the tide comes in, coming together."*
> — Rex Edmunds, founding member of Karrabing,
> explaining the meaning of Karrabing.[83]

Karrabing Film Collective is a collective of between thirty and seventy people, with ages ranging between two and sixty years old. Their mere existence as an organic collective blurs frontiers between art, life, and political action. They work with, among other things, filmmaking, but also in building outstations, hunting, and rebuilding cars. All members but one are indigenous from the Belyuen community in the edge of Anson Bay in Northern Australia. When the collective was formed, the anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli, who had known this community for 23 years, was invited to be part of the group, redefining the traditional—and problematic—role of anthropologists. Their network of kinship further connects to several international curators and institutions. They really represent a "earth-wide network of connections including the ability partially to translate knowledge among very different empowered-differentiated communities."[84]

The fluid collective is full of uncertainties. It formed around 2007-09, when the members of the Belyuen community were living in tents. Their collaboration started as a form of self-organizing in the aftermath of a land claim, when the bureaucratic understanding of land council decided to break the territory of the wider community into different parcels, resulting in tensions among its members. Their organization was key to resisting the way all this "inherent fluidity became administratively settled under systems of bureaucratic and anthropological recognition." With the "boundary and heteronormative descent," the "government demand for certainty" threatened, and still threatens, the existence of different forms of social organization.[85] The authorities aim at bringing the Karrabing way of life closer to the settler standard, by "severing connectiveness and reducing indigeneity, to what is really a racist and hetero version of reproduction of belongingness."[86]

By practicing collectiveness in a radical way—for a Western perspective, of course— they expand the capitalist logic of productivity: their membership is fluid and not constant. Furthermore, their practices also engage with different temporalities, through the ongoing ancestral presences. Different families descend from different presences, and the knowledge about their relationship with that (also) geographical place is passed down generations through stories, rituals, practices, and sweat. They believe in an *ethos* constituted by two principles: the "roan roan" or the "particularity of one's own dreaming"; and an "ontology of connected relationships."[87] The articulation of collective and collaborative practices blurs connectivity and independence, sameness and difference, hence countering "the liberal dualism of inside *or* outside, as the same *or* different."[88]

"Karrabing filmmaking refuses the late liberal capture of all practices by economic rationality or cultural recognition, including the idea of filmmaking as an apprenticeship to a more industrious pathway in the name of individual or community betterment."[89] Karrabing artistic practice consists in films and installations that cross everyday life narratives with a confrontation with their spiritual ancestry, representing the crossroads they find themselves in: captured in the present between the pressures of ancestry and those of the authorities. Aesthetically, Karrabing films and installations are raw, presenting vivid images with a relevant indexical value. You can see the characters and the actors behind them, for instance when a Karrabing member represents an official of the police or a ranger. Despite the likeness of these films with anthropological cinema, they're not as interested in documenting as in creating "new possibilities for ongoing and freely associating agency."[90]

As they film different temporalities in overlapping layers of different colors and dynamics—not only the present time, but also the ancestors' time, the temporality of dream—, Karrabing films sprout from their lives and condition. If their narratives didn't happen, they could have happened, and therefore "are making true something in but as-of-yet unable to define about the world."[91] But Karrabing are not interested in adhering to reifications of their traditions, nor in becoming "a translation machine or a solution to the representational dilemmas of ethnographic description under continuing occupation." Their practice is beforehand a relational and aesthetic practice that crosses forms of life with artistic forms, refusing to provide the logical meaning of the representations, shaking the "politics of reception and circulation" through Karrabing methods of "(mis)translation and (dis)orientation."

The Karrabing Film Collective embodies the expression of an earth-bound rejection of Western-centric expectations. Their practice consists in a profound epistemological break; in the way that they value different knowledges (such as presence of past lives) and temporalities, they resist by making visible their local and particular stories (ecology of trans-scale), by proposing new forms of organization and productivity, and by the simple fact that their practice consists in a form of recognition that naturalizes difference. In fact, their existence as a collective within the contemporary art system demands from art criticism to adapt its models of recognition of value. Karrabing films were not produced to replace the "government-generated truth claims, with counterclaims about Indigenous alterity."[92] But as they are "residual artifacts" of "ongoing living analytics that are expressed in multiple modalities, being playful, hanging around, environmental listening, and political scanning included," the images of Karrabing vibrate with a sense of possibility, of a particular but holistic understanding of the world. By doing so, they evince the "provincial nature of Western ontologies and epistemologies."[93]

Ana Vaz · A Body of (Re-)Existence

Who sees? Who is seen? And in the action of seeing, who has agency? The role of anthropologists has been riddled with these questions. As it is *par excellence* the discipline of Alterity, it has been accused of misrepresenting the cultures it studies, of exploiting its subjects and of defining the problematic concept of primitivism.[94] The films of Brazilian artist Ana Vaz present a series of aesthetic and relational strategies that answer these questions of perspective.

By refusing a "final figure, a model's picture, a master's work, a frame or narrative that is Whole," Ana Vaz creates her own anthropological fiction of affections with "real beings in them."[95] The speculative landscapes she proposes unravel the intertwined

forms of domination that define the exploitation of humans, nature, and imagination. In order to achieve it, it is necessary to reconfigure some of the characteristics of a field "notorious for its links to paternalism, colonialism and racism."[96] When in 1958, Jean Rouch shot *Moi, un noir*, he challenged one of the rules of anthropology by allowing the subjects of the film to decide how they wanted to be portrayed.

Three years after shooting *The Age of the Stone* (2013)—a film that depicts the construction of an unrealistically huge ruin in the middle of the Brazilian savannah—Ana Vaz returns to the savannah to film *Há Terra!* [There is Land!]. In this film, she works again with Ivonete dos Santos Moraes, a young woman she met during the location-scouting for *The Age of the Stone* and who ended up featuring in the film as one of the main actors. In both films, director and actor collaborate in the definition of the role, leaving behind the objectification often motored by visual anthropology. Further on in *Há Terra!,* Ivonete has control of the camera and microphone in the first eight minutes of the thirteen-minute film. With this, Ana Vaz intends "to destabilize the power dynamic in ethnographic filmmaking, subverting the filmmaker's gaze and relationship to the 'other' by situating within the film the narrative and perspective of the territory."[97] In *Há Terra!,* a shaky camera, as if energized by an historical ghost, roams the landscape for refuge as one hears the screams of the first Portuguese colonizers that echo through time.[98] Ivonete's character hides from the enacted chase, and wild animals run away from the camera (is the camera a gun?). In the middle of this conflict of perspectives (the Western invaders; the invaded territory and its members) and temporalities, we are reassured by Ivonete's gesture of (re)existence: her hand touching the land. By stating her material existence, she claims her belonging to this territory and resists.

A different way Ana Vaz proposes a reconfiguration of the concept of anthropology is by reversing it, in *Occidente* (2014). An earlier use of this process can be found in *Rouch in Reverse* (1995)*,* a film where Malian director Manthia Diawara turns the camera to Jean Rouch. This gesture that encourages Africans to be the creators of their own narratives—past, present, and future—is a further step toward decolonizing anthropology. In *Occidente,* Vaz practices her own reverse anthropology. A big blue wave arrives in Lisbon, a camera wanders through the touristic city, a salon where joyful guests have an exquisite lunch served by a black maid. As Vaz fights to "reforest the salon" in a magnetic montage that brings together those inside with the big and diverse outside, "The furnitures come to live, the tables begin to dance: fish, plants, working hands, plates, forks, knifes and flesh."[99]

As the conditions of the present are materially associated with the past relations of domination, by making these elements dance in cosmological tension with the broader outside, Vaz opens an "experience in thought: in-probabilities rather than improbabilities—animistic and imagistic."[100] In this way, Ana Vaz engages with the theory of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in trying to advance with a "cinematographic multi perspectivism": "a mode of thinking that believes in the immanence and sentience of all things and in their multiplicity of zones of subjectivity."[101] Perspectivism is the Amerindian conception that believes in "a unity of the spirit and a diversity of the bodies."[102] This is very present in the films of Vaz, where animals, plants, and even objects achieve an ontological equivalence to that of humans, weaving a network of affections between beings of different species.

This is particularly evident in *Occidente,* with its affection-images in the setting of a great transformation. The camera finds an ally in the gaze of the Maid. The complicit shots where she faces the camera and returns the regard reveal her separation from the other characters, as both she and the camera seem to be invisible to them. This very brief and discreet yet expressive attitude makes visible the productive hierarchy that stems from the history of the oppression of the subaltern. Silent, dressing in uniform, "She becomes symbol and living metaphor to the desire to domesticate which lies at heart of [the Western project's] libidinal engine."[103] Following the *Anthropophagic Manifesto* by Oswald de Andrade, Vaz proposes a perspectivist montage that reveals "the tiger in the maid, the cacti in the hands, thin spikes to protect from predation, domestication,"[104] in a food chain-montage. This is a cinematic embodiment of the "anthropophagic rite, after being captured, the enemy-prey can only be eaten after having become like their hunter and their hunter like their enemy; one being vulnerable to the other."[105] Resistance is conveyed through anthropophagy, as existence is asserted, and the subjects (re)exist.

The magical anthropophagic rite becomes possible with the coalescence of the consciousness with the body.[106] In these films, the camera is not a tool that registers, but rather an enchanted body that through its movement restitutes movement to thought. This sensitive body without organs is the embodiment of expanded reason. It is thus this sensitive body that transfers its agency to those around it: the humans, the landscapes, the animals, the elements. It is a cosmology of kinship marked by the scars of present and past forms of violence. It is the radical affirmation of this kinship that empowers those depicted under a condition of oppression to (re)exist. Resistance as "maintenance of an existence" that difficultly sustains itself doesn't seem to be the challenge, but rather the "creation of new forms of existing."[107]

Ana Vaz, *Occidente*, 2016. Fotograma 16mm transferido para HD, 15 min.

Expanded Rationality and the New Topography of the Possible

> *"This is what a process of political subjectivation consists in: in the action of uncounted capacities that crack open the unity of the given and the obviousness of the visible, in order to sketch a new topography of the possible."[108]*

Art provides an extraordinary platform to resist hegemonic discourses, by changing the paradigm of the visible and therefore redefining the possible. If all the things socially produced as nonexistent become visible—and art has the ability to do it—, the quantity of totalities that make reality expand. If we overcome the static truth and accept the ever-changing network of unresolved reality, the inequality of agency and access decreases, and the possibility to politically transform reality increases. The emancipation of art from pure interpretation, as the modernist avant-gardes proposed with the replacement of the representative regime by the aesthetic one,[109] allows for the expression of an expanded rationality: one that overcomes the Cartesian divide of body-spirit. It creates a tension between meanings and the material expression of elements that installs an "aesthetic distance."[110] This aesthetic rupture is not the "static contemplation of beauty,"[111] but a form of dissent, an operation of the redefinition of the "common experience of the perceptible."[112] One that can engage with the unresolved complexity of a world full of troubles. And this is the most political of actions: to undo the unthinkable, and create new forms of rationality that can install a new topography of the possible.

Germer claims that he who wishes "to find aesthetic answers to political questions [...] by inventing rather than analyzing social conditions" deludes himself.[113] We claim one shouldn't undervalue the power of aesthetics. As the discussion about the politicization of aesthetics develops, and artists are invited to engage more directly in forms of political activism, we would like to claim that art can indeed provide an aesthetic response to political problems. "Because for the oppressed, the challenge was never to acknowledge the mechanisms of domination, but rather to constitute a body voted to something else than domination."[114] Western rationality used the production of nonexistence to hierarchize forms of production of knowledge, hence imposing its domination. It is not enough to analyze social conditions; any successful political action has to propose new models of production of knowledge, as a way to create new forms of existence. And to face the challenges of contemporary society, it takes a radical creation of new thinkable possibilities. As mythologies make the human experience intelligible, art must create the intelligibility of the transformations to come.

Art has to learn from ancestral forms of knowledge that were (or are being) subjected to invisibility. Forms of production of rationality such as magic that create a transgression of the productive forces to transform reality. Not by analyzing its relevance under models of causality, but by creating its own forms of rationality. In the examples we analyzed, art proves itself able of operating a new topography of the possible. By creating new forms of existence, it can (re)enchant our connectiveness with the expanded human body: a body made of physicality, reason, will, and an external system of organs (animals, plants, mineral forms, and nature at large). Art, like magic, can come to terms with the fundamental yet paradoxical scar/split (body/mind; nature/culture) that fractures and defines humanity. In this way, contemporary artistic practices can fulfill their political potential by providing a radical platform for (re)existing and making kin.

Post-Scriptum: the Future of the West

It is unclear if the West[115] as a center of power remains hegemonic. "Europe is no longer the center of gravity of the world,"[116] and it seems that the USA is becoming one of the centers of power within a "polycentric world."[117] However, it's undeniable that Western rationality has colonized the cultures of the world. Even Communist China is following a development model based in productivity informed by the West's late capitalism. Throughout its colonial expansion, the West produced a dominant epistemology that socially produced the inexistence of all other forms of knowledge production. Even if the geographical center of this model of domination shifts, the tendency is to universalize a social link of subjection and a *body of extraction*.[118] Therefore, the challenges posed above remain relevant in the decades to come, even if their agents might relocate to new geographies.

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Notes

1 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London and New York: Verso [1944]2016), 7.

2 Boaventura de Sousa Santos warns us about conceiving the West as a block, because "What is usually called Western modernity is a very complex set of phenomena in which dominant and subaltern perspectives coexist and constitute rival modernities." (2016:11)

3 This expression is borrowed from Lewis Pyenson, though one should note he uses it to refer to the specific discipline of the history of science. See Lewis Pyenson, "The Ideology of Western Rationality: History of Science and the European Civilizing Mission" *Science and Education* 2 (1993): 330.

4 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* 16.

5 Ibid., 4.

6 Ibid., 9.

7 Pyenson, "Ideology," 337.

8 "European scientists grounded their work in philosophical prejudice just as devout churchmen did": while Pyenson only proposes the analogy between science and religion, we claim that entertainment and capital are also intertwined in the epistemology of the West.

9 Kwesi Djapong Lwazi Sarkodee Prah, "Perspective on Welfare Rationalism in African Contexts: Freedom and Social Cohesion" *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 9, no. 2 (April 2016): 48.

10 Martha Rosler, "Take the Money and Run? Can Political and Socio-critical Art 'Survive'?" *e-flux journal* 12 (January 2010), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/12/61338/take-the-money-and-run-can-political-and-socio-critical-art-survive/.

11 For instance, the way New Age exploited and commodified different non-Western belief systems for Western use through the appropriation of practices as diverse as Feng Shui, Qi Cong, the Ayahuasca ceremony, yoga, etc. See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012), 6.

12 It is worth noting that these processes have been taking place in Europe for more than 2,000 years. Throughout this period, witchcraft and traditional medicine and beliefs were pushed all the way to the margins, leaving the European landscape almost completely homogenized.

13 Susan Sontag, *Contra a Interpretação e outros ensaios,* trans. José Lima (Algés: Gótica, [1961]2004), 24. Translation by the authors.

14 The Anthropocene is the proposed name for the current geological epoch, which acknowledges the geological impact of human beings.

15 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "A Threat to Holocene Resurgence Is a Threat to Livability," in *The Anthropology of Sustainability: Beyond Development and Progress,* edited by Marc Brightman and Jerome Lewis (London: Palgrave, 2017), 54.

16 The geological epoch in which we have lived for the last 12,000 years, according to the International Commission on Stratigraphy and the International Union of Geological Sciences.

17 Tsing, "A Threat to Holocene," 51.

18 Françoise Vergès, "Capitalocene, Waste, Race and Gender" *e-flux journal* 100 (May 2019), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/100/269165/capitalocene-waste-race-and-gender/.

19 Marx cited in Daniel Hartley, "Against the Anthropocene," *Salvage,* August 31, 2015, https://salvage.zone/in-print/against-the-anthropocene/.

20 Vergès, "Capitalocene, Waste."

21 Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking."

22 Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* vol.6 (2015): 159.

23 Ibid.

24 Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking."

25 Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 8.

26 Ibid.

27 Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene," 160.

28 Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking."

29 Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene," 160.

30 Ibid., 162.

31 Ibid., 160.

32 Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26(7-8) (2019): 2.

33 Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, [1995] 2012), 114.

34 Santos, *Epistemologies of the South,* 265.

35 Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience," 6.

36 Ibid., 3.

37 Escobar, *Encountering Development,* 105.

38 Santos, *Epistemologies of the South,* 262.

39 Ibid., 266.

40 Ibid., 268.

41 Ibid., 269.

42 Ibid., 270.

43 Ibid., 271.

44 Ibid.

45 Vandana Shiva links knowledge systems to ecosystems. If globalized plantations threaten the biodiversity of the planet by transforming diverse habitats into a policed one-species agriculture, a globalized epistemology certainly threatens the existence of local not aligned alternatives. Vandana Shiva, "Monocultures of the Mind," *Trumpeter* vol. 10, no. 4 (1993).

46 Santos, *Epistemologies of the South,* 277.

47 Ibid., 278.

48 Ibid., 280.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., 283.

51 Ibid., 284.

52 Ibid., 289.

53 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Os Pronomes Cosmológicos e o Perspectivismo Ameríndio," *MANA* 2, no. 2 (1996): 116. Translation by the authors.

54 Ibid., 121.

55 Ibid., 124.

56 Gil, *Caos e Ritmo,* 50.

57 Ibid., 201.

58 Ibid., 56.

59 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* 19.

60 Gil, *Caos e Ritmo, 193.*

61 Ibid., 48.

62 Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) collects a series of examples from the press, art, and common sense that seem to 'naturalize' ideological processes. Rather than intentional, the ideology produced everyday by media and other contemporary agents reproduces Western rationality.

63 Rosler, "Take the Money."

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 The art of the Renaissance used a series of matrixes and formulas—like the golden ratio—in order to achieve an ideal representation of the world.

67 Joseph Beuys, interview by Adolf Holl, *Club 2*, January 27, 1983, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_VPN8M1SGw.

68 Ibid.

69 Matthew Gandy, "Contradictory Modernities: Conceptions of Nature in the Art of Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87, no. 4 (1997): 646.

70 Beuys, *Club 2.*

71 Joseph Beuys in Werner Nekes and Dore O., *Beuys*, film, published by Werner Nekes, 1981.

72 Ibid.

73 Isabel Jasinski, "As cinzas de Beuys em Bellatin e o ritual da lebre morta: articulações do humano e do animal pela linguagem artística," Caracol, no.17 (June 2019):140. Translation by the authors.

74 More interesting is the critique by Stefan Germer of Beuys' reluctance in addressing the context of his artistic production within the institutional framework, after Marcel Broodthaers. See Stefan Germer, "Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys," *October* 45 (Summer, 1988). We will not have the opportunity to address this criticism, but we'd like to remark, that, unlike another critic claims, the art world is not "the prime and final sphere of his operations." See Benjamin Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum* 18, no. 5 (January 1980). For Beuys, art is an intrinsic and fundamental dimension of humanity—and not a particular political and economic system. Even though relevant within the framework of the politics of art, this critique doesn't concern directly the angle by which we are analyzing Beuys' work—but indeed he benefited from the art world without engaging in its critique.

75 Beuys, *Club 2.*

76 Ibid.

77 Kader Attia, "Las cicatrices nos recuerdan que nuestro pasado es real," Fundació Joan Miró, June 15, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbnWpishstk.

78 Viveiros de Castro, "Os Pronomes Cosmológicos," 131.

79 Kader Attia, "Open Your Eyes: 'La Réparation' in Africa and in the Occident," *Third Text* 32, No.1 (2018): 16.

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81 Ibid.

82 Ibid., 30.

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84 Donna Haraway cited in Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "After the End, Stubborn Affects and Collective Practices," Sonic Acts Festival 2019 – Hereafter, February 24, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B39F2duTlJ4.

85 Lea and Povinelli, "Karrabing," 42.

86 Povinelli, "After the End."

87 Ibid.

88 Lea and Povinelli, "Karrabing," 37.

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90 Ibid., 43.

91 Ibid., 41.

92 Ibid., 43-44.

93 Povinelli, "After the End."

94 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 70.

95 Ana Vaz, "Ana Vaz: Occidente," interviewed by Olivier Marboeuf, *Vdrome,* March 20, 2016, https://www.vdrome.org/ana-vaz-occidente.

96 Manthia Diawara, *Rouch en Reverse,* film, 1995.

97 "Ana Vaz, Há Terra!," accessed March 1, 2020, https://kadist.org/work/ha-terra/.

98 The screams ("There is land!") come from Manoel de Oliveira's *Francisca* (1981).

99 Vaz, "Ana Vaz: Occidente."

100 Ana Vaz, "NYFF Interview: Ana Vaz," interviewd by Aily Nash, *Film Comment*, September 29, 2015, https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-ana-vaz-occidente/.

101 Ibid.

102 Viveiros de Castro, "Os Pronomes Cosmológicos," 116.

103 Vaz, "Ana Vaz: Occidente."

104 Vaz, "NYFF Interview."

105 Ibid.

106 It emulates the writings of José Gil about yoga (*Caos e Ritmo*, 203-222) according to which certain techniques that explore this coalescence allow for a transformation of the properties of the body.

107 Marina dos Santos Ferreira, "Re-existir e a insurgência de Natividade," *revista landa* 7, no. 2 (2019): 73.

108 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator,* trans. Gregory Elliott (London, New York: Verso), 96.

109 Jacques Rancière, *O destino das imagens,* trans. Luís Lima (Lisbon: Orfeu Negro, 2011), 103. Translation by the authors.

110 Jacques Rancière, *O Espectador Emancipado,* trans. José Miranda Justo (Lisbon: 2010), 85. Translation by the authors.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid., 95.

113 Germer, "Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys," 66.

114 Rancière, *O Espectador Emancipado*, 93.

115 It is worthy to note that the division between East and West is itself a Western invention.

116 Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason,* trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2017).

117 Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience," 10.

118 Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 4-18.

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Tracing Resistance
Jacqueline Kok

Heralded as one of the most progressive East Asian countries, Taiwan not only recognized same-sex marriage by legalizing it on May 24, 2019, but it has also been actively involved in challenging heteronormative discourses since the 1990s.[1] With regard to gay rights, protection laws have been established to prevent workplace harassment; LGBTQ+ members can openly serve in the military, and textbooks have been shown to promote acceptance and tolerance for the community. In many ways, Taiwan has become a beacon of hope for those living in sexually repressed places like Aceh, Indonesia, where homosexuality is a crime worthy of 100 lashes.[2] Despite these milestones, Taiwan still has ways to go; while it may have been taken great steps in terms of protecting non-conformist sexual orientations, it still has much work to do with non-binary gender identities. Taiwanese individuals who identify as trans or intersex are required to undergo sex reassignment surgery to change their legal gender on official documents, and are often the targets of sex-based discrimination.[3]

In a similar vein, Taiwanese Indigenous peoples, who make up two percent of the entire population and are composed of sixteen legally recognized groups, are also no strangers to injustice and prejudice. The country has made what can be considered great strides towards equality through like the New Partnership Between the Indigenous Peoples and the Government of Taiwan document signed in 1999 and reaffirmed in 2002.[4] However, tribes continue to be neglected, as exemplified by their recent demand for designation of traditional lands during the Indigenous Ketagalan Boulevard protest in February 2017.[5] A survey conducted in 2016 also indicated that more Indigenous members are relocating from their traditional communities into the city, driven by low income opportunities in rural lands and the lack of government investment into these communities. Further statistics show that such financial conditions result in negative health-related and educational consequences.[6]

Ironically, what ties these two subjects together is also what sets these topics apart: discrimination and inequality towards marginalized communities. We must remember, though, that the struggle for visibility and representation remains *wholly* intersectional, and never mutually exclusive. Yet, the battle for Indigenous rights

remains, for the most part, separate from LGBTQ+ rights, even if the latter takes gender identity within Indigenous communities into account. Specifically speaking, resurgence theory—the current dominant political philosophy that argues that Indigenous peoples need to form their own independent programs to reclaim, restore, and revitalize their communities[7]—tends to focus more on the rejection of the settler-colonized dichotomy. In other words, resurgence theory aims first and foremost on reconciling issues of representation, land claims, self-governance, and self-autonomy, just to name a few, all of which were taken from Indigenous peoples throughout the colonization process.

Unfortunately, what the settler-colonized dichotomy does not fully consider are the subtleties that exist *within Indigenous culture such as Two-spirit that not only rejects in and of itself the imposed Western male-female binary, but that has existed in many generations before today.*[8] While recognized as tolerant overall, Taiwanese society has been deeply influenced by Christianity-driven Western ideology, developing the narrow understanding of "natural" and "abnormal" to distinguish between hetero and others.[9] This oppressive perspective manifested beyond the capital city center and into tribes after they began adopting Christianity, thus further marginalizing LGBTQ+ Indigenous individuals.[10]

It is not to say, though, that non-binary Indigenous peoples are not actively involved in the fight for Indigenous rights, but rather that, in those instances, gender identity is not a primary topic addressed. As such, while perhaps not in direct response to the lack of this intersectional platform, I would argue that the Miss First Nation Taiwan, the very first drag show in the country, launched in 2018 as part of the Pulima Art Festival's programs, was an effort to reconcile the disparity. Done in partnership with Yirramboi, an Australian Indigenous contemporary arts and culture biennial founded by Jacob Boehme. In 2017,[11] Miss First Nation Taiwan encouraged cross-cultural collaboration, including artistic exchanges and direct participation in artistic projects such as performances, exhibitions, and workshops,[12] allowing not only for visibility, but the possibility for new ideas in public programming.

In realizing this event, the festival and the concurrent art award created a space of plurality where communities bound by the very same principle of discrimination could meet, engage, and create, not only by ultimately refusing to participate in the existing settler-colonized discourse, but by reappropriating the long-standing infrastructure and traditions of Western art institutions for themselves as well. And though some might perceive the festival as populist due to its scale, the art award, for example, held at the Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei (MoCA TW), invests itself in widening the current art discourse through a queer lens (discussed further on).

In fact, I would further challenge that Pulima does not attempt to propose a paternalistic representation of Indigenous peoples, their art, or their culture, as in order to do so, they would have had to portray this community as in need of help from the outside.[13] As Pulima was created by the Indigenous Peoples Cultural Foundation (IPCF) to celebrate, and not victimize, the tribes, the events organized could not be considered as stereotypical—they are not aimed at increasing tourism or a cursory interest that leads to "othering." Instead, Pulima actively tackles such superficiality by focusing their programming on the contemporary—demonstrating that Indigenous tribes and communities are not backwards-thinking and stuck in the

past—and on inclusion—pointing to the acknowledgment of the hybridization of Indigenous traditions with current Western-influenced culture.

This becomes notable for various reasons. Since 1984, Taiwanese Indigenous groups have effectively "disengaged" with the settlers by founding their own groups and starting their own movements, such as the Return Our Land Movement in 1988, for a higher degree of political self-determination.[14] Later examples include the establishment of public programs such as a television broadcast network, Indigenous Television Network (iTV), and a full-time Aboriginal radio station, Hi-ho-yan, which came quickly after the rise of Indigenous pop music, led by now famous international Aboriginal artists, that aim to represent these communities and preserve the diverse languages spoken.[15] In its bold attempt to claim its spot in the contemporary arts discourse, Pulima has not only become a platform for Indigenous arts and culture, but an outspoken one for Indigenous LGBTQ+ members exercising queer curating.

To be clear, queer curating is far from organizing exhibitions that examine queerness as a sexual difference. Instead, I am referring to, as Isabel Hufschmidt defined it, the "decentered way of thinking social and cultural processes" and a real questioning of the binaries and normative

fig. 1: View of Miss First Nation Taiwan, *MICAWOR – 2018 PULIMA Art Festival,* November 10, 2018, Taipei, Taiwan.
Photograph by: 2018 Pulima Art Festival.

structures that have become so deeply coded within our way of life.[16] It would be too reductive to say that Pulima is a representation of successful queer curating simply because it encourages a plurality of audiences and interests. Arguably, most arts festivals attempt to appeal to masses and program something for everybody. But Pulima has become an effort for collaborative thinking and openness that not only tries to leave behind, or at least reappropriate, the traditional brick-and-mortar institution and its labeled hierarchies, but also engages in the intersectionality of identity politics.

Furthermore, Pulima and Miss First Nation Taiwan appear at a nationally critical moment in time not simply because they immediately preceded the change in the legislative law, but because they contextualized and gave meaning to drag in Taiwan, which was largely low-brow entertainment culture for the vast part of its existence. Although drag arrived in Taiwan as "a western import over 20 years ago,"[17] it must not be forgotten that, like in many societies across Asia, Europe, and North America, cross-dressing is neither a modern concept—both men and women cross-dressed while performing in Chinese operas, the latter appearing as early as the Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1368)—nor a singular Western concept, as perhaps misunderstood by the current revival of drag in the States thanks to the popular television series, *RuPaul's Drag Race.*

To contextualize briefly, as traditional operas began to die out, a new entertainment program emerged in Taiwan in the late 1990s, featuring RedTop Arts, a cross-dressing dance troupe founded by the Tsai brothers. Such programs launched RedTop Arts into fame despite censorship by the government, which claimed that such performances would have detrimental mental effects on children.[18] Nevertheless, in an era where mass-media diffusion and technology were evolving rapidly, RedTop Arts' performances, as well as the various variety shows in which they performed, were well-received by audiences because they purposely exploited sexual fascination that deviated from the norm, keeping the people interested and highly entertained. The awe, due in part to its outrageousness and its light-heartedness, could have also been understood as an outlet for the tense political climate brought on by various Western and global ideologies and competition with China.[19]

That said, throughout RedTop Arts and cross-dressing television shows' rise and fall, there were rarely cases of outward violence such as the ones witnessed and experienced during the Pansy Craze between 1930 and 1933, a historical period which is said to have launched the drag underground night scene.[20] While it would be far too optimistic to say that RedTop Arts paved the way for a more democratic and equal platform for non-heteronormative individuals, it certainly started nationwide socio-political conversations.

fig. 2: Carly Sheppard (Kurtjar, Wallangamma, Takaluk and Kunjin), TAI Body Theatre (Truku, Pinuyumayan, SaiSiyat, Atayal, Paiwan and Rukai), "Negotiating Home x Red Earth". YIRRAMBOI x Pulima program 2019. Photo by Ken Wang. Courtesy of YIRRAMBOI.

It is possible that the relatively late onset of these discussions coupled by the desire to combat the painful, and often repressive, history in Taiwan allowed for the creation of a much more tolerant society that ultimately considered hybridization of cultures and ideas, creating what is understood today as "Taiwanization"[21]—the ideology of a national identity born from the complex histories and geopolitics of the island.

It could thus be suggested that in organizing Miss First Nation Taiwan, which actually originated from Miss First Nation hosted by the Darwin Pride Festival in 2017,[22] Pulima has, on the one hand, acknowledged the existence of drag as a long-standing practice and, on the other, reaffirmed intersectional identity politics, openly addressing, rather than masquerading it in the way the '90s Taiwanese drag scene did, through public programming. By including the competition as one that is strictly limited to Indigenous individuals, but not reducing, altering, or even minimizing its format, Pulima elevates the "fantastical" and even Western-imported aspect of drag and offers a space in which representation of local marginalized communities takes precedence.

Yet, Pulima is not the first to "queer curate" a show around or to organize an exhibition that engages in queer theory. Coincidentally (or not), MoCA TW opened a show in 2017 titled *Spectrosynthesis* that "explored ideas of identity per se and sometimes unpalatable representations of queer experience" from a wide selection of Chinese artists including those from the diaspora.[23] The show, although having fallen short of diving into a deep analysis of queer identity, was "borne out by the different historical contexts of LGBT organizing in Asia," indicating yet again the existence of this discourse prior to the importation of queer discourse from the West in the '90s.[24]

Despite not being the earliest, what this indicates, rather, is a reaffirmation, on Pulima's part, of the necessity for these discussions to take place and encourages its continuity. Coupled with its activism for Indigenous rights, Pulima allows the capacity for a new way of exploring public programming and curating at large, generated by what the alliance of the Indigenous and the LGBTQ+ communities can offer. Whether done consciously or not, Pulima is tracing resistance within the histories of each community and in the act of curating itself, and shining a light on the various artists and art performances that have gone overlooked for too long.

fig. 3: Pulima Art Festival curator Nakaw Putun and YIRRAMBOI First Nations Art Festival curator Caroline Martin. *MICAWOR – 2018 Pulima Art Festival*. Photo courtesy of Pulima Art Festival.

But as José Esteban Muñoz so cleverly frames it in the first page of *Cruising Utopia,* "Queerness is not here yet. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality."[25] Mentioned earlier, queer as a mode of curating, thinking, or even being, asks for an acceptance of the present socially constructed reality and then a complete rejection, or at least re-working of it. In looking at the ongoing fight for LGBTQ+ and Indigenous peoples' rights in Taiwan, Pulima has offered a glimpse of what could be: a future that not only dispels the usual settler-colonized binary through its intervention on the institutional level (arts, education, government, etc.), as suggested by resurgence theory, but the full reconsideration of the theory's heteronormativity, in part thanks to queer curating, *at the same time.*

It is clear that, like Taiwan and its progressive take on gay rights, there is still work to be done—the fine line between art, craft, and entertainment being difficult to steer. Even so, we must bear in mind that Pulima, Yirramboi, and other Indigenous arts and culture festivals launched elsewhere are examples of the desire for change, and the collaboration between festivals can be said to be further steps taken to reach Muñoz's utopia. Specifically, for Pulima's 2018 edition, for example, Rose Mary, an Atayal drag performer and winner of the inaugural Miss First Nation Taiwan drag competition, was invited as a special guest judge and performer for Miss First Nation (Australia). Competing against three other performers of Aboriginal

descent, Rose Mary took a chance at the crown when she decided to incorporate Aboriginal elements into her drag performance. Rather than further exoticizing her culture, she saw it as a way to address the LGBTQ+ community that exists in the male-dominated group.

In a conversation I had with the artist, she divulged with me her experiences as an Indigenous Two-spirited drag performer working in the up-and-coming field of drag in Taipei City:

Jacqueline Kok: As far as I understand, drag is quite young in Taiwan. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and about your experience in drag?

Rose Mary: Drag as we understand it today, that is, as we see it on various media outlets—the glam, the lip-synching acts, the wigs—thanks to RuPaul, is only three years old in Taiwan. Lady impersonating and cross-dressing however, has been around for many years. There was once a very famous female impersonating group that started in 1994. Their activity ended in 1999 due to the earthquake in Nantou, Taiwan, where the theater collapsed. They fell off the map and never came back. So, to say that cross-dressing is a "new" trend is not entirely true; it's actually distinguished between 'before' and 'after' the RuPaul era.

JK: Absolutely. Cross-dressing has existed for centuries, in both Western and Eastern cultures, particularly in theater. The RuPaul version, let's call it, which is tied to the LGBTQ+ community supposedly originated from around the 1920s. Homosexuality at the time was outlawed, so many suffered oppression and prejudice. Have you felt any of that during the three years you've performed?

RM: Not at all. I've been lucky in the sense that I was born and am living a generation of acceptance and tolerance. Taiwan used to frown upon the LGBTQ+ community, but as history has shown, this country is one of the most progressive in East Asia. Luckily, my drag community is also very tight-knit, so despite the usual clash of personalities, there isn't really a sense of isolation or exclusion. Even when I came out to my mother, I didn't feel rejected. If anything, she simply worried about whether I would be treated the same in society. I have been extremely fortunate to not have had to fight for who I am or who I like.

JK: That's amazing to hear. Although I didn't grow up in Taipei, my mother, who is Taiwanese, had kept much of her prejudice, and it took a long time before she came around. I think we can both agree that our parents' genera-

tion was far more conservative, and many lived in hiding. The fact that you are also of Indigenous descent is also another point that I wanted to bring up. Our parents lived in a time when the Indigenous community was thought of as less than. Do you feel that at all today?

RM: Again, not at all. There are certainly rights that we are still fighting for, such as land, territory, recognition, etc., but in regard to how I'm treated on a daily basis, I don't feel the difference. Perhaps it also has to do with the fact that I don't fit into the physical stereotypes like dark skin or body shape. My father is Han and my mother is Aboriginal. When she was growing up, on the other hand, she definitely felt the pressure and mentioned that my father's family was especially unique at the time because they tolerated her background.

JK: It's interesting that you say that, because in North America we speak of systematic racism or oppression where the system has been built to favor the oppressor. In other words, even if one were not to feel direct racism or discrimination on a daily basis, it appears and reappears throughout their lifetime in small but important ways like salary or career opportunities.

RM: I haven't thought of it that way.

JK: Perhaps things have been changing rapidly in Taiwan. It's just that when thinking about how the government has taken action in regard to restoring the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, it feels unsatisfactory. Tsai Ing-Wen was the first president of Taiwan to apologize to Indigenous peoples for their suffering, but it's clear that that is not enough.

RM: Yes, in that sense we are still waiting for equality. On the legislative level, the attempts to repair and restore stolen lands have been but few. As mentioned before, we are still waiting for sovereignty as was promised back in 2002. There have not been concrete policies set up in favor of Aboriginal rights.

JK: This is precisely the trouble with resurgence theory: Indigenous communities are almost asked to fend for themselves by creating their own programs. Lasting external support is rarely given. Yet, in a way, I've found that the LGBTQ+ community, whose ethos is precisely tolerance, acceptance, and equality, has been an ultimate safe space. You've mentioned that you never felt rejected by this group for being Aboriginal, but has it been the same the other way around? Do you feel pressure when visiting your mother's tribe?

fig. 4: Rose Mary at Miss First Nation Taiwan. *MICAWOR – 2018 Pulima Art Festival,* 10 November 2018, Taipei, Taiwan. Photo by Alejandro Wang. Courtesy of Rose Mary.

RM: I don't go back much to Taoyuan (the village), and my connection with my Aboriginal side blossomed later in life, when I started college (that's when I began participating in the rallies and protests). But being non-heterosexual in the Aboriginal community isn't hard to define in the sense that almost 60% of the Aboriginal people that I've met in my adult life identify as non-hetero! The necessity to label oneself is not as pressing as the older generations.

JK: That's beautiful in its own way—to live in an environment where you can just "be." Is this what is understood as being two-spirited?

RM: Two-spirited is almost like saying that you have both female and male, and other energies residing within. To me, everybody is two-spirited. It's like a spectrum; some exude more masculine traits and some more feminine ones. And so, to express more than one over another even if it does not match your sexual organs isn't considered strange.

JK: I love that perspective. It actually makes me think of one of the doctrines in Buddhism. Without trying to generalize or simplify the religion, it's my understanding that there are four recognized genders: female, male, intersex (physically and spiritually), and finally, those who cannot reach Enlightenment.

RM: I think that colonialism and the onset of Christianity really impacted the way we understand ourselves and the environment.

JK: But Two-spirit is, as I understand it, an Indigenous North American term. In Taiwan, "Adju" is more frequently used, no?

RM: "Adju" is actually a borrowed word. It means "sister" or "girl" in Paiwanese but more colloquially, like when you are greeting a friend. Today, it is used to refer to Indigenous peoples who are "on the spectrum" but mostly to men who do not display the conventional masculine characteristics.

JK: Going back to what you just said, if there is no need to label, does that mean that there is an open acceptance of what you do?

RM: It is a bit of a grey area. Of course, doing drag no matter whether you are an Indigenous person or not, is unconventional. When my mother first found out that I was doing drag, her first reaction was, "You look ugly!" I thought it was hilarious at the time, but I also knew that she was not fully against me performing. Nowadays, she tells me what I look better in. My stepfather, on the other hand, had a much more negative reaction. To each their own, really.

JK: It's eye-opening to learn that the LGBTQ+ and the Indigenous communities are so closely intertwined on the sociopolitical level but never addressed as one whole unit. But even as separate entities, they are handled in similar ways—that is, the fight for equality, I mean—with the exception, as I've gathered from our conversation, that Indigenous peoples don't find it necessary to classify their sexual identity.

RM: Absolutely. I also have a couple of drag sisters that I work with who are of Aboriginal descent.

JK: So just to clarify, the drag competition that Pulima held in 2018 was strictly for Indigenous contestants? I know the arts festival promotes contemporary Indigenous arts and culture, of course, but having worked only on the arts awards part of Pulima, I was completely unaware that they had integrated a drag competition into their 2018 program!

RM: Miss First Nation Taiwan was indeed the first drag competition ever, let alone for performers of Aboriginal descent. It was organized, rather, in collaboration with Yirramboi, an Australian First Nations' arts and cultural event. In Australia, there were already two drag competitions for Aboriginal entertainers at that point. The partnership was great because it obviously allowed for cross-cultural dialogue to take place, and it heightened the visibility of Indigenous culture across both countries, but non-Indigenous communities are rarely aware of these events.

JK: I think that certainly is tied to the downside of resurgence theory as we talked about earlier. But what I appreciate about Miss First Nation Taipei is that it presented drag as an art form rather than purely entertainment. There must have been thought put behind the programming; a curation of some sort.

RM: Pulima definitely created a platform, and for that I am thankful. Through them, I've gotten to share my personal story and become a symbol to the young people in my tribe. The most touching compliment I received was from a young man from the same tribe who told me that his brother had to give up his dream of becoming a drag queen. Being able to be who I am and do what I do has become representative of his brother's lost dream, and so he rallies for me in hopes that others can also find the courage and passion to pursue their goals. It's ironic because we spoke of Indigenous peoples not needing to label themselves. However, as I said, the path I've chosen is not exactly the norm either. It would be great if drag could one day become a true profession; one that people could make a living out of.

JK: That's incredible, and I couldn't agree with you more. The purpose of art has been ideally debated but Lévi-Strauss did a fairly good job at synthesizing the diverse functions, breaking Art into two main categories: motivated and unmotivated. Drag, at least to me, covers both, including the many sub-categories: entertainment, social cause, imagination/fantasy, etc. Curating and creating a platform for drag subverts the superficial value of the performance and provides a space for discourse to take place. I cannot wait to see what you will do in the near future. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me.

RM: The pleasure is all mine. Happy to have been able to share my experiences with you and the greater public.

Notes

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General Nourishment:
The Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts
in Marawi
Renan Laru-an

One of the early issues of *Mindanao Journal* (1975), a multidisciplinary publication dedicated to the study of the Mindanao-Sulu-Palawan area in southern Philippines, features a research project on a lake and a river.[1] The article belongs to a group of writings that span the disciplinal ambits of ichthyology, heritage, history, management, and sociology, authored mainly by faculty members of the university where the journal was published. It looks and reads like most scientific papers in academia. Its classification subscribes to the editorial mission of converting scholarship from "demarcation points" to "meeting points," a bridge that prioritizes connections towards Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan,[2] which collectively turned all other geographic centers of the archipelago into "secondary importance." The text—divided into parts that describe the journey of an investigation, fully illustrated in graphs, maps, tables, and drawings— explains a natural phenomenon of leaving.[3] It is a story of water that leaves Lake Lanao, a major tropical lake in Southeastern Asia, through its lone drainage system, a river called *Agus* (flow). On top of a hill, the ancient lake is a picture of still vastness, a vista in the non-metropolitan city of Marawi[4] shared with a state university and another modern infrastructure: the Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts.

The subject of this essay is the museum, and the purpose serves a discourse on the curatorial. I am opening it with/in a tributary. Limnology, the study of lakes, gains its understanding of how the lake works and changes over time in a concerted appraisal of geology, chemistry, biology, and physics. Environmental science applied for conservation and utilization. Its objectivity is shaped by the scientist's trust in samples. The Agus River supplied these samples in order to assess Lake Lanao's status based on the biological and physico-chemical characteristics and traits of elements exiting the lake. This conventionally means that tributaries represent loss. If ecosystem is historiography, then the same loss I find attachment here, which the biologist studying Lake Lanao through Agus River described as "part of the energy drained permanently,"[5] shows patterns of interaction. We all know this to be history. Such an analogy that bears site-specificity from the locality of a lake to its cycles of emptying out to the larger world witnesses all the forces that pass through a tributary. It is neither central nor peripheral either in location or action. Tributary areas excite ecologies that surround them— either through their inter-dependency in life-making or agency in archival abundance— in ways that their temporalities exhibit the strength of currents, the volume of flow, and the density of population in highly unpredictable conditions that fluctuate. We always encounter the natural state of a tributary under constant pressure. This functional principle verifies tributaries' work over time (power) in holding a transfer between structures. I do not mean supportive in a tributary way; in this essay, I wanted to write about the museum that 'forces' me to "think and feel and wonder about what sustains us, and maybe also what leads [me] to think we do not need sustenance."[6] What excites me in thinking curatorially along tributaries; to drift away with a museum, almost like being abducted, essentializes the Aga Khan Museum to be a curatorial force that induces the museum's standard subjectivization, usually an alternative or a gesture, to atrophy.

Through a glimpse of the museum's formation and operations offered to the readers of this journal, I follow Stenger's refusal to stay in the deconstructionist proposal of we-no-longer-can-do-this-anymore milieu in curatorial practice.[7] This has been performed in theorizing the exceptionality of institutions, like the Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts in Lanao province, to be a model or a case study for revitalizing or critiquing "modern" ideas that we continuously uphold and refer to. Perhaps the turbidity of tributaries engages us with Stengers' call for the betrayal of the modern territory.[8] It has convinced me of the urgency and value of creativity over reflexivity in crafting a practice that multiplies dimensions toward a situation, and in theorizing that creates encounters for us, readers and writers of this enterprise, to listen to and learn from the people and things we form with our words and ideas in essays like this one. Since interruption achieves capture, if not a return to, in the same territory we wish to betray, I will bring my articulation of the museum in a tone that Stenger identifies as "a refrain, like children in the dark, who hum under their breath in order to summon the courage to walk."[9]

These concerns are indebted to the concreteness of the Aga Khan Museum itself. I am emphasizing it as a matter of clarification that disables a performative reading of the museum that could take our experience of its forces hostage to what we resonate with its "minority" or "extremities," and recently with its "small-scale-ness" as the outlier. In recognition, we inherit a habit of proselytizing whatever affects us into our "social constructions." And the crafting of words becomes a project of argumentation; I will not do this. I am telling you—a self-consent and demonstration that shares my reckless acceptance—that the curatorial force of the Aga Khan Museum is a contemporary standpoint that builds, discriminates, and fabricates connections and encounters.

fig. 1: View of Lake Lanao from the University, undated. Facsimile of an original photograph from the Aga Khan Museum Library, exhibited as part of The Mamitua Saber Project (2019). Commissioned by Singapore Biennale. Courtesy of Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts.

fig. 2: Impression of the Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts building, undated. Facsimile from Antonio Isidro, "The Muslim Filipinos and Islam," *Mindanao Journal* 3, no. 2 (October-December, 1976): 49.

Constructing a Territory

The Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts first appeared in the abstracted realization of "Filipino Native Culture" in Mindanao. In the law that established a university in 1962, the University of Mindanao (later on changed to and now called the Mindanao State University) envisioned the tasks of intensifying and accelerating education among interchangeable subjects: "the Filipino youth, especially *among the Muslims* and others belonging to the *national* minorities" and "the peoples of the south, *particularly the Muslims* and other *cultural* minorities."[10] In an earlier version of its mandate approved by the Philippine Congress in 1955, the formation of the university could not be elaborated in the mission aligned with national minorities in the south, the Muslim youth, or Muslim Filipinos.[11] The delivery of professional and technical training, and advanced instruction in literature, philosophy, the sciences, and the arts rendered a shape to the vision of the university, which in the same document legalized its metabolisms as a regular corporation. Two years later, new amendments to the law started to present the university as a social engineering project for the development of citizenship in Mindanao. More defined relations emerged in the insertions of the more potent naming of tasks: training and instruction became provinces of education, which extended to the capital of research; and the university as corporation adopted a new lifecycle as one of the many learning institutions to be erected on the island. The compound identity of Muslim Filipinos had been hinted formally at this point, " necessary to implement the policy of the Government in its desire *to integrate the National Minorities into our body politics.*"[12] This necessity immediately transformed the attention of a Frankenstein nation-state into a new order of paradigms for teaching. The ascendance of "Filipino Native Culture" loaded an imperative value onto its disciplinary core. Without using terms such as "Filipino Muslims," "Muslim Filipinos," or "Islamicized Indigenous" in all revisions until 1973, the University's foundational charter introduced an opening to imagine what a Filipino native culture looks like in Mindanao. They are "non-Christian tribes."[13]

This appointment of identity in composing "the peoples of the south" and "the Muslims" formulates the preamble of the Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts. Built in a single room with the name "University Museum and Folk Art Center" at the same time the university opened to the public, the museum implemented the mandate of the university to preserve, conserve, and study Filipino cultural tradition. In doing so, it produced a closer distance to "Filipino" in a conceptual region that the native Maranao

Mamitua Saber, a co-founder of the university and the founder of the museum, described as the "immediate Mindanao culture area."[14] The efficacy I find in Saber's cartography, the self-appointed director of the museum who had *signified* institutional curatorship, offers an additional description of the technical understanding of the frontier's geography. Such a geobody had been given up to romance. In Frank Laubach's[15] monograph titled *Mindanao, Island of Romance* (1928), which circulated among Evangelical Christian missionaries, the Congregationalist American intellectual-missionary known for his literacy methodology "Each One Teach One" instituted Mindanao in a history of romance that captivates whoever comes close to it: "I remember how my heart beat, how my throat too tight for words, how my soul soared!"[16] A sensuous, fatal attraction drawn from a *coup d'œil* summoned decades later by the technical propositions of a modern museum in rural Mindanao. As if repossessing Laubach's "glance at Mindanao as she was and come once to Mindanao as she is, and as she is becoming,"[17] the emergence of the Aga Khan Museum wrote a new geopoetic ownership.

The seemingly entrepreneurial venture of the university gallery and folk arts laboratory in museology instantly changed after the arrival of Prince Karim Aga Khan IV. In his 1963 visit in Lanao, the twenty-six-year-old Ismaili leader attended the first founding anniversary of the University of Mindanao. A crowd of local men and women dressed in hybrid ensemble of Maranao and Filipiniana motifs seated side by side with international dignitaries from Islamic countries listened to his speech. At this convocation, he clearly communicated the function of the university as the people's tool for self-development in their state participation as "first class citizens."[18] Moroland under the Philippine flag: the new achievement in citizenship required self-perfection.
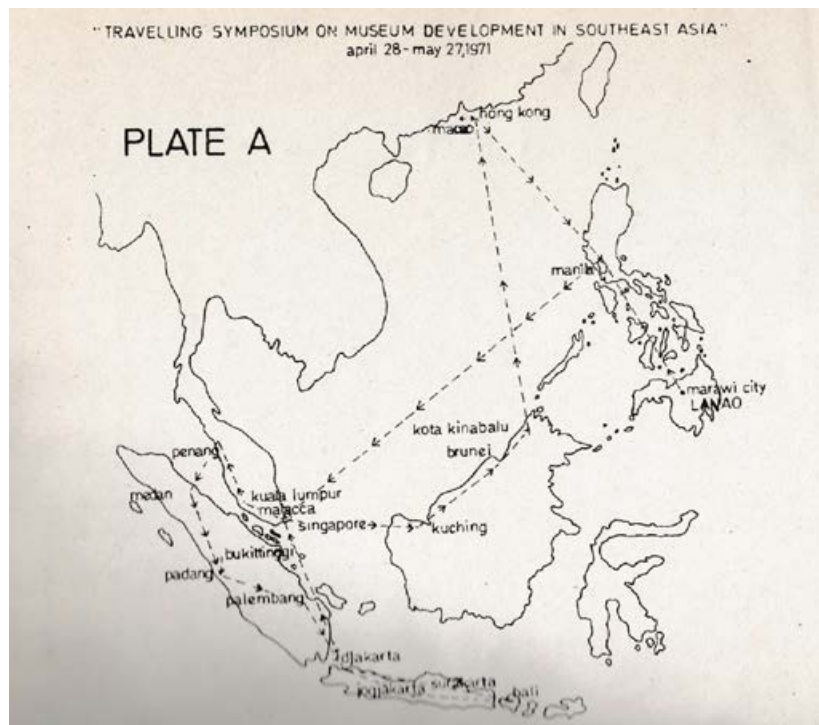

fig. 3: Cities visited by Aga Khan Museum representatives to the Travelling Symposium on Museum Development in Southeast Asia, 1977. Illustration by Dionisio Orellana. Facsimile from Mamitua Saber and Dionisio Orellana, *Comparative Museum Notes on Exhibits in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Macao, and the Philippines* (Marawi: Aga Khan Museum, 1977), 2.
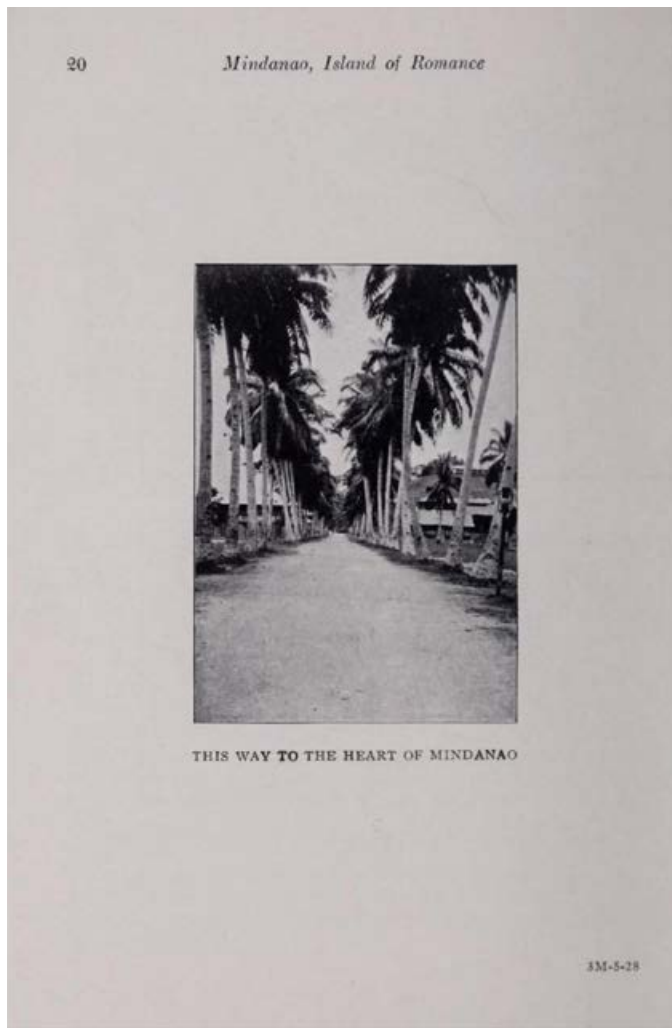
fig. 4: Last page of Laubach's *Mindanao, Island of Romance,* (c.a. 1927). Facsimile.

> … Here you have at your disposal a tool which is being fashioned into an instrument for self-perfection. But it must never be thought, I submit, that this tool is or will become perfect. It will take all the vigilance of the founders, the faculty and the students to see that your standards are continually raised, that your instrument for learning is continually ameliorated so as to render you greater service at less cost in time and energy.
>
> I hope that those students who came to this University, and that those students who will leave it for further studies, will approach their work with sharp vengeance – vengeance for the torpor and indifference of the past; vengeance for having temporarily lost their rightful position amongst the intellectual elite of the country [...].[19]

The Aga Khan's endowment to the university constructed the purpose-built repository of cultural heritage.[20] On March 23, 1969, less than a decade since its foundation and a few months before the public opening of the Cultural Center of the Philippines in the capital Manila, the Mindanao State University inaugurated the Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts. The non-metropolitan Marawi instantiated development: a snapshot of the regional museum's building signaled a comprehensive outlook towards progress.

This moment accomplished the geobody's plot to participate in the afterlife of subjectivities implanted and cultivated in and for Marawi. Ahead of its own death, the museum reclaimed its "rightful position" in the ante-normative placement of local and national history. By 1982, based on the only document that I could find describing the operations of the Aga Khan, the museum had been functioning as a professional institution with nineteen members following a seven-point mandate.[21]

1. To collect and preserve folkart [*sic*] specimens and artifacts of the Muslim groups and other indigenous minorities of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan regions.

2. To organize systematic collection that could be used by scholars, students and researchers on Muslim culture.

3. To encourage research and others and to lend assistance in the revival and conservation of historical folkarts [*sic*] and cultural treasures.

4. To spread knowledge about the peoples of these regions in an effort towards cultural integration.

5. To undertake cultural and educational exhibitions.

6. To conduct lectures and demonstrations to the visitors, students, and others about the significant and scientific values of objects in the Museum holdings.

7. To periodically orient Museum personnel by sending to museums in the Metro Manila and other Philippine museums in order to observe the latest trends and techniques for enhancing such activities in the Aga Khan Museum.

fig. 5: Prince Karim Aga Khan IV greeted by local officials in Marawi, (1963). Facsimile of an original photograph from the Aga Khan Museum Library, exhibited as part of The Mamitua Saber Project (2019). Commissioned by Singapore Biennale. Courtesy of Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts.

In the Aga Khan Museum Annual Report for CY 1982-1983 authored by Dr. Mamitua Saber, who signed as Dean of Research and Director of Museums, the museum's vitality had been recorded according to its bureaucratic values: defining responsibilities as organizational dynamics that unite a history of studying and the collective pedagogy of self-studies in its intramural centrality as a university hub. The content of the report is a site that reveals an institutional x-ray categorizing the museum's production of studies. These activities manifest in services that position the Aga Khan Museum in the web of conflicting qualities of the modern. Saber arranged these headings in descending order of attention to the ebb-and-flow of a living organization: Functions of the Museum; Major Accomplishments for CY 1983; Special Exhibits; Achievement Awards; Three Regular Exhibitions of the Museum; Daily Activities and Museum Performance; Personnel; Detailed AKM Personnel; Personnel Temporarily Occupying an NSM (Natural Science Museum) Item; Personnel Part-Time Detailed with URC (University Research Center); Personnel on Study Leave; and Problems of the Museum. The proficiency in enumeration also indicated the future of the museum. The services of a trained conservator had been named to "effectively" and "urgently" resolve the eventual destruction of artifacts in the museum. Saber concluded the report with another call for repair, segregated in terms of request and emergency from conservation and preservation problems of the museum: "The building is leaking from the roof."[22] In order to stay alive, the museum must be extramural.

Demanding the university's attention, the two-story, general museum enacted an empirical starting point for a *theory* of the museum. This theory dramatized the craft in knowledge; Saber had earlier expressed the same cry he registered upon discovering

fig. 6: One of the galleries of the Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts, undated. Facsimile of an original photograph from the Aga Khan Museum Library, exhibited as part of The Mamitua Saber Project (2019). Commissioned by Singapore Biennale. Courtesy of Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts.

the leaking roof in a 1963 letter addressed to Dr. Antonio Isidro, the University's first president: "The art research is an extensive cultural inquiry. Subjects are unlimited, but we need the proper resources in personnel and material to do this job."[23] The museum recognized itself as the property; it could therefore authorize relations among its properties. The museum abstained in interpreting a territory, and in pursuing interpretations of what had happened to social, economic, and political agenda in a new territory. The theory now is that *this* museum is territorial. Involved in self-romance, in extra-territorial affairs, too. The Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts had suddenly gotten a reprieve in the historical construction, description, and performance of multiple modernist values. After all, the museum was busy. The museum embraced its existence as "the center of visitation" and "the busiest office/academic unit"[24] in the university. The current business was not enslaved in self-testifying trauma and survival. From its location in the formerly occupied military camp—leaking out of its very territory, the museum invented the property to be studied, traded, saved: "It is an exciting adventure to read the meaning of native designs as we observe and interview enthusiastic informants."[25] The Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts improvises a law of attraction: *This is how I want you to be attracted to me.* Stengers identifies this to be the "arts of protection against capture."[26] This is not very detached from its actual contemporary appreciation as Lanao province's main tourist attraction. If a theory of the museum had always been formed in the attraction, enjoyment, and perfection of relational properties, could we, readers and writers who profess to the curatorial, see these forces as being the necessary guide in understanding the eloquence of things that are cultivated, protected, and owned by another modern museum?

fig. 7: A well-attended exhibition at the museum, (c.a. 1983). Facsimile of an original photograph from the Aga Khan Museum Library, exhibited as part of The Mamitua Saber Project (2019). Commissioned by Singapore Biennale. Courtesy of Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts.

Fabricating Tributaries

Correspondence survives the past of the Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts in Marawi. They have maintained the theory of a museum through multiple oral reports of looting and institutional neglect. Dysfunctionality is not an unorthodox determination of this knowledge that the moderns delivered in the geography and memory of the non-metropolitan. The museum demonstrated epistemology, and it continues to do so in this writing. For the country's first Islamic arts museum, its position defines the kind of knowledge that is essential for the immediate Mindanao culture area. Among conservationists, who are upgraded in the discursive agencies of conflict studies, they need to prevent the permanent loss of this knowledge. Failure to do so eliminates the candidacy of the Aga Khan Museum in cultural exchange. What we have not realized, just yet, is how the fabrications of the museum could linger in the air.

Lake Lanao quietly witnessed the narrations of the ancient, the traditional, and the modern who took residence on the soil it has fertilized for centuries. The lake—whose shores accommodated the museum—might be illiterate, so its sensuality is acknowledged mathematically in its attendance to withholding resistance: to be or not be polluted. When the lake's ecological efficiency is high, pollutants do not suffocate; connections are seamlessly facilitated; organisms thrive. Inadvertently, resistance is a matter of belief in disruption; productive in general, it conceptualizes reterritorialization within a system. Like pollutants, resistance requires navigation or abolition that leads us to questions, such as, How do we go about/around this? The Aga Khan Museum is not 'biologically' equipped to perform resistance. Its teleological quietude weathers the filth, hardness, and smell of the lake's water. I have come to accept that the other side of the museum's position, earlier deliberated as generative knowledge, is nonperformance. The politics of knowledge that hosts our "critical inquiry" could be easily embarrassed by such entanglement of positions. The museum decided to be both intoxicated and sober in experiencing the things and feelings it had inherited from the past. With no interest in decolonizing, radicalizing, and changing a museum—whatever we may think of this 'inappropriateness'—the Aga Khan Museum cuts right through these fabrications, and tastes its own spell. Such dangerous courage prepares us to be lured in a theory of this museum to transform our address to it. We are stuck with it. And like the rest of us still reading this at a tributary, these omniscient fabrications re-cycle vengeance. The Aga Khan Museum procreates poisonous and nurturing subjectivities that participate in larger streams of social, cultural, and political ideologies and processes. Preserving this to be the fact of the museum theorizes its "torpor and indifference"[27] as the most intoxifying refrain in grand curatorial professions that conserve the museum in a rupture of modernist divides in Mindanao. The museum comes to us irresistibly with ante-curatorial forces that simultaneously contract us to and solicit from us a peer valuation that cannot be extracted from the etymological sameness of legality and loyalty.

My ongoing research in the museum's curatorial history brought my attention to the letters that were dispatched from and received by the institution's administration. So far, I have only collected an "insignificant" amount of these materials dated between 1971 and 1979. They could further a theory of the museum I have been belaboring here; however, these data remain unreliable in gathering consensus around the strength of their materiality and statements. These letters are supposed to be transparent in order to justify and verify that the Aga Khan Museum is just like us, a peer that can pass the trial of witnesses and colleagues. But these materials come into existence when they escaped the ongoing deterioration of the museum and when I captured the museum in my curatorial milieu. I prefer to drain these letters to support the theoretical tenure of

the museum in our practices of knowledge that give forms and spaces to things and energies publicly. Ideally, the result portrays a museum that can defend, refuse, and speak for itself. And indirectly—or at its worst, the museum fabricates new spells that sustain our theory of the encounter with a peer.

The Aga Khan Museum letters engorge the network of tributaries where the museum's curatorial forces flow. One writing modality palpable in these notes documented the confidence of the museum. I noticed this in the dispersal of requests and reminders to colleagues and other institutions. The acquisition of new or additional information and materials is weaved through "a wish to know more" that consequently asks to share resources in "please let me know." These desires are enriched in the deliberation of mutual assistance and benefit based on skilled "note-taking" and "observations" that frame the museum's ongoing study of objects. Reaching out doubly describes the museum's encounter with its peers and the impact of things that they have in com-mon. Compatibility ensues from introducing comparativity of needs and limitations. Sending the letters below insists that knowing each other and committing each other's names to memory satisfy the sender's and recipients' cultural agenda.

> In 1971 I had an opportunity to visit your museum [...]. It was however a brief visit taking notes about some of your exhibits which are closely related to the ethnological collections in our museum in this part of the Philippines....[28]

fig. 8: Dr. Mamitua Saber visiting a local weaver, undated. Facsimile of an original photograph from the Aga Khan Museum Library, exhibited as part of The Mamitua Saber Project (2019). Commissioned by Singapore Biennale. Courtesy of Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts.

fig. 9: Saber with Archbishop of Manila Jaime Cardinal Sin, (1983). Facsimile of an original photograph from the Aga Khan Museum Library, exhibited as part of The Mamitua Saber Project (2019). Commissioned by Singapore Biennale. Courtesy of Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts.

May I remind you that if you shall have spare time [...] you may take notes or observations about the development of the well-known Bishop Museum in Honolulu for the benefit of the Aga Khan and Natural Science Museums when you shall return to our university campus.[29]

Somebody who might know us and our folk art manuscript sent a "List of Publications of Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University" (New Haven, Connecticut) whereby he/she (?) put a check on the title: Adam, Marie Jeanne: System and Meaning in Sumba Textile Design: A Study in Traditional Indonesian Art (1969) [...].

It will be a good reference for our own study of folk art, especially 'system and meaning' in Maranao art, if you or your office can help us order the book. We can reimburse you[...].[30]

Research programs were also communicated in these letters. These pen-and-paper networking opportunities circulate the trends and gaps in the sphere of initiatives. More importantly, this platform records the profile and methodology of the museum,

which discriminates "good references" for their own study. It aligns the agenda of the Aga Khan Museum, and opens it up to a chance for collaboration with other institutions. The museum takes a step further by naming its contribution to shared resources as reimbursement. As a result, it cleverly turns a deficit into a loan that could be revitalized as the lender's future asset. In manufacturing the needs of its peers, the museum integrates its expertise in the holdings of other institutions. These letters exceed networking, as the Aga Khan Museum articulates and validates the expertise and access of other practitioners. Projecting mutual appreciation informs the recipient of the seriousness that the museum allocates in making and presenting research. This artificiality when declaring affectations is a creative undertaking that conjures the museum-as-apparatus, especially its research direction, into an assemblage of usefulness. Reading the next batch of excerpts equips us with an assemblage that 'forces' us to feel the effects of the museum's fabrications instead of contemplating its intentionality of becoming useful in the letters. This is the tool of the curatorial. It echoes Stenger's defense of the witches' magic; in these letters, I dare say that writing the curatorial forces "respect(s) and honour(s) the tools [the museum's peers] fabricate in order for those tools to induce what will fabricate them."[31]

> … In this connection, we will appreciate very much if you please lend AKM some of your collections relevant to the above-mentioned materials. Kindly let us know.[32]

> The copy of Lanao History note is extremely useful. With your authorship and full credit, we hope to edit and publish it in any of our publications for the present and future generations to know and appreciate. Of course, we will add some data from our own file. For instance, when your (sic) said there were 2 Spanish boats (Blanco and Lanao) brought to Lake Lanao, we'll make it 4 to include the Corcuera and Almonte.

> … Please give us information on how the Blanco was sunk. Was it deliberately sunk by the usaffe or attacked by Japanese planes? I did not know the latter case and wish to know more about it.[33]

> This is a belated acknowledgment with thanks [to] the two color print pictures you have taken.…

> One of our projects now is gathering folklore materials including the *Darangen*, but we are not translating [it] yet.… A Ph.D. in Literature who published a volume of Philippine folktales joined my research staff.… is helping me in this folklore project. We shall share you some of our future publications.

> Besides your great Maranao dictionary, do you plan to compile a dictionary of *darangen* words and phrases? If you have no plan for it, may you give us your expert suggestion on how to do it. I have the old, former assistant of Dr. Laubach who understands every word of the epic, while most young Maranaos are fastly losing their understanding of the language of this oral literature.[34]

> This is a reply to your letter.… requesting our cooperation for your project on 'Factbook of Mindanao and Sulu'. Congratulations for such a very laudable project.

> Per your request we will help go over the materials for the entry volume on portrait of the Lake Lanao towns for comments and suggestions as   well as in

providing the introduction to the volume. Of course before writing a fitting introduction, I have to see the materials which…. have been started and expected for publication this coming September. We will extend any other needed cooperation within our means.[35]

These fragments connect us to the museum's efforts in institution-building. Aside from fostering relationships, these documents reaffirm the competitiveness of the museum in an attempt to obtain support and complementarity in the cultural landscape where its peers operate. The museum carries both institutional and linkage variables. These letters assemble a tiny universe of the Aga Khan Museum's institution-building, where the workings in leadership, doctrine, resources, programs, and internal structure could be traced in operations that are enabling, functional, normative, and diffuse. The disorganized and scarce documentation in Mindanao's history of custodianship does not eliminate my impression of the museum's public relations tactics to stimulate interests in its contact list. Thereby, this modest public engagement converges different valuations of the museum's doctrine into a survey of human and physical resources that consolidate ante-normative and -curatorial dynamics into sustainable services. Such fullness in the curatorial force of these letters heightens the authority of the museum's pragmatic arts. I highlight these inquiries of the sender in an attempt to restore our faith in the power of "inhabiting again what was devastated"[36] (to institute some things again) in contrast to the more aggressive force of "taking back." These are more perceptible in the following excerpts that outline the museum's procedures, which invite cooperation and distribution of responsibility.

> … While we are interested in their history and ethnography, their present status of development and progress could be the basis of a future research project about them from written sources and perhaps through a field visit to their region in Sabah?
>
> … Are their scholars and writers among them in English with whom we might communicate?"[37]
>
> … it will be unethical for us to publish Mr. Funtecha's thesis on Lanao history unless we have a joint permission by your University and himself as the author. We simply kept our Xerox copy in our reference shelf of materials dealing with Lanao/Mindanao history.
>
> Yet, if we have your joint permission, we may publish a limit of 1000 copies, mostly for exchange of publication with those of other institutions locally and abroad, and never on a profit plan…
>
> If you have a list of other graduate papers…. please let us know. If they be within our research publication interest about Mindanao [,] a cooperative arrangements [sic] for USC and MSU mutual benefits may be covered up by a joint agreement.[38]

In these prolific linkages, the growing cultural and intellectual ecology of the museum recruits the Aga Khan Museum's academic freedom. The museum now—recently instituted, networked, and professionalized—conceptualizes agreements on sociality. It means that it can issue care and interest, which is binding and valid, in all matters that the museum prospects to be owned. Impropriety is a condition of freedom, and to muster the courage to say when to be free exhibits the most obscene ownership of

freedom. The social obligation of the Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts is tied to this curatorial force that decides how and when to expose things. The reality that it would take time (or another temporality) to ascertain if these letters had been read, answered, or opened by the museum's intended recipients fabricate the utmost shamelessness of this freedom: the museum can serially and continuously disappear; the museum can pathologically plagiarize its presence. But the theory of a museum remains true—that it writes socius. In these letters, the museum existed in the middle of feedback. Its productive output duplicates knowledge sources that complicate approaches to discourse. Its most noxious presence can be 'smelled' in instances that cast doubt in the freedom of theory and history taking place at a museum. Responding and writing unsolicited letters, suggestions and materials short-circuit the feedback in a milieu:

> Thanks again for the receipt of your note and the Xerox copy of the 'feedback' letter of Ben Bronson about a historic copy of the Quran in the Field Museum of National History in Chicago.

> Regarding her inquiry …. we cannot be certain whether the antique Quran copy really belonged to the Sultan of Bayang who died along with other Muslim warriors in their defense against the attacking American forces in the Battle of Bayang in October 1902 (not 1901).

> … Among the warriors of Bayang were religious leaders who may have brought inside the Kota (fort) their copies of the Quran, one of them the copy brought home as a "trophy" by one of the American troopers.

> We will withhold publicity about the Holy Book till it actually reaches Manila or Marawi City.[39]

> …That [the sipa] is played by [the Security Force and the Fire Department] in modified form using a net line tennis or volleyball in school athletics, as it was first developed by the Manila Police Departments. [They] may be encouraged by the Physical Education Department to perpetuate the classical manner of sipa-playing for the specific purpose of preserving-conserving such a genuine cultural heritage. The youth in physical education may also be encouraged to learn and participate in this artistic way of exhibition…[40]

> … We thank you heartily for sending us your papers … I read them with the keenest interest and found them enlightening. You are right in trying to put up a service commitment towards the preservation and functional use for education of museum materials.[41]

Working curatorially from the periphery[42] confirms that the creative heritage of a non-metropolitan, modern museum expands. To demand similarities, to ask for copies, to demand for a return: these are acts that interfere with the obligations in, of, and to modern territories. In reappropriating a theory of the museum, the Aga Khan Museum in Marawi transmits its struggle "affectionately," "sincerely," "truly," and "respectfully" to its *pagariya* (friends).[43] These signatures used to be signals of empty closures in correspondence; yet the museum's curatorial forces creatively resist these conclusions. I don't mean generalizing performances of opening up or subversion. The museum refuses to be alone and uncomfortable. Or, not to be uncomfortably alone. These extracts from the desk blow up the "technical" problems of creating, fostering, and sustaining forces that have separated us from adventures, like emptying out septic tanks.

In one of the letters addressed to a museum friend-colleague, the sender, Mamitua Saber, mentioned that "a blown up copy" of the picture he had asked would be ready by the time Saber received his friend's annotation to the image. Reassuring his friend that fabrications and techniques eventually unite forces, he wrote: "You don't hurry."

> …May I know from you what are similar cases you have helped to resolve and how? Were said cases tried in court or decided through simple administrative procedures? What are the rights of the natives over their ancestral lands? Under what laws? etc.[44]

> You will remember that from a copy of the *National Geographic Magazine….* you showed me a 1901 picture of Gov. Gene. William H. Taft shaking hands with an unidentified Moro (Maranao) datu who was influential that time. I realized the picture is of historical value. Could you please copy it for me?

> At the Aga Khan Museum, we are developing an Iconographic (pictorial) exhibit of historical pictures during the part American time….

> I am writing to many sources of pictures. In a separate note, please note the source of the picture. I will have a blown-up copy when it reaches here. You don't hurry. Thanks [45]

> Please be reminded of the key to the Main door of the Aga Khan Museum you borrowed sometime in 1976.

> With the arrivals of our new recruits, more officials are needing possession of a duplicate key [...].[46]

fig. 10: View of Lanao road, (c.a. 1963). Facsimile of an original photograph from the Aga Khan Museum Library, exhibited as part of The Mamitua Saber Project (2019). Commissioned by Singapore Biennale.
Courtesy of Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts.

fig. 11: First batch of students who entered Mindanao State University with Lake Lanao behind them, (c.a. 1965—1966). Facsimile of an original photograph from the Aga Khan Museum Library, exhibited as part of The Mamitua Saber Project (2019). Commissioned by Singapore Biennale. Courtesy of Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts.

... The air conditioning unit for which the Property and Supply Office has stock is needed at Aga Khan Building for the following purposes:

a.) The Storeroom for stuffed birds and other animals needs cool air to preserve the specimens and make it comfortable for the storekeeper, museum guides, and visitors;

b.) When they (sic) are many visitors to the building looking at the exhibits the inside portion of the building becomes warm and uncomfortable [...]. [47]

This is to report to your office that the two septic tanks in my cottage are now filled up.... and need periodic emptying [...].[48]

Vernacular Loneliness[49]

Curatorial forces need not approach conservation, preservation, and study in haste. What I learned from the organisms in tributaries, who feed upon the nourishment of more defined bodies of water, is that our energy will always be transformed and recycled in parts. Being *partly* is always a wholeness that continuously leaks; periodically emptying itself out to be residual forces that nonetheless reclaim the rightful amount of freedom: less and more, good or bad does not matter. The technical existence of the museum in Mindanao is never extremely authentic. To believe that it was never marginal—exclusively through the letters that could have been fabricated, and that is technically so, because no one could visit the museum right now. The loneliness of the vernacular nourishes the creativity of a museum: a theory of the Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts in Marawi is the *theory* of slowing down forces that affect us *curatorially*.

———————————

Notes

1 Asuncion An-Lim, "Limnological Study of Water Leaving Lake Lanao through Agus River," *Mindanao Journal* 1, no. 4 (June—April 1975): 12-41.

2 Roberto Pontenila, editorial notes and comments to *Mindanao Journal* (Marawi: University Research Center, 1974).

3 An-Lim, "Limnological," 12-41

4 An overview of Marawi City can be accessed on Wikipedia. "Marawi," Wikimedia Foundation, last modified July 5, 2020, 5:36, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marawi.

5 An-Lim, "Limnological," 39.

6 Isabelle Stengers, "Experimenting with Refrains: Subjectivity and the Challenge of Escaping Modern Dualism," *Subjectivity* 22, no. 1 (May 2008): 51. https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2008.6

7 Ibid., 40.

8 Ibid., 42.

9 Ibid,2.

10 To read the entire law, you may access Republic Act 1893 online. "Republic Act No. 1893," Arellano Law Foundation, accessed June 27, 2020, https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra1957/ra_1893_1957.html.

11 The original version is Republic Act 1387. "Republic Act No. 1387," Arellano Law Foundation, accessed June 27, 2020, https://www.lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra1955/ra_1387_1955.html

12 Republic Act 1893, section 2.

13 Ibid., section 4.

14 Mamitua Saber, "Aga Khan Museum: Repository of Cultural Heritage," Abstract. *The Journal of History* 22, no. 1-2 (1977). https://ejournals.ph/article.php?id=5049.

15 A short introduction to Laubach can be accessed online. "Frank Laubach," Wikimedia Foundation, last modified April 2, 2020, 21:52, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Laubach.

16 Frank Laubach, *Mindanao, Island of Romance* (Boston: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1927), 1-20.

17 Laubach wrote these words under a section titled *"Mindanao Today."* Laubach, "Mindanao," 4.

18 This is also His Highness' first address to be fully understood, as it was not delivered in Latin. "Presidential address by His Highness the Aga Khan at the 1st Anniversary of the Mindanao University," Aga Khan Foundation, accessed June 27, 2020, https://www.akdn.org/speech/his-highness-aga-khan/first-anniversary-mindanao-university.

19 Ibid.

20 The term "repository of cultural heritage" was documented in a 1977 journal article authored by Saber. A copy of the text still needs to be recovered.

21 Mamitua Saber. *Aga Khan Museum Annual Report for CY 1982—1983* ([Marawi?]: Administrative report, c.a. 1982), Reproduction, Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts, 1-7.

22 Saber, *Aga Khan Museum Annual,* 7.

23 Mamitua Saber, Personal correspondence in *Papers on Maranaw Art, Social Organization and Cultural Traditions,* ed. Mamitua Saber ([Marawi?]: Mindanao State University, n.d.), 4.

24 The report also documented that the museum was recognized as the most functional unit/office by the University's Committee on Awards. Saber, *Aga Khan Museum Annual,* 2.

25 Saber, personal correspondence, 4.

26 Stengers, "Experimenting," 56.

27 Rehearsing the words of His Highness Aga Khan IV during the convocation in Marawi. It is a call to activate romance, the same romance that Laubach performed, which the missionary also used to describe the relationship of the Philippine national hero, Jose Rizal, to Mindanao: "Rizal gave Mindanao its romance." See Laubach, "Mindanao," 3.

28 Mamitua Saber, to the Museum Curator, Sabah Museum, Kota Kinabalu, August 5, 1977. Aga Khan Museum Library.

29 Saber, to Macmod Maguindanao, February 22, 1977. Aga Khan Museum Library.

30 Saber, to David Szanton, March 29, 1971. Aga Khan Museum Library.

31 Stengers, "Experimenting," 52.

32 Saber, to various university offices, August 23, 1977. Aga Khan Museum Library.

33 Saber, to Brod Antal, May 29, 1978. Aga Khan Museum Library.

34 Saber, to Howard McKaughan, September 2, 1977. Aga Khan Museum Library.

35 Saber, to Emilio V. Corrales. Aga Khan Museum Library.

36 Stengers, "Experimenting," 58.

37 Saber, to the Director, Sabah State Library, January 24, 1979. Aga Khan Museum Library.

38 Saber, to Joseph Baumgartner, January 25, 1979. Aga Khan Museum Library.

39 Saber, to Jesus Peralta, January 31, 1979. Aga Khan Museum Library.

40 Saber, to H. H. Ele, January 25, 1979.

41 Saber, to Jesus M. Merino Antolinez. December 13, 1978.

42 In another attempt to articulate cultural work in Mindanao, see Renan Laru-an, "An Impossible Profession," in *Place of Region in the Contemporary,* ed. Patrick Flores (Quezon City: Philippine Contemporary Art Network, 2019), 134-149.

43 "Your pagariya" including the quoted words above were used to sign the letters.

44 Saber, to Francisco Claver, January 18, 1979. Aga Khan Museum Library.

45 Saber, to David Cruz, March 1, 1978. Aga Khan Museum Library.

46 Saber, to Angelito Flores, August 11, 1978, Aga Khan Museum Library.

47 Saber, to M. Tamano, July 31, 1972. Aga Khan Museum Library.

48 Saber, to the Chief Engineer, February 19, 1979. Aga Khan Museum Library.

49 Fred Moten: What if freedom is just vernacular loneliness? See Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nonperformance" (talk at MoMA LIVE, Museum of Modern Art, New York, streamed live September 25, 2015), accessed June 20, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2leiFByIIg.

Renan Laru-an is a researcher working curatorially from the Philippines. He is the Public Engagement and Artistic Formation Coordinator of the Philippine Contemporary Art Network. He studies 'insufficient' and 'subtracted' images and subjects at the juncture of development and integration projects through long-term inquiries, such as *Promising Arrivals, Violent Departures* (ongoing) and *The Artist and the Social Dreamer* (2017) among others. He has (co-)curated festivals and exhibitions, including *But Ears Have No Lids: Maayan Amir and Ruti Sela,* PCAN/UP Vargas Museum, Manila (2021); the 6th Singapore Biennale: *Every Step in the Right Direction*, Singapore (2019); *A Tripoli Agreement*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah (2018); the 8th OK. Video – Indonesia Media Arts Festival, Jakarta (2017); and the 1st Lucban Assembly: *PAMUMUHUNAN* (*Waiting for a capital*), Quezon Province (2015). His scholarship has been supported by the Foundation for Arts Initiatives, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, and other fellowships. He edited *Writing Presently* (PCAN, 2019), an anthology of recent writing on contemporary art in the Philippines.

2
The Ecology Crisis:
Can Art Fill the
Communication Gap?

Wonders in the Heavens and in the Earth: Notes from the Dormant Exhibition
Sebastian Cichocki

The exhibition "The Penumbral Age" at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw was not held at the originally scheduled time (20 March – 7 June 2020) due to the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic. When the exhibition finally opened on the 5th of June 2020, the new situation affected the number of works presented at the exhibition and the manner of presentation. The very last weekend of the show, 12-13th of September, flags of Extinction Rebellion movement were added to the display, as a gesture of solidarity with the XR autumn wave of civil disobedience, the biggest mobilisation worldwide since the historic protests of October 2019.

In 1970, a group of Buddhist monks from the Shingon and Nichiren schools went on a pilgrimage to Japan, from Toyama to Kumamoto. They adopted the name Jusatsu Kito Sodan, i.e., Group of Monks Bringing the Curse of Death. It was one of the most radical but also poetic ecological and anti-capitalist manifestations in the history of Japan. Equipped with conch instruments and books with the curses of Abhichar (based on, among others, Vedic rituals from the 9th century), the monks wandered from factory to factory where they camped and performed their ceremonies. Their intention was to bring death to factory directors through prayers. The activities of Jusatsu Kito Sodan were a response to the environmental pollution and mass poisonings in Japan after a series of epidemics in the mid-1960s. New diseases appeared, such as *itai-itai*, caused by cadmium-contaminated rice, a side effect of hard coal mining. Japanese industrialists connected to, inter alia, American businesses or those protected by the government remained unpunished. One such example is, among others, the activities of Chisso Corporation, which for thirty-four years—aware of the damage it was causing—discharged wastewater with a high mercury content into the Shiranui Sea. This poisoned thousands of people and caused severe Minamata disease in many. The actions of Jusatsu Kito Sodan can be analyzed in terms of a radical artistic experiment or performance that combines spirituality as well as a general concern for the well-being of people and the natural environment.[1]

We live in a time of planetary change affecting each and every one of us. Climate change influences every sphere of life, including thinking about art: the systems of its production and distribution, its social function, and its relation to other disciplines, especially science. *The Penumbral Age* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw[2] is composed of artistic works from the last five decades, based on observations and visualizations of the changes underway on planet Earth. It was supposed to provide a space for discussion on "managing the irreversible" and new forms of solidarity, empathy, and togetherness in the face of the climate crisis. The installation was suspended a few days before the opening scheduled for March 20, 2020, due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. We were not unaware of the irony of the situation: the consequences of violence against nature, the leading theme of the exhibition, have led to institutional paralysis.

The title of the exhibition was drawn from the book *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway,[3] where the protagonists from the future date the "period of the penumbra" from the "shadow of anti-

intellectualism that fell over the once-Enlightened techno-scientific nations of the Western world during the second half of the twentieth century, preventing them from acting on the scientific knowledge available at the time" and leading to tragedy. We are witnesses to this process: scientific findings have ceased to be regarded as dispositive and do not persuade people to act. As the American writer and historian Ibram X. Kendi wrote in *The Atlantic*, analyzing skepticism about climate change or outright rejection of the threat (climate denialism)[4]: "Science becomes belief. Belief becomes science. Everything becomes nothing. Nothing becomes everything. All can believe and disbelieve all. We all can know everything and know nothing. Everyone lives as an expert on every subject." The crisis in the culture of expertise and science is reinforced by fundamentalist movements denying such scientific findings as evolution and the harmfulness of air pollution, and disputing man's impact on climate. Clearly, statistics, charts, graphs, and shocking photo and film reports from places affected by ecological disaster no longer make much of an impact on the imagination.

Observations by artists are akin to those of scientists, but they typically do not confront viewers with an excess of numbers, soaring bar graphs, or "pornographic" images of poverty and devastation. Art has "strange tools"[5] at its disposal, which we can use to discern "wonders in the heavens and signs on the earth." When ordinary tools of dialogue and persuasion fail, artists enable an "imaginative leap" by working on the emotions, confronting the incomprehensible and the unknown. As the theoretician of visual culture Nicholas Mirzoeff puts it,[6] we must "unsee" how the past "has taught us to see the world, and begin to imagine a different way to be with what used to be called nature." Art can help by organizing the work of imagination, sometimes more effectively than the tools developed by science and environmental policy.

Suzanne Husky, *La Noble Pastorale (The Noble Pastoral),* 2016/2017, tapestry. Courtesy of the artist.

One of the key historical references for the exhibition were the activities of the Slovenian OHO group—active from 1966–71 (these dates are rather arbitrary), described as "transcendental conceptualism." The development of the group can be divided into three rather distinct phases. In the first phase, members of the group devoted themselves to "reism," a philosophical and artistic project based on a non-anthropocentric view of the world and discovering things as they are, a world of things, where there would be no hierarchical difference between people and things—seeing things beyond their function. They devoted themselves to, inter alia, creating "popular art" that could be found on matchboxes sold in bazaars. In the second phase, the group established a dialogue with the contemporary artistic avant-garde: the artists used the principles of Arte Povera, Land Art, Conceptual Art, Anti-form, etc. Many of their activities took place in nature and consisted of poetic and transient interventions using readily available materials: strings or sticks. In the last phase, OHO members undertook to leave the world of art through a combination of Conceptual Art and a kind of esoteric and ecological approach. The group's composition was changing, especially in the first phase, when OHO functioned more as an artistic "movement," which was attended by representatives of various disciplines: poets, filmmakers, sculptors. The documentation presented at the exhibition focuses on the last phase of the group's existence. In 1970, OHO was invited to participate in the exhibition *Information* at MoMA in New York. In response, the artists then focused on activities they referred to as *šolanje* (education), organizing two summer sessions in the villages of Zarica and Čezsoča. They did not work on any specific project, but in a conscious and conceptual way approached living, cooking, walking, and breathing together, looking for patterns of behavior and relationships with each other and with nature. They were primarily mindfulness exercises, through which they trained in order to perceive OHO as a «collective body.» The group was just starting an international career when the members decided they should abandon art as a separate area and really enter life; therefore, in April of 1971, the main members of the group settled on an abandoned farm in the western part of Slovenia and started a community—the Šempas Family. Meditation, cultivation of land, daily drawing sessions, weaving, ceramics, and animal husbandry were all a continuation of OHO's hitherto searches into posthumanism, spirituality, and land art. After a year, the family went their separate ways; only Marko Pogačnik remained in the village, continuing to work for the benefit of the local community and environment while attempting to «heal the land» through his original «lithopuncture» method.

The Penumbral Age exhibition spans five decades and highlights the strengthening of environmental reflections in the art of the late 1960s and early 1970s as well as the second decade of the 21st century. The first period is linked with the intensification of pacifist, feminist, and anti-racist movements and the formation of the contemporary ecological movement. The first Earth Day was held in 1970, Greenpeace was founded in 1971, and the next year a think tank, the Club of Rome, published the report *The Limits to Growth*, describing the challenges posed for humanity by the exhaustion of natural resources. At the same time, new artistic phenomena arose, such as conceptualism, anti-form, land art and earth art. While introducing "geological" thinking about art, artists used impermanent organic materials or sought to entirely dematerialize the work of art. Many of those proposals forever changed the thinking about the role of art institutions and the relationship between artistic practice, professional work, and activism. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, treating household chores and motherhood as part of her artistic work, Bonnie Ora Sherk, transforming urban wastelands into green oases, and Agnes Denes, combining art with cybernetics and agriculture, were all part of the countercultural revolution, which ultimately failed to live up to the hopes placed

in it. For us, land art is much more than a stream of Western art emblematic of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Following the thought of the Pakistani artist and activist Rasheed Araeen, drawing from his "ecoaesthetics" agenda, we seek "global art for a changing planet." Araeen formulated an ecoaesthetics program, expressed in a series of essays making up the publication *Art Beyond Art. Ecoaesthetics: A Manifesto for the 21st Century*.[7] In it, the artist postulates going beyond the supremacy of the Homo sapiens species and unleashing the "creative energy of the free collective imagination." Araeen's program is anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, as well as anti-capitalist. The system—wherein art functions— itself is criticized, which maintains hierarchies, glorifies growth and progress, powered by the intellectual fuel of modernity, separating creative energies from everyday life processes and petrifies them into "narego"—the narcissistic ego of the artist. Araeen uses the terms nominalism and cosmoruralism. The first one consists in launching useful processes—fluid, lasting, based on sustainable development—by artists, then implemented by local communities. For example, in 2001, Araeen proposed—utilizing his engineering experience—building a dam in the Balochistan desert, which would help retain water from periodic rivers, thus providing better living conditions for the nomadic population. The dam would be both a sculpture and a fully functional engineering solution. The second proposal, cosmoruralism, is a complete vision of a network of cooperatives and ecological villages based on fair cooperation between the Global North and Global South, which would result in, amongst other things, the reforestation of the Sahara.

Actions connected with the "canonization" of land art, such as Richard Long's *Throwing a Stone around MacGillycuddy's Reeks*, 1977, in which the artist followed a stone he tossed before him, the "terraforming" plans of Robert Morris, or Gerry Schum's television programme (an example of the use of new media to expose audiences to "organic" art practiced in deserts or forests), are accompanied in *The Penumbral Age* exhibition by works from the 21st century, employing ecological education (Futurefarmers), protest (Akira Tsuboi), and involving spirituality and esoterics (Teresa Murak). Their works help visualize what seems omnipresent and overwhelming. The field recording is particularly efficient tool of transferring these ineluctable changes. One of the exhibition participants, the interdisciplinary scholar Anja Kanngieser (based in Wollongong, Australia) works with such issues as violence against indigenous communities and the natural environment of the Pacific region, related to the extraction of fossil fuels from the ocean floor or the consequences of nuclear tests done in the 20th century. Kanngieser was born and spent her early childhood on a boat sailing the Pacific. She remembers the sounds of the ocean, always mixed with the noise of the walkie-talkie that her father, the sailor, and electrician operated. Her work consists of field recordings, interviews, and turning scientific data into sound. *The Penumbral Age* exhibition includes the artist's field recording, recorded early in the morning in Tarawa, the capital of the Republic of Kiribati in the Pacific. The Republic is on the front line of climate change: the ocean level has risen by three meters, and the island is regularly submerged in salt water. The water enters flats, hospitals, drinking water wells, fields, and gardens, destroying crops. Anja Kanngieser explains: "The people of Kiribati with whom I spoke do not want to leave the land of their ancestors, where they have lived for thousands of years. Some elders told me that they wanted to stay on their islands and did not want to talk about migration, that people were happy in their homes and that they didn't know what would come but they put their trust in God. Kiribati's share of global greenhouse gas emissions is disproportionately low to the effects that the islanders face today."[8] According to climate forecasts, Kiribati will disappear completely under water by 2050.
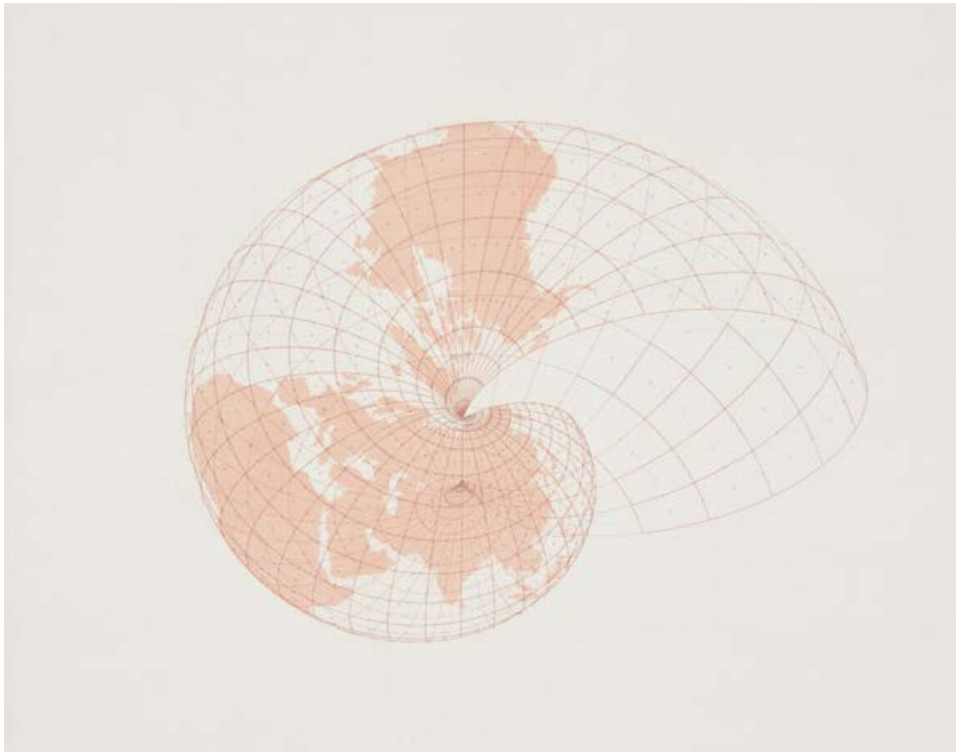
Agnes Denes, *Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space – Map Projections: The Snail,* 1976, four-color lithograph
on Rives BFK paper, edition of 48/50. Courtesy of the artist and Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York

Artists sensitive to environmental changes also address such issues as climate debt, post-anthropocentrism, the unavoidable exhaustion of fossil-fuel deposits, the effects of limitless accumulation of goods and economic growth, planetary ecocide, and colonial exploitation. All of this is the context for land art. We thus propose to extend this term to cover a broad panorama of artistic practices concerning humans' relations with other species, inanimate matter, and the entire planet, as well as "non-artistic" ventures by artists and activists (from community gardens to the battle for the rights of native populations and the establishment of political parties). Land art in this sense is not confined to any one medium, specific material, or geographical region. It can also cover activities that do not occur under the banner of art.

One example is the ice stupas in Ladakh, India, artificial glaciers created by engineer Sonam Wangchuk, with a fascinating form and a clearly defined function of delivering water to inhabitants of the desert at the foot of the Himalayas. In desert areas, located at an altitude of over 3,000 meters above sea level, it almost never rains, and agriculture is dependent on water from seasonally melting glaciers flowing down from the Himalayas. Currently—as a consequence of global warming— water no longer reaches the villages at the foot of the mountains, and when it does, it does so violently, destroying buildings and bridges. Wangchuk and his team use gravity and temperature differences between day and night to create the ice stupas. Using a simple pipe system, they direct water from peaks to the villages in the valleys below. The ice stupas, several meters high, melt slowly, supplying farmers with water until early summer. A beneficial side effect of erecting ice stupas is also the draining of lakes, which form as a result of the violent ripping of large fragments of glaciers, blocking the outflow of water and causing floods. According to local legends, in Ladakh, people have specialized in "breeding" glaciers for centuries. It is said that in the thirteenth century, an ice barrier was used to stop the invasion of Genghis Khan's army.

Time has never spun so fast. What used to take millions of years now plays out in just a few decades. In 1947, Isamu Noguchi proposed to erect *Memorial to Man* in the desert, a huge relief sculpture resembling a human face which could be viewed from space. It was supposed to leave a trace of a civilization that would seek a new home following a nuclear war by settling on Mars. But fantasies of "planet B" have not been fulfilled. We have just one Earth. The awareness of the catastrophic agency of the human species, as well as the inevitable end of the order we know, requires another view of the activity of mankind—a vision stripped of anthropocentric arrogance, non-human, and closer to geology than the humanities. Only when we change our perspective and recognize that we live simultaneously on more than one scale will we perceive the consequences of the processes occurring since the Neolithic revolution (and later the Industrial Revolution and the post-war economic boom). The bounty we receive from "civilization" is also our poison. *Eat Death*, the American artist Bruce Nauman concluded in his prophetic work from 1971.

Life in a state of deepening crisis forces us to fundamentally change our thinking about the entire system of social organization and to confront ethical and existential dilemmas (climate migrations and new class conflicts). The world of art, with its museums and rituals for organizing objects and ideas, is no exception (to paraphrase the slogan of the Youth Strike for Climate, "No museums on a dead planet!") and requires deep systemic transformation. We treat engagement in this discussion as a duty of the museum, and not as just another fashion or stream in art. Countering the calls for "ecological restoration" or the popularity of "art of the Anthropocene," we stress the permanence of environmental reflection, based on continuity and responsibility.

Ice Stupas Project, Ice Stupa in Ladakh, photo by Sonam Wangchuk, 2015/2020, photography, digital print, paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Art will certainly not protect us against catastrophe, but it can help us arm ourselves with "strange tools" for the work of imagination and empathy. In her memorable manifesto from 1969, Mierle Laderman Ukeles posed the question: "After the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?"[9] In works of art from recent decades, we not only seek a visualization of processes occurring on our planet, but also discern possible proposals for the future. If ecological catastrophe is already happening (as the residents of the inundated islands of Nauru and Banaba in the Pacific would certainly agree), together we wonder, will we ever manage to clean up our planetary mess and rebuild our relations with other sentient beings? Will we manage to start over again?

Notes

1 Koichiro Osaka, *Curse Mantra: How to Kill Factory Owners* (Hong Kong: Para Site, 2019), 4-47.
2 https://wiekpolcienia.artmuseum.pl/en.
3 Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2014).
4 Ibram X. Kendi, "What the Believers Are Denying," *The Atlantic*, January 1, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/01/what-deniers-climate-change-and-racism-share/579190/?utm_source=feed.
5 Alva Noë, *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015).
6 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *How to See the World: An Introduction to Images, from Self-Portraits to Selfies, Maps to Movies, and More* (London: Pelican Books, 2015), 195.
7 Rasheed Araeen, *Art Beyond Art. Ecoaesthetics: A Manifesto for the 21st Century* (London: Third Text Publications, 2010).
8 Anja Kanngieser, email to author, December 24, 2019.
9 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART, 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition: "CARE,"* written in Philadelphia, October 1969, four typewritten pages, each 8 ½ x 11 in.

Sebastian Cichocki (b. 1975, Gliwice) is the chief curator and head of research at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. Selected exhibitions curated and co-curated by Cichocki at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw include *The Penumbral Age: Art in the Time of Planetary Change* (with Jagna Lewandowska, 2020); *Never Again: Art against War and Fascism in the 20th and 21st Centuries* (with Łukasz Ronduda and Joanna Mytkowska, 2019); *Making Use: Life in Postartistic Times* (with Kuba Szreder, 2016); and *Zofia Rydet, Record 1978–1990* (2015). Other recent curatorial projects include *The Resistance of the Form: Non-Exhibition*, Powszechny Theatre, Warsaw (2017), and *Rainbow in the Dark: On the Joy and Torment of Faith* at SALT in Istanbul and Malmö Konstmuseum (with Galit Eilat, 2015). Cichocki also curated the Polish Pavilion at the 52nd and 54th Venice Biennales of Art (in 2007 with Monika Sosnowska, in 2011 with Yael Bartana, co-curated with Galit Eilat). He has curated exhibitions in the form of books, radio dramas, libretto, anti-production residency program, and performance lectures.

Toward an Ecological Singularity
Dennis Dizon

My historical connection with the climate began with a delusion. In Manila, where I grew up, the summer monsoon season, or *habagat*, was a period of mild catastrophe. In the *barangay* ("small village" in Tagalog-speak) where my family lived, buildings and houses were densely packed together, all seemingly constructed in materials that were never damage-proof in extreme weather. So, at the beginning of a typhoon—the quiet before a tropical storm—there was always an ambivalent waiting for the chaos that would ensue. When the dark clouds loomed and the strong winds rattled, loose corrugated iron roofs flew, metal gates slammed, and wooden beams snapped into two.

Heavy flooding was not unusual in the streets, which could be knee-, waist-, or chest-deep; the urban ecosystem, quickly revealing itself as unidentifiable critters from the gutter scampered up and out of the sewers. Yet, as the rain plummeted and the murky sewage water-level rose, it was not ambivalence, but rather an anticipation to *swim* that occupied me. During the occasional wandering wade through the flooded streets, as drops of rain touched my bare skin, I convinced myself that I was in a swimming pool, splashing, kicking, and dipping in its cool waters.

Until the stench became unbearable.

Reign in your imagination for a second: I was not hallucinating. I did not throw on goggles or put on swim shorts, nor was I doing backstrokes and butterflies in these floods. It was common for the flood to have entered people's homes, so by the end of the storm, when the water-level receded, we would brush the floors dry and rearrange any furniture, awaiting the next big one in the climate loop. And if at all explicable, the delusion from my experience was a necessary way of coping. Barely discerning my distorted reflection on the flood's surface, the delusion was a moment of desire to normalize the anxieties of the situation from the imposed ecological conditions, internalizing a masterful taming of a pandemonium into a performative imaginary.

Pointedly caused by a combination of rapid industrialization and unusually heavy rainfall, there exists a combination of widespread oblivion and increased tension in the multidimensionality of the flooding problem that cannot be tackled easily. The tropical climate (a monsoon), or natural weather events (typhoons), mixed with a convolution of infrastructural factors, including but not limited to urban planning, bureaucracy, and policy, impact the population's living conditions. According to local civil engineers, the unabated disposal of garbage and waste in waterways only exacerbates the rise of residential displacements, disease epidemics, and deaths; the engineers, "[appealing] to the public to exercise their sense of patriotism… [and follow] the city's waste-segregation scheme."[1]

The climate crisis is a deafening analogy for (and big factor in) the heavy flooding dilemma in Manila. Globally, compelling evidence about climate change continues to unfold, proving rapid temperature increases, warming oceans, melting ice sheets, glacial retreats, and rising sea levels, only to name a few.[2] Since the mid-20th century, a combination of factors that expand the "greenhouse effect" is attributed to global heating (intensified by human production of greenhouse gases).[3] And though evidence of

accelerated changes in the climate exist, there are still tensions when communicating about the climate crisis that displace accountability, perpetuate false beliefs, facilitate skepticism, or forge delusions.

In a December 2018 poll on global warming from a Climate Change Communication program at Yale University, results showed that 73% of Americans think that global warming is happening—51% of whom are "extremely" or "very" sure—with more than 60% understanding that global warming is "mostly human-caused." About 69% of Americans are "somewhat worried" about global warming, 14% think it's too late to take action, and 28% say that global warming is either "not too" or "not at all" person-ally important. Yet, despite available proof, there continues to be an ambivalence in the cultural response toward global warming (and climate change). If 73% of Americans think that global warming is happening, what do the remaining 27% believe? Why do the 69% doubt their worry?[4]

The concept of communication continues to transform; its structures and processes are tipping toward failure. Communication is at stake. Over time, the rapid unfolding of an ecological crisis and the mutation of information have converged, creating an ecology of communication that operates in delusion. Sure, it seems *extreme* to infer this, but arguably, our implication in the neoliberalist, dominant, masculine, hegemonic systems of communicating bind agency suspended in erratic logic. So, if communica-tion now functions in delusion, what better way out than *through* it?

Surpassing its clinical definition, the concept of delusion, as was activated in the story above, becomes an emergent space for tactical exploitation. As an ongoing critical inquiry into a queer techno-ecological (in research, through writing and with curatorial practice), I propose re-imagining the potential of communicating through difference, destabilizing existing logics through queer sensibilities—among humans, with non-humans. Practicing *thought-queering* as a tactical exploitation of delusion, I visualize communication as a *trip* toward an ecological singularity—not a journey *per se* but as a navigable emergence through imaginary and bodily excess—largely inspired by queer and feminist thinkers, including Karen Barad's call for "materializing practices of differentiating."[5] At the cross-sections of interiority-exteriority and aesthetics-politics, I (1) introduce communication as infrastructure, mapping existing pathways for the possibilities beyond a linear transmission of information, (2) analyze communicating as matter-*ing*, designating a direction for materializing difference between *object* and *thing*, and (3) arrive at the concept of an "ecological singularity" as an experimental and experiential re-positioning to decentralize self and transcend human exceptionalism.

This text does not attempt to solve the climate crisis. Instead, it interrogates the exist-ing ecology of communication: an era of manufactured delusions that depoliticize the dimensions of the climate crisis, markedly dispersing fears and anxieties; an expanse of networked oblivion to the normalization of its financialization; a condition of stealth violence from the institutional displacement of accountability onto the individual and the injustices toward the Global South. This text does not attempt to solve the climate crisis, but instead, traces tensions and surveys a turbulence when communicating about it in the historical present. This text does not attempt to solve the climate crisis, because I have no solution. Beyond a cultural and environmental diagnosis, I only have enough nerve to challenge existing constructs and systems of failing logic—thinking *through* them—toward a belief that a new ecology of communication, in a culture of delusion, is still possible.

Mapping

In 2014, CarbonStory, a climate change crowdfunding platform, in collaboration with two marketing agencies (BBDO and Proximity Singapore), created the *World Under Water* campaign (now defunct), which was an interactive web experience that showed what places would look like if submerged under six feet of water. Using Web Graphics Library (WebGL) and Google Street View, users could type any location, neighborhood, or famous landmark and "see the extreme effect of climate change" through flooding. When one typed "Times Square" in New York or "Westminster" in London, for example, the platform showed animated visualizations of the respective post-apocalyptic cities under water.[6]

CarbonStory (also now defunct) operated between 2013 and 2017 in Southeast Asia, leveraging gamification and social media with an aim for crowdfunders to "neutralize [...] carbon footprints by sponsoring [for less than a dollar per day or a few dollars per month] certified green projects that have been carefully selected."[7] The group designed an online user platform for "an awesome experience," incentivizing sponsorships with personal and customized rewards, such as online badges and printable certificates. Summarizing the outcome of their work, CarbonStory claimed that the platform "allowed users to offset their climate impact without doing anything radical to their lifestyles."[8]

See the problem here?

When communicating about climate change (as a "crisis," especially), it is necessary to address that communication is not merely a linear transfer of information. Beyond an oversimplification of the climate crisis in CarbonStory's proposal and the *World Under Water* campaign, the problem is rather a failure to recognize the potential of the problematic. While there appears to be a seemingly "good" intention to the project, communicating about climate change was reduced to a transfer of information (via capital) that stretched agency to a binary positioning (participation/non-participation), setting aside the ontological complexity and multidimensionality of a crisis.

While information transmission is an entry point into the concept of communication, an analysis of communication as "infrastructure" distinguishes its concept as a matter of mediation. Following one of Keller Easterling's assessments of "infrastructure space" as a "medium of information," communication *as* infrastructure hosts information "in invisible [...] activities that determine how objects and content are organized and circulated."[9] Understanding communication as infrastructure is a mapping of the system of relations among actors (human and nonhuman). As infrastructure, communication is the mediation of an assemblage of information and meaning that either instrumentalize as interest or materialize as difference.

If mediation is constituted as instrumentalization, communication can be paradoxical, making the space for matter-*ing*—of moving, of forming, of materializing difference—vulnerable to obstructions of interest. Communicat*ing* functions under a set of protocols based on a logic of rules and order that facilitate and/or block movements in mediating. In a 2004 essay titled, "Communication beyond Meaning: On the Cultural Politics of Information," theorist and critic Tiziana Terranova states that information dynamics are "increasingly gaining priority over the formation of meanings"; she concludes that a "cultural politics of information does not simply address the proliferation of representations but, more fundamentally, the turbulent dynamics of sociocultural emergence within an open informational milieu."[10] Beyond representations, there

should be particular consideration of the volatility of the infrastructure from sociocultural (and affective) conditions and conditioning; in this space, (invisible) regimes of power and control can anchor a turbulence in communicative exchange, in which the system's logic functions as an instrument of exclusion.

In the case of CarbonStory above, a supposed linear transfer of information is, in fact, multilinear strata of exclusions—not only of information but of entanglements—that disguise the complexity of the crisis as an *optional* game. The exclusion of entanglements from the plurality and volatility of the infrastructural pathways filter through competing realities, conflicting realities, or conflicting interests. If instrumentalized, communication is a depoliticization, normalizing delusions that exclude climate injustices and inequalities; infrastructural management *vis-à-vis* communication can be a tool for green neoliberalism. CarbonStory prioritized the financialization of climate change through personalization. The "careful selection" for climate campaign sponsorship was rather a practice of exclusion disguised as inclusive action. The *World Under Water* campaign substituted the ontological reality of climate violence with a simulated "experience" of an event, ultimately exposing it as a marketing tactic for spectacle.

Just as various infrastructural factors can cause catastrophic impact from heavy flooding, the infrastructure of communication is also vulnerable to a deluge of interference that can block inclusion and facilitate exclusion—in information and in meaning, of differences and of bodies. So, in thinking through the ecological, wading through the floods, I wish to negotiate—negotiate in what appears to be an optional game in which there exists a transactional reconnaissance of making and taking. Though what appears to be a game is actually not a game but an orientation where I occupy an aimless position. If there exists an orientation, there exists a direction; as infrastructure, communication is an emergent space toward a possibility of—a longing for—more-than-human worlds.

fig. 1 Me, on the far right, posing with family members in front of what-was-once an elementary school buried under dried lahar (volcanic mudflow), two years after the Mount Pinatubo eruption. San Antonio, Pampanga, Philippines, 1993.

Matter-*ing*

In June 1991, in the region of Central Luzon in the Philippines, Mount Pinatubo, a volcano located in the Zambales Mountains, erupted, ejecting more than one cubic mile of an ash cloud that rose twenty-two miles into the air and created avalanches of hot ash, gas, and pumice fragments.[11] Simultaneously, a strong tropical cyclone

(Typhoon Yunya) developed around the same time of the eruption, intensifying the disaster, as a combination of ash deposits and heavy rain from the typhoon caused giant mudflows of volcanic material (*lahars)*, consequently causing overbank flooding that buried the towns and villages nearby. Following the eruption, the winds from the typhoon blew the ash cloud westward that covered most of Central Luzon, including Metro Manila (located only fifty-four miles southwest of Mount Pinatubo), and was recorded as having reached as far as Vietnam and Cambodia.[12]

As a then six-year-old living in Manila, I have faint memories of what exactly happened; perhaps, because nostalgic images of an airscape of dark clouds and a landscape blanketed with ash fall and debris dominate my mind from what can only be described as post-apocalyptic—everything dusted in shades of grey and white, like matte snow. Yet despite the tragic consequences, my mind rather reaches for quite a peculiar memory: as volcanic ash fell down and piled up—in front of our apartment, on the driveway, and on the streets—I picked up a plastic spoon and an empty mason jar to collect leftover ash as a collectible, a souvenir, a microcosm of that great eruption to call my own.

The reality of that natural disaster is that it had a detrimental socioeconomic impact, slowing down any growth momentum and development activities in the region. Deemed the second-largest volcanic eruption in the 20th century, the explosion of Mount Pinatubo resulted in $700 million in damage, which included the livelihood of approximately 2.1 million people who lived in the surrounding area. Beyond efforts in post-disaster relief and following the eruption's aftermath, however, many Filipinos saw a value to the volcanic ash, crafting art and making sculptures from what was gathered (some creating and capitalizing on its exchange-value, cashing in from selling what was made)—lemonade out of lemons, if you will.[13]

In a 2004 essay titled, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," Bruno Latour identifies Heidegger's definitions of *object* and *thing* as analogies for his analyses on the construction of fact and concern in both communication and critical discourse. An *object*, for Latour, has no defining traits or characteristics apart from its physical, material, or superficial properties; it is static, either held in position as a trite explanation from a cause-and-effect analysis or an idol. A *thing*, in contrast, co-opts a position that orients the conditions of being, defining it as "an object out there and [...] an *issue* very much *in* there."[14] In Mt. Pinatubo's eruption, the repurposing of volcanic ash goes beyond aestheticizing and commodifying. What's been largely revealed is the significance of a processual reconfiguring: volcanic ash is the *object*, but in its matter-*ing*, what we observe is its un-becoming.

Observing recurring and recursive tensions in climate change communication between the news media, the scientific community, and politicians, Latour indicates, in the essay, that there is an "excessive *distrust* of good matters of fact disguised as ideological biases." For the critic, he pushes for an advancement of contemporary critical inquiry by putting forth a proposal to cultivate not only "matters of fact" but also "a *stubbornly realist attitude*," which he identifies as "matters of concern." On its own, matters of fact do not define a reality and can be "very partial [...] very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern," proposing instead to "dig much further into the realist attitude." For Latour, a sole recognition of fact, or observation of object, is limited thinking—"a poor *proxy* of experience and of experimentation," expressing the role of the critic as "not one who debunks, but [...] one who assembles."[15] If communicating about the climate crisis is increasingly becoming instrumentalized, there is a need to redirect positions in the emergent space of communication where the normalization

fig. 2 Installation of Joana Moll's net-based piece *DEFOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOREST* (2016),
which visualises a display and counts a number of trees that need to be planted in order to counteract the amount
of CO_2 emissions from global visits to Google.com. Joana Moll, *DEFOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOREST*
at Ars Electronica Festival, 2018. Image credit: vog.photo.

of illusions form and delusions function. In reassessing communicating as differentiat-
ing—an always already un-becoming of difference between *object* and *thing*, fact and
concern—there is no mutual exclusion and only essential inclusion. In his suggestion
to *dig* into a realist attitude, differentiating—the matter-*ing* of difference—reclaims
communication from instrumentalization.

But why does this matter-*ing* matter?

Within the existing communication infrastructure, there is an illusion of a dissolution
of boundaries that convolutes difference as sameness, which creates a delusion that
equates sameness with equivalence. Matter-*ing* matters because it is situating a plural-
ity of positions in the erratic logic of the dominant systems of communicating. Between
object and thing, matters of fact and concern, these positions rework difference as
constitutive to the climate crisis—difference that is not totalized (exclusion) but a
differentiating that continuously moves through boundaries. This matter-*ing* matters
because it reconfigures anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism; communicating
about the climate crisis becomes communicating *in* entanglements. It becomes
neither a resistance to extinction nor a desire for immortality; it is, instead, a matter of
actively occupying the radical relations between human and nonhuman toward more-
than-human worlds.

In *DEFOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOREST*, a 2016 project from Joana Moll, the artist created a net-based platform that visualizes the number of trees that need to be planted to offset the amount of CO_2 emissions from global visits to Google.com. As the most visited site on the Internet, Google emits an estimated amount of 500kg of CO_2 emissions every second. Calculating the average amount of CO_2 that a tree can absorb and the average number of visits to the website per second, the artist "[imagines]... alternative techno-paradigms which may coherently respond to our environmental and human conditions."[16] *DEFOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOREST* foregrounds human impact on the environment by materializing the invisible boundaries created in networked dynamics and platform technologies. Moll situates a matter-*ing* of entanglements—user, tree, algorithm—calling for a re-evaluation of subjectivity toward more-than-human worlds. Reappropriating computational techniques, the artist adopts the dominant logic of communication in order to reclaim it. Moll positions matters of fact with matters of concern, attaching object to thing; more significantly, toward a new ecology of communication, she tactically exploits the system to find the potential means for destabilizing it.

Arriving

Toward more-than-human worlds, among humans and nonhumans, communicating *in* entanglements could be tricky. It requires a tactical exploitation of delusion—a putting down, a flipping, a reversing. It requires a back-to-basics understanding of communication toward an interrogation of its dominant becoming.

In a 2017 psychopharmacological study on the effects of psychedelic substances on nature relatedness, researchers found that "experience with classic psychedelics uniquely predicted self-reported engagement in pro-environmental behaviors." In correlation with the use of psychedelics, "nature relatedness," as a construct identified in previous studies, is defined as a "stable personality trait that captures people's ecological self-construal, or *ecological identity*… [which] centers around their perceived connectedness with the natural world," including people's affective, cognitive, and physical relationship with nature, as well as, "an abstract understanding of their interconnectedness with all living beings on this planet."[17]

According to the research, exposure to psilocybin enhances a recollection of personal memories and emotions with increased vividness, in addition, to "[triggering] a decrease in cerebral blood flow in brain regions that serve as structural 'hubs' for information transmission between different brain regions and as systems for cognitive integration." Use of LSD, on the other hand, can "decrease the tendency to engage in mental time travel to the past [...] often associated with rumination and depressive thoughts," and instead, "increase the subjective intensity of suggested psychobiological states, such as [...] one's arm [...] becoming heavier, or [...] water [tasting] especially refreshing." The research found that psychedelic states, which include hallucinations, produced "profound [feelings] of connectedness or unity [...] causing the lines between self and environment to blur." As a consequence of an "ego-dissolution" during psychedelia, there is an "evocation of empathy" from an anthropomorphization of certain elements in nature that would, as the researchers ultimately hypothesized, "manifest in increased pro-environmental behavior."[18]

Look, I don't advise that everyone in the world dose on 'shrooms or LSD to act on the climate crisis. In matters of fact, there are still nuances to the research study, which includes distinguishing frequency (between lifetime and recreational use of classic psychedelics) and measuring actual pro-environmental behavior from the participant's

"true self" as opposed to their "ideal-self"; in matters of concern, the researchers attach the need for the study as a "common goal to heal the fundamental alienation between humans and nature, thereby aiding in the conservation of our planet," identified as an essential moral imperative for a climate crisis resolution.[19]

In psychedelia, existing systems of knowledge and primitive beliefs are intercepted through the emergence of a hyper-imagination from the conjuring of hallucinations, which increases measures of "nature relatedness" or reveals an *ecological identity* (both defined earlier as constructs). The constructs of "relatedness" and "identity" however, are fixed because an implicit sameness is assumed as equivalent in the ecological paradigm for anyone, everyone, any*thing* and every*thing*, restricting the value of differentiating from the blurring of lines between self and environment.

Affirming imaginary and bodily excess through matter-*ing* in entanglements requires a radical decentralization of self beyond identity and individuality. When communicat-*ing* in entanglements toward more-than-human worlds, there is a necessary transfiguration of self toward an *ecological singularity*. In thinking through communication as a *trip* (colloquially defined as the experience of hallucinations from taking psychedelic drugs), constructs break down, paths divert, and communication becomes more than an instrument of interest, and instead, manifests as an emergent space for materializing difference in ecological engagement.

In matter-*ing*—an always already un-becoming of difference—it is not the beginning (an assumed formation) nor the end (an outcome) but rather the navigable *in-between* that shifts dominant or oppressive epistemological thinking toward the potential of radical ecological engagement. Challenging the existing systems of communicating while implicated in its mutable logic, the "trip" is a processual and tactical exploitation of delusion that reassesses the complexity of ecological relations as a matter of redistributing agency with *other* (and vice-versa).

The concept of "singularity" involves numerous interpretations, analyses, and theories; ecological singularity, in this context, extends from both the Deleuzian notion of "singularity" and the Guattarian material-semiotic process of "singularization." Taking from Georges Simondon's concept of individuation, Gilles Deleuze reconceptualizes "singularity" as an "event" for the new phase of being—a "pre-individuation," a becoming of the individual and a conditioning of its potential.[20] In *Three Ecologies*, on the other hand, Félix Guattari calls for the process of "re-singularization" in order to counteract the homogenization of desires and the standardization of ways of living (largely influenced by the media); "singularization," in the Guattarian sense, is an "emergence of entities" in which there are "processes that undo (or deterritorialize) existing stratifications and in turn congeal (or reterritorialize) new modes of being."[21] In either case, "singularity" and "singularization" depart from the construct of identity and converge at a rearticulation of self that takes matters of condition and acts of conditioning as a matter-*ing* of difference. Ecological singularity is a spatiotemporal immersing in the duration of the "trip" with a pace that values intensity over speed. It is neither the start nor finish; ecological singularity is always already happening as means for experimental more-than-human-world-*ing* based on experiential materializing.

Communication in an ecological singularity dispossesses spatiotemporal self-positioning as a redistribution of agency. In a multi-media installation series titled *Pteridophilia* (2016-ongoing), Hong Kong-based artist Zheng Bo interprets the concept of ecological singularity as an "eco-queer" potential, taking from queer and feminist discourses that

challenge hegemonic knowledge systems in order to reconsider the notions of sexual-ity, gender, and nature in a cultural level.[22] In a three-part sequence, the artist dis-iden-tifies with heteronormative sexual difference through imaginary and bodily excess as a tactical exploitation of delusion.

On the surface, the series introduces what appears to be humans experiencing a "trip," hallucinating in a lush forest against an auditory chamber of nature. The first segment shows a fully nude man entangled in the center. Slowly, as the man walks further, he disappears into the green abyss; the scenes, alternating between his journey and close-ups of the fern. Within moments, the man stands under a larger plant, rattling its soft stems above his head; quickly changing over, the segment introduces six other men who make close contact with various species of fern in what appears to be voyeuristic scenes of deviant *forest bathing* and *gay cruising*. From an exhibitionist stance, they each perform uncompromising and explicit sexual acts with the fern, smelling its leaves, licking its curled tips, and in a couple of cases, eating parts of the plant entirely. And by the final segment, each man practices varied acts of BDSM with the plant— thin stems of thorn wrap around the penis while pliable branches choke-hold the neck.

Pteridophilia is beyond biophilia and/or the eco-sexual. Zheng translates the "eco-queer" potential of nature relatedness as an intimacy that recognizes the complexities of difference while reorienting positions of dominance, submission, and control from human-over-nonhuman to human-*with*-nonhuman and nonhuman-*with*-human. In this situating, an emergence of communication unfolds; there are, however, only silent exchanges between man and fern—an experiential and experimental matter-*ing* of dif-ference. Communication between human and nonhuman is decidedly focused on the non-verbal and tactile instead. Communicating is testing pain thresholds; communi-cating is unleashing pleasures; communicating is activating queer desires.

fig. 3 Still image from Zheng Bo's *Pteridophilia 3* (2018), displaying BDSM interplay between the man and fern. Zheng Bo, *Pteridophilia 3,* 4K video with sound, duration 15 minutes, 2018. Image courtesy of the artist.

From a curatorial lens, the series, in different exhibition settings, has been installed in assorted displays. At the 2018 *Manifesta 12* in Palermo, for example, a single-channel television monitor was posted against a bamboo grove in the city's botanical garden; at the 2019 *Garden of Earthly Delights* exhibition at the Gropius Bau in Berlin, four TV monitors set on the floor loosely confine rows of fern plants in terracotta pots that sit atop cinder blocks. In either case, the materializing interaction of observer with the screen interrogates self-positioning in the ecological present; a direct encounter with the plant(s) provokes a necessary emergence of radical relationality as a deliberate attempt to confront the dominant ideologies of normativity and conformity in gender and sexuality.

Ecological singularity warrants matter-*ing* over fact or concern, object or thing; it is a deep immersion into matter-*ing*, of which excesses in the imaginary always already transfigure bodies into a corporeal extreme for potentiality. In communicating, ecological singularity is a scrutiny of the instrumentalization and ultimate depoliticization of communication in order to engage within the entanglements between human and nonhuman that push beyond the maximum. During the "trip," ecological singularity is seeing obstacles not as barriers but as deficiencies of the imagination; surpassing exploring, discovering, and navigating, arriving at an ecological singularity is subverting the conditions of and conditioning of self and culture embedded in delusion.

The climate crisis is ongoing; communicating *in* entanglements should be never-ending. Thinking through the existing ecology of communication during an ecological crisis and the possibilities for an*other*, I drift through more questions. How can we subvert *and* pervert the dominance of erratic logics in the systems of communicating? In the extremes of climate inaction and eco-fascism, how can we rethink environmental advocacy and civic participation through ecological singularity? What is an ecological singularity for bodies of color? What is ecological singularity in the nonhuman? For the more-than-human?

I look back. My brain—flooded with thoughts, feelings, words, numbers, facts, concerns, objects, things, and matters—a matter-*ing*!

In late February, while scrolling through Twitter, I came across a *New York Times* climate report on the rising sea levels in the Philippines:

> *"Adapting to Rising Seas, Schools Move to the Rafters and Cats Swim"*

I click on the article and peruse through images of flooded homes and streets, read through notes on children "sloshing" their feet in the tides and descriptions of swimming dogs, goats, and cats in Batasan, an island in the south-central region of the country. A sociologist declares that while "the entire [country] is a hazardous landscape [...] [people] have developed [a] culture of adaptation and recovery." For the people and animals of Batasan, uprooting their lives to a higher elevation is not that simple, choosing instead to "respond [...] to a new reality."[23]

But is this a *new reality*?

I sigh.

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Notes

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Extremely Unagitated—A Closer Look at the Artistic Practice of Lara Almarcegui
Helene Romakin

The current situation is *uncanny, extreme,* and *improbable.* In the popular public consciousness, Covid-19 is a highly improbable event, perhaps comparable to Hurricane Katrina, which hit New Orleans in 2005. Had a fortune teller told us a year ago that a pandemic would strike the entire world in the near future, we would have shaken our heads and exhaled a disappointed sigh. Clearly, such a course of events would have seemed improbable—a mere storyline, nothing of the sort could possibly actually take place. After all, we are not characters from the movie *Outbreak.* The doomsday blockbuster, directed by Wolfgang Petersen in 1995, was based on the nonfiction book *The Hot Zone* (1994) by Richard Preston on viral fevers such as Ebola. The storyline of *Outbreak* pivots around the uncontrollable and furious spread of an Ebola-like virus and its containment in the USA in the late 1960s. However, both Katrina as well as the Covid-19 pandemic are very much real events regardless of how a wider public perceives them as exceptional or even implausible. I explicitly speak of a wider public because scientists and some politicians had very well taken into account the possibility of such events, which had indeed been hinted at or even predicted by previously published research. After the outbreaks of SARS and Ebola, there have been many signs and warnings that these types of pandemics would not remain singular events.

What we experience as situations of the uncanny, the extreme or the improbable is deeply linked to the culturally established ways in which our conception of time is manifest in storytelling, argues Amitav Ghosh in the tradition of feminist philosophy by Donna Haraway, author of *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable.* In modern storytelling, explains Ghosh, the coupling of probability and improbability plays an essential role: it was with the growing establishment of bourgeois life that modern novels began to mirror a calm and rationalized world with fewer and fewer unexpected narrative threads. Ghosh introduces *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert, written in 1856, as exemplary of how narratives could bring daily life to the foreground, profoundly shaping our perception today, which over time has become unreceptive to unpredicta-

ble events. In order to understand the prevailing conception of time in the Western Hemisphere, Ghosh suggests that the geological theories of gradualism and catastrophism of the 18th and 19th centuries should be considered as nothing less than studies of narrative.[1] Geology as a scientific discipline was established in the 18th century, and was still in its infancy when gradualist theories emerged. The gradualist model of geological slowness as developed by James Hutton (1726-97) and his concept of *Deep Time*, or later, Charles Lyell's (1797-1875) analysis on the predictability of geological trends, favored slow processes, not allowing for nature to take any leaps.[2] During the height of the bourgeois period, these geological studies led to a regime of uniformitarianism, an image of the Earth as being shaped by uniform and continuous processes. Gradually, the concept of catastrophism was perceived as unmodern. Although gradualism, as opposed to catastrophism, still dominates the popular discourse, recent geological consensus suggests a concurrence of both "continuous fluxes operating all the time or [...] the spectacular large fluxes that operate during short-lived cataclysmic events."[3] However, Ghosh argues that the era of global warming

> presents [a resistance] to the techniques that are most closely identified with a novel: its essence consists of phenomena that were long ago expelled from the territory of the novel—forces of unthinkable magnitude that create unbearably intimate connections over vast gaps in time and space.[4]

The artistic practice of the Rotterdam-based artist Lara Almarcegui provides one such entrance to challenge methods and strategies bundled in categories of time. In her projects, Almarcegui deals with geological matter in an acutely unagitated manner, avoiding the rhetoric of catastrophism while plausibly demonstrating the urgency of acknowledging the consequences of long-term land exploitation. Almarcegui's practice draws from conversations and collaborations with geologists. This essay looks into how Almarcegui's work can be seen as instrumental in creating new narratives and accessible imaginaries about land exploitation and how

her artistic research on mineral and mining rights can become relevant to scientific and legal discourse. To contextualize Almarcegui's work in current environmental discourse, this essay places it in the context of the Capitalocene, a term suggested by Jason W. Moore and Donna Haraway that answers to shortcomings of the notion of the Anthropocene, and it introduces philosopher Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's concepts of latency and the broad present.

Mineral and Mining Rights

> *I visited a community waiting for a decision on whether a rutile mine would be opened there. I was deeply impressed by this difficult moment of fear and anticipation.*
> – Lara Almarcegui, 2014[5]

The realization that art is possible beyond the boundaries of gallery and museum walls, and beyond the manageable scale of typical art objects designed for enclosed spaces, was a decisive moment for artist Lara Almarcegui during her studies in the early 1990s. In most of her practice, Almarcegui works with natural materials, such as gravel or volcanic lava sediment, and spends a great deal of time on mining sites and some-

times introduces massive amounts of such materials from pits or nearby quarries to museum spaces.

Over the last fifteen years, Almarcegui has been focusing on the lengthy process of acquiring mineral and mining rights for deposits across Europe to raise public awareness of the existence of these ores and to prevent their mining. In 2015, Almarcegui leased the exploration rights of an iron deposit in Tveitvangen, not far from Oslo, to prevent big companies from mining the ground. Later, she obtained the permits for another iron deposit in Buchkogel and Thal near Graz, Austria, which was recently approved for extension. The acquisition of the rights is usually privately funded by Almarcegui herself. If the acquisition is connected to an institutional project, she sometimes receives financial and organizational support from the institution involved.

It is in this context that Almarcegui investigates the origins of construction materials. In her search for sites where basic materials such as gravel, iron, and clinker are extracted to be later used for the construction of buildings and entire cities, the artist traces *built histories* that surround us every day. In her work, Almarcegui reflects on concepts of land reclamation and exploitation, the recreation of topographies, and the role of geological space and time in the context of climate change.

Lara Almarcegui, *Agras Volcano Mineral Rights*, Video Still, 2019 © the artist.

Typically, Almarcegui's projects combine both working outdoors and bringing the outdoors into exhibition spaces. For a cultural institution, this would often imply granting the artist a conceptual carte blanche: Only from the moment Almarcegui receives an invitation to show her work does the actual research begin. She visits the sites, talks to local architects, urbanists, geologists, and many other professionals to decide what kind of project she intends to implement in the surroundings of an institution to finally transfer the results of her work and the generated documentation to the exhibition space.

For her solo exhibition at the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM), on view from July 11 to October 27, 2019, Almarcegui first examined the geological matter of the museum's surrounding area. In her research, she came across the Agras volcano in Cofrentes, some eighty kilometers west of Valencia, which was subject to mining for construction materials such as volcanic ash from the 1960s to the 1980s. For a period of one year, Almarcegui acquired the mineral rights of 270 mining squares, equivalent to 8,100 acres, to explore the area for pozzolanic ash—a material historically used to produce concrete. While extraction at the Agras has ceased, other volcanic sites in the county, such as the Castilla-La Mancha region, have active quarries to this day.

Thus, the exploitation of volcanic areas around Valencia became the central motif of the show.

In the main gallery space at IVAM, Almarcegui placed pozzolanic ashes in a single large pile that spanned over the entire floor surface, leaving just enough room for only one visitor at a time to walk between the margins of the pile and the gallery walls. The pile, spread out to the far corners, appeared almost like an organic figure enclosing the columns that support the second floor of the exhibition space. In her shows, the artist repeatedly challenges the engineering aspects of the exhibiting institutions by introducing no less than the maximum weight of material that the structure of a given building can support. Varying in form, volume, and material, the piles fill the exhibition rooms to the limits of the feasible. Although the Agras volcano is the main theme of the show, today, the quarry is defunct. For this reason, the 40 tons of pozzolanic ash were brought in one truckload from a still-active quarry in the volcanic area of Campo de Calatrava, 330 kilometers west of Valencia, which is still mining the material for cement production.

On the second floor of the exhibition space, Almarcegui created an educational section providing background information on the Agras volcano in the form of a two-channel video work, showing a survey of the volcano's

Lara Almarcegui, *Agras Vulcano Mineral Rights,* Installation view, 2019.
Photo: Juan García Rosell. Courtesy: IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern and the artist.

Lara Almarcegui. *Agras Vulcano Mineral Rights, Sections of Agras Volcano,* Drawing, 50 x 35 cm, 2019. © the artist.

surface in slow-motion images and text, divided into short precise sentences, explaining Spanish national mining law and the volcano's history. In addition, the artist presented an exploration permit from the responsible regional mining authority, *Dirección General de Minas de la Comunidad Valenciana*, a map of the territory leased and cross-sectional drawings of the volcano's interior.

The video work, and in particular its text, reflects the actual research process that Almarcegui follows in all of her mining projects: First, she familiarizes herself with the history of the site and the research already conducted by previous contractors or geologic institutions. In a second step, she starts an investigation on-site in consultation with a geologist who will later also conduct the required exploration tests. In the latter part, Almarcegui follows the recommendations and instructions of the geologist on how to proceed within the exploration permit, always adhering to non-intrusive methods so as to avoid any environmental impact. This means that any exploration Almarcegui ever commissions remains at surface and never involves any actual

extraction or digging on site. Everything stays at its place. In the seven-minute video, viewers learn more about major interventions on the site led by a company called Asland. In the 1970s, Asland was one of the leading cement factories in this region and was first to undertake geological research on the solidified lava deposits of the Agras volcano: "The reserves were estimated at almost 2 million m³ of volcanic material susceptible to exploitation: 732,500m³ of pyroclasts and 549,000m³ of basalt," Almarcegui explains in the video text. Extracting only the pyroclasts or ashes, the reserves were almost entirely exhausted by the end of the 1980s, and the quarry was closed down due to the lack of economic profit.

As in all of her projects, Almarcegui seeks to show what lies below our feet, to enable us to grasp this site beyond our vision. Drawings, photographs, newspaper clippings, and printed statistics play a crucial role in her artistic practice.

Thus, as part of her research process, but also to visualize geological data, Almarcegui often produces cross-sectional sketches. The tradition of cross-sectional views goes back to the 16th century. Conveying the ideals of the Enlightenment, they still inform our idea of science today—rational analysis that permeates all matter, revealing the unknown and invisible. Moreover, the sketches make visible the procedures involved in the artist's considerations during the creation and research processes. The drawings presented at IVAM are based on the geological studies of the volcano's material reserves from the quarry in the 1970s and 1980s, which Almarcegui retrieved from the archives of the then active cement factory Asland, now owned by Lafarge-Holcim. In the drawings illustrating the different layers of volcanic material in Agras, she chronologically examines how, within two decades, the layer of lava useful for industry decreased. The quickly applied cross-sectional sketches are 35cm x 50cm in size, suggesting that the artist uses them more as a form of knowledge visualization than as aesthetic production.

With this work, Almarcegui underlines the importance of noticing how land exploitation and mineral extraction gradually change our environment in the long term, while the consequences on our ecosystems and the geological impact are nevertheless urgent and, likely, irreversible.

Excavating Working Conditions

"The image of the city, in particular, as a thing that is made of geology or on geology, increasingly has to content with the idea of the city as a thing that makes geology, in the form of nuclear fuel, dammed rivers, atmospheric carbon, and other metabolic products of urbanization whose impacts will stretch into future epochs."
– Seth Denizen[6]

Throughout her career, Almarcegui has pointed out the precariousness of conditions of production in urban environments. She questions capitalist societal values and reminds us of urgent unsolved problems of land exploitation today. Her works do not seek to elevate the viewer's contemplation to philosophical heights, up to a point from which motifs such as the landscape or the sublime come into view—dominant themes in the 18th and 19th centuries. Instead, she virtually pulls them back to the ground, or even under the ground, thus pointing out actual environmental damage. Her mineral and mining rights projects act as an invitation to reflect on the consequences of extraction in relation to the land and the remaining landscape, and also to one's closer surroundings. Industrial activity, which is usually only ever a background scenario in the Western urban world, suddenly comes to the fore. Today, industries in Western societies are mostly based on so-called immaterial services. Living in urban areas, mining industries have largely withdrawn from our sight. Industries involved in the extraction and direct processing of mineral resources, for example, coal mining and heavy material industry such as iron and steel, appear both abstract and as something from the past. In her work, Almarcegui reveals to urban inhabitants that land exploitation still takes place on a daily basis, often just around the corner.[7] The installation at IVAM serves as an example of how the artist illustrates the scale of produced construction materials. Usually invisible and unimaginable in their volume, they become tangible in the museum space. Hence, the piles of lava rock at IVAM involve a discursive thinking that initiates further acknowledgement of one's own surroundings.

What does it mean to exhibit the work of Lara Almarcegui? Firstly, the inviting institution and curator assist Almarcegui in producing new knowledge relevant to their location. By working with municipalities and geologists, Almarcegui uncovers the current status of present ores and consolidates different fragments of existing knowledge. Secondly, presenting the results of

this research in the context of an exhibition at a museum of contemporary art means introducing the political urban discourse to a cultural context. What this essentially means is raising awareness and reaching a public that is usually not confronted with industries of land exploitation. Thirdly, these exhibitions bring about a new dialogue between different groups and professionals. It was remarkable to see that engaged visitors who joined an artist talk or a guided tour with Lara Almarcegui had a very personal approach to the subject: they were themselves affected by urban structural changes caused by local industry. Almost everyone had their own story to tell. Either because an additional rural road was built near their neighborhoods, connecting the industrial area with the city, or they personally knew someone who had worked in the mines. In the exhibition, different biographical occurrences began to connect the dots with economic and political decision making. These moments were significant in terms of knowledge gain and social interaction. Finally, a seemingly extreme aspect in the artist's practice consists of the visualization and confrontation with the latent and slow but ongoing violent consequences of extraction.

Slow Violence in the Capitalocene

"Maybe only God can make a tree, but only that shovel, Big Muskie, can make a hole like this."
– Anonymous strip miner, cited by Robert Morris[8]

The increasing interest in the geological worldview mirrors the necessity to cope with this factual complexity and the enormous data flows in terms of scales of time and space that are constantly generated. In recent decades, and with the growing awareness of climate change, the theory of gradualism, however, poses its own pitfalls, as it "suggests a degree of insignificance and disempowerment that not only is psychologically alienating but also allows us to ignore the magnitude of our effects on the planet," writes geologist Marcia Bjornerud in her 2018 book *Timefulness: How Thinking Like a Geologist Can Help Save the World*.[9] The increasing awareness and evidence of human interference on Earth has led to a general perception of both urgency and intangibility, whereas this feeling of disempowerment derives from the imbalance and inadequacy of human perception of time and space and its corresponding geological reality. These "expanded spatial and temporal scales of geology exceed human comprehension, and thereby present major challenges to representational systems."[10] This is also one of the major challenges Almarcegui emphasizes in her work: "What I

seek to do is offer a vision of the island's possible destruction through an exploration of its geological origins and future exploitation," she commented on her project *Rocks of Spitsbergen* in 2014.[11] In this project, Almarcegui identified and calculated the sum total of the mass of the geological components that make up the island of Spitsbergen.

The discourse around our new era shaped by the consequences of climate change due to anthropogenic processes is reflected in diverse manifestations. The term Anthropocene has been widely criticized for its "terminological, philosophical, ecological, political"[12] inclination. Although there are many suggested alternative terms for the Post-Holocenic era, in this essay I would like to place Almarcegui's artistic practice in the context of the so-called *Capitalocene.*

As a term, Capitalocene was introduced by the scholars Jason W. Moore and Andreas Malm in 2009,[13] and later picked up by Donna Haraway in her essay "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin" in 2015, which was adapted into Haraway's milestone book *Staying with the Trouble* a year later. "The Capitalocene helps identify the *economic* determination of our geological present,"[14] writes art historian T.J. Demos in his 2017 book *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today*. These are only a few of the many scholars who emphasize the role of the financial and corporate elites and industrial leaders in the discourse surrounding global warming. Naomi Klein has adequately pointed out that the thesis of Anthropocene dangerously ignores the systematic and structural exploitation driving and driven by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy.[15] From this perspective, Capitalocene seems a more precise description, as it "refers to the geological epoch created by corporate globalization."[16] To look through the lens of the Capitalocene means performing a deep analysis of complex economic processes and identifying the responsible industries and their interwoven exploitative structures with political lobbyism. Demos dedicated an entire chapter in his book *Against the Anthropocene* to acknowledging the violence caused and executed by a Capitalocene world. Among many others, it is writer Rebecca Solnit who calls out for the recognition of climate change as a form of "global-scale violence against places and species, as well as against human beings."[17]

One of the most expansive analyses of the slow violence involved in climate change struggles was offered by the environmental humanities scholar Rob Nixon:

A central question is strategic and representational: How can we convert into image and narrative disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image world? How can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political interventions, these emergencies whose repercussions have given rise to some of the most critical challenges of our time?[18]

As Amitav Ghosh discerns, the Anthropocene is a challenge to various disciplines such as history, humanities, and the arts, "but also to our commonsense understandings [...] the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of imagination."[19] Along with the abovementioned scholars, Ghosh appeals to a quest for new imaginaries, alternative narratives that go beyond representational boundaries.

By acquiring archival data from companies or municipalities on geologic calculations, Lara Almarcegui draws attention to slow violence caused by land exploitation and discloses systematic abuse by structures of capitalist and governmental practices. In their directness and persistence, her projects become forceful, emphatic, and even radiant. Throughout her career, Almarcegui has acquired a connoisseurship for geology as a discipline and its political connotations, and has established herself as an artist native to geological and industrial processes that are usually withdrawn from our sight. Methods of estimating the potential wealth that can be extracted from a given area were introduced by the English geologist William Smith in the 19th century when he identified fossils as indicators for coal deposits.[20] In reference to this process, Almarcegui reminds us that geology as a discipline has not only introduced the Deep Time perspective on the Earth but also created new economies while mapping wealth through the precise localization and identification of resources. The geological cartography to which Almarcegui has access through the permits of exploration she receives from the responsible municipalities allow her to study geological calculations and resource mappings, and how they were exploited going back as far as seventy years. Uncovering this body of knowledge, usually buried in state archives or in the private hands of the companies involved, and presenting it to a wider public is sometimes perceived as outrageous by those involved. Usu-

ally, the inhabitants of the surrounding communities of an exploited area do not know in detail to what extent their land is being damaged. Making this knowledge accessible is perceived as dangerous and a provocation to the powers that be, i.e., the capitalist systems.

In our desire to refrain from catastrophism in order to escape the continuing consequences of climate change, we are "missing out on the bigger picture," as Rebecca Solnit illustrates. On the contrary, "We should seek out new kinds of stories—stories that make us more alarmed about our conventional energy sources than the alternatives, that provide context, that show us the future as well as the past."[21] The following section highlights some of the stories Almarcegui has to tell.

Uncanny Latency
In his 2013 book *After 1945: Latency as Origin of the Present*, literary theorist Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht hypothesizes that situations of latency arise in our present. In his reflections, Gumbrecht describes an era in which the future appears to be threatening. By linking his ideas to the implementation of so-called invisible matter, he lucidly illustrates what causes uncertainties in our daily lives. The magnitude of the matters at hand plays a major role here: the topics we are dealing with are either too small (atoms) or too large (the universe), or too complex (global warming) to ever be transformed into an unmediated situation of evidence, presence, or visibility.[22] Gumbrecht outlines a situation in which the feeling prevails that something is there, but this "something" is too overwhelming to actually be negotiated and infiltrated into consciousness in social and scientific discourses. It never comes to the moment when the latent becomes clearly visible.[23] But what exactly does latency mean in this Post-Holocene age?

A latency towards global climate change is not a denial or suppression of the environmentally harmful factors caused by capital flows. Rather, it neutralizes the initial alarming agitation. The facts accumulate rapidly, but the actual irritation, such as pain, triumph, or any other kind of resonance, disappears. Being aware of climate change in Western societies usually doesn't mean experiencing its consequences first-hand. Although consequences of climate change are already in full swing, it is often simply easier not to take heed of the warning signs, even when these signs are hard to overlook. Or in the words of Timothy Morton in his essay "Being Ecological": "Funnily enough, living in a scientific age means we have stopped believing in authoritative truth [...] Mass extinction is so awful, so incomprehensible, so

horrible—and at present it's so invisible."[24] To the human eye, slow violence is invisible, and thus incomprehensible, but its existence has latently entered our consciousness. However, waiting for the moment of "redemption," a situation of visibility and clarity, seems hopeless. Expanding on latency, Gumbrecht notes that the status quo of experienced paralysis can only be resolved when action has a prospect of a future so that motivation can be transformed into reality.[25] And here, the core question unravels: How can artists form and express such a future scenario so that their motivation becomes reality?

Latency is the "withdrawal from perceptibility and representability [...] [that] cannot be addressed simply as topics or themes but only as *problems of form*," writes art historian Eva Horn, and she continues:

> The visual arts have developed a panoply of different strategies for translating the transformative processes of the Anthropocene, such as climate change, from their latency into something tangible and manifest [...]. [They] seek to make inaudible audible, the non-perceptible perceptible.[26]

What is latent needs a translation or a transmission in temporal or spatial scales to become relevant to human comprehension. The increasing occupation with geological perspective and matter in contemporary art is a form of engagement with challenges of representation in the Capitalocene.

The Geological Worldview in the Broad Present
As with everything else, latency is part of the present, which is becoming continuously broader, while the horizon of the future narrows in anticipation of a surely coming, but still seemingly distant, catastrophe: climate change. In this context, what Gumbrecht means in terms of a broader future is "that it is no longer possible to leave behind any past. Instead of losing their connection with the present as orientation, pasts flood our present [...]. Between this overflowing past and that threatening future, the present has become a spreading dimension of simultaneity."[27] The ever expanding scales of time and space, as well as the immanent overproduction of facts, imply a constructed reality that emerged from a postmodern poly-perspectivism that is no longer tangible and traceable. The return of object-oriented ontology (OOO) to the academic realm is an interesting phenomenon, which again strengthens the trend of trying to understand things *in themselves* and acknowledging that nothing can be grasped in its entirety in one moment.
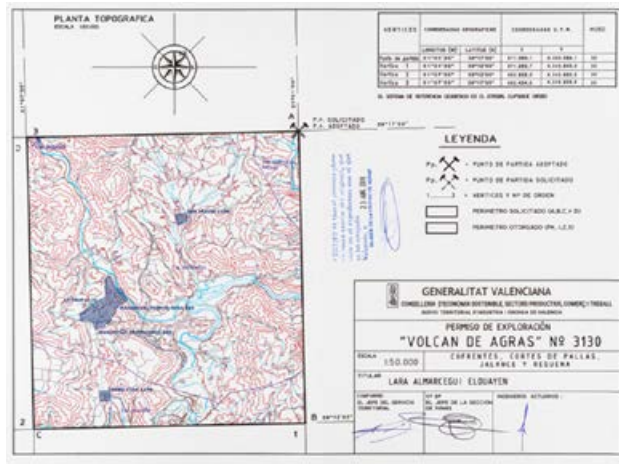
Lara Almarcegui, *Agras Vulcano Mineral Rights, Exploration permit,* Valencia, 2019. © the artist.

Bringing the past of destructive activities into the present, climate change discourse falls into one of the many utterances of this broad present. The engagement with spatial and temporal scales of geology is becoming essential for the confrontation of environmental challenges. As geologist Seth Denizen points out in his essay, "Three Holes: In the Geological Present," published in the anthology *Architecture in the Anthropocene*, today, geological scientists not only reconstruct the past (as was the original idea of the profession), but they are now confronted with the question: How to produce a geological present[28]:

> At the moment geology is asked to testify on behalf of its materials, regarding issues that concern the unfolding of ecological catastrophes, it becomes a forensic science in the legal sense. However, unlike the materials of forensic science, the geological materials that are brought to trial have not stopped speaking. Even the nature of the crime is in question. In short, geologists are increasingly being asked to answer the question what's going on? Rather than what happened?[29]

Geology as a discipline also bears the potential to develop future imaginaries by providing a lens through which time can be experienced beyond human perception.[30] Expanding the human understanding of time is not the only significant impact. Furthermore, geological calculations provide ground for juridical decision-making on a governmental level.

Rights of Ownership in the Capitalocene
In her mineral and mining projects, Lara Almarcegui intends to employ exactly this lens to reflect on rights of ownership that are so deeply intertwined in our capitalist governmental systems. The mineral rights are exclusive to the company or individual who receives the permit for exploration. In all of her mineral and mining rights projects, however, as mentioned above, Almarcegui never extracts anything from the areas she receives. Returning to the exhibition at IVAM, the copy of the permit of exploration forms the actual starting point of the exhibition. In Spanish it reads: "Lara Almarcegui explains that she intends to carry out exploration work on resources belonging to section C for which she is applying for an exploration permit for pozzolanic ashes for industrial use, which will be called 'Agras Volcano'."

The general regulations of this permit imply further that the "exploration program must be submitted indicating the techniques to available means for its development and details of the operations to be carried out to make on the surface of the land, with the plan, investment budget, financing program and guarantees offered on its viability."

At its core, it reminds the exhibition visitor that the project is not just representational but in fact legal reality. By committing to the project, Almarcegui is exposed to a binding contract, which demands certain exploration research results to be delivered in a year's time. Within this particular project as part of Almarcegui's investigation of mineral and mining rights across Europe, the artist unveils the regulations governing the ownership of exploration rights. Being a public property, the mining rights are managed by administrations, which lease certain areas to third parties, mostly big mining companies, for extraction of geologic material. Different permits are required in order to explore, research, and exploit a site. Already at the stage of the application procedure to receive a permit for exploration, Almarcegui had to hire a geologist, who would conduct the primary research necessary for the submission. As with the contracts Almarcegui signs for her Mineral Rights projects across Europe, she must deal with locally changing juristic facts and fulfill the agreed-upon requirements. Upon completion of the exploration, a report with geophysical measurements, geological surveys, geochemical sampling, geochemical anomaly charts, accounts of rock exposures, and so on, must be submitted to the state. To meet all requirements, Almarcegui is obliged to collaborate with geologists and local industrial sectors to submit this report. However, an exploration permit by itself does not allow mining, which would require a separate application process.

Considering climate change and resource exploitation, societies based on conceptions of property face the historically relatively recent challenge of reconciling property with sustainability. In his ongoing research on social ownership, philosopher Tilo Wesche discusses a new concept of property, which supports a new perspective on natural resources that undermines capitalist exploitation. Looking at nature as a source for the creation of value—for example from soil, water, wind, or the sun—nature becomes something that must be protected. The next step is to grant rights to nature for its own natural resources, because any foreign property that does not belong to you imposes a fundamental obligation that you must not damage or destroy it. And since natural resources are foreign property, belonging to nature, people are obligated to use them sustainably. As a result, obligations of sustainability have to follow the logic of property itself. Wesche claims that the law that "property obligates" should be extended to nature. This chain of thought is not so uncommon. The rights of nature, such as those embedded in the Constitution of Ecuador or the laws of New Zealand today, are also expressed in the claim that natural resources are nature's property. This line of argument is grounded in the Green movement of the 1980s, with the British lawyer Poly Higgins and her campaign "ecocide" as one of its most prominent figures. Higgins dedicated her life to drafting a law that would make corporate executives and government ministers criminally liable for the damage they do to ecosystems.

Meanwhile, Almarcegui has become familiar with dealing with different authorities and the various mineral and mining laws across European countries. By claiming up to nine years of mining rights of iron deposits in different countries, and by then refusing to extract these, Almarcegui is effectively blocking or denying the industrial and economic exploitation of resources. In the context of the outlined property discourse, one could say: she returns nature's property—its resources—back to nature. As long as Almarcegui legally claims an area's mining rights, companies cannot exploit its resources. While every government has its own national regulations on mineral and mining rights, in her research, Almarcegui has discovered that for the most part it is uncommon to issue mining rights to small parties or individuals. Norway might be one of the few exceptions, allowing individuals to apply.

Undermining the Narrative of Growth

In none of her mineral rights projects does Almarcegui seek economic advantage. On the contrary, pushing the absurdity of demand and value creation to extremes, Almarcegui applies for the mining rights of iron—a material which in today's industry is characterized by only minor demand and correspondingly low prices. By doing so, Almarcegui indirectly criticizes the imperative of constant growth, which in capitalist societies equates to constant progress.

The persistence of slow violence grounds in dominant capitalist culture, which allows for no room for negotiation or for building new narratives while the myth of growth continues to dominate our cultural perspectives:

> We also face a barrage of messages that tell us to keep moving forward, to get the newer model, to have more babies, to get bigger. There is a lot of pressure to grow [...]. Our era of human destruction has trained our eyes only on the immediate promises of power and profits.[31]

When "the story of pioneers, progress, and the transformation of 'empty' spaces into industrial resource fields"[32] no longer works, how to make one of the biggest challenges of our time tangible? The circulating facts and images about climate change are just as daunting, as they offer the potential incentive to rethink our perceptions of the new era, to withdraw from the "assumptions of growth," and to accept "the heterogeneity of space and time," argues anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. The categories of improvement and growth are still grounded in our perception of the world: "The problem is that progress stopped making sense [...]. It is in this dilemma that new tools for noticing seem so important."[33]

In the discourse on the Capitalocene era, numerous voices are circulating that build on a report titled *The Limits to Growth* commissioned by the Club of Rome, published in 1972. In her book *In Catastrophic Times: Resistance to the Coming Barbarism*, philosopher Isabelle Stengers questions the dominant imperative of growth, which "identified with progress continues to impose itself as the only conceivable horizon."[34] The logic of growth: it invariably implies the exploitation of nature, among other processes of injustice and inequality. Stengers proposes "creating a life after economic growth that explores connections to the new power of acting, feeling, imagining, and thinking."[35]

How can we think about this in light of Lara Almarcegui's work? As scholar Isabelle Doucet points out in her essay "Anticipating Fabulous Futures," "Much of architectural production may be complicit in economic growth."[36] Lara Almarcegui shows with all clarity that there are still too few alternatives presented by architects and city planners. In the concreteness of abstract figures and the cherishing of wastelands, the artist illustrates the urgency and necessity of rethinking the Western world's relation to growth and progress. Her methods and themes in the project concerning mineral and mining rights place Lara Almarcegui in the field of forensic research involving interdisciplinary approaches drawn from the sciences of geology, archaeology, ecology, and historiography.

Exchanging Research

The exact processes behind the conversations and collaborations between Lara Almarcegui and the geologists involved in her projects have yet to be discussed in more detail. The question of if the exchange is valuable for both sides remains open up to this point. By diving deeply into the subject matter, Almarcegui has evidently developed enough tools and is equipped with the necessary knowledge to ask scientists the right questions. But is this approach a mutually beneficial one? Can geologists benefit from the artistic exchange with Almarcegui? In a conversation with me, Almarcegui implied that finding geologists who are interested in collaborating with an artist on land exploration is challenging. Sometimes it takes the power of persuasion to convince the scientist to invest time for a project that is not heading toward the usual scientific outcome. It is a matter of time, communication and mutual professional appreciation that artistic and scientific approaches can merge into one shared vision of a specific project.

An insight on Almarcegui's research process, and how the mutual interest in geology can inspire critical reflection across the disciplines, is provided in the interview "Earth Calculation," published in the artist's catalogue *Béton* in 2019, between Almarcegui and Winfried Dallmann, an Associate Professor at the Department of Geosciences at the Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø. The two worked together on the project *Rocks of Spitsbergen*. With the title *Earth Calculation*, Almarcegui introduces her idea for a colossal new project, which "consists of calculating the total amount of Earth's rock materials."[37] After being asked if such a calculation would be of any relevance to geoscience, Dallmann replied by pointing out the difficulties of such an endeavor: "Your idea needs some clarification. When

you talk about Earth, do you mean the entire planet right down to the centre of the core, or do you mean Earth's crust? Or, as in the calculations in Spitsbergen, only the land mass above sea level?"[38]

After posing these questions, Dallmann provides a number of informative considerations on what needs to be considered to devise any kind of viable and worthwhile calculation. The interview is an excerpt of a three-year-long conversation between the geologist and the artist and shows how a playful approach to generating ideas can open up new scales of feasibility and imagination for both disciplines. In her projects, "Almarcegui presents both markers of geological facts and a way of narrating and abstracting: a geopoetics, a geophilosophy, or a geohistory," curators Max Andrews and Mariana Cinema Luna note in their essay "Thinking Like A Drainage Basin." Andrews and Luna argue further: "They [the works] open up an alliance between the typographic and the stratigraphic, between stones that are stones, and stones that are human resources, or abstract fictions."[39]

Digging deep and engaging with the vertical has proved itself to be an artistic strategy to entangle with the environment in this new epoch. This paradigmatic turn brings about a reconsidered view and understanding of nature.

Mines and quarries are still to be found on Earth in countless numbers, and they will continue to exist. The eschewing of a gaze upon the landscape or chunks of it or of seeking out the sublime, Lara Almarcegui looks straight into the eyes of the beast and addresses issues of resources and their exploitation actively and on an equal footing. Refusing to create images, but rather working on a 1:1 scale, she avoids a reduction of complexity. Her works uncover and show the correlations of the future and the past of industrial processes. In contrast, Almarcegui's direct pragmatism and engagement with concrete materiality contributes to the development of new narratives that propose methods of structural change in the midst of epochal transformation. In particular, this means grasping what landscapes and industries, which draw from these resources, surround you; what policies and legal regulations are involved; and how you can actively take care of the environment you are entangled with. Almarcegui's practice situates itself as a leading strategy for visualizing the latency of slow violence in times when the urgency of a pandemic overruns our perception. Almarcegui's practice can be summarized as follows: she shows and reports exactly what there is, and the ways in which it is there. By doing

so, the artist offers a humble narrative or, in the words of Demos and Solnit, "a revolt against brutality."[40]

The Covid-19 quarantine discourse was notably quick to adopt the comparison and reference to ongoing issues of climate change. Bruno Latour was one of the first voices to bring up the topic in his short essay "Is This a Dress Rehearsal?," published in *Critical Inquiry* in 2020, hypothesizing that the current health crisis could be a kind of rehearsal for worse days to come due to climate change.[41] Although a bold statement that some have been quick to criticize,[42] Latour's approach invites the reimagining of possible future scenarios based on the necessary changes on so many levels we are currently living through, or in Latour's own words: "The state of society depends at every moment on the associations between many actors, most of whom do not have human forms. This is true of microbes [...] but also of the internet, the law, the organization of hospitals, the logistics of the state, as well as the climate."[43]

Lara Almarcegui helps us familiarize ourselves with many of these actors ahead of its collapse. The subject matter of Almarcegui's work is never expressed in a vocabulary of the extreme, the improbable, or uncanny catastrophism—she simply shows us the world of extraction as it is without exaggeration or embellishment. She never speaks about any singular, hence improbable, situation, or highly distinguished cases. The sites she seeks out are never at the center of attention. They could be visible to anyone if there was just enough interest; otherwise, systematic, slow violence remains unrecognized as such. The extraction industries Almarcegui follows, the mineral laws she researches and claims—the point is to show that all this happens gradually on a daily basis. The extraction industries are highly probable, they are never uncanny, but they are dangerously extreme.

Text written in April 2020.

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Notes

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3
Art and Curating in Conflict Zones

What Borders Can Do
Carla Gimeno Jaria

How difficult is to imagine a world without borders? Whether they are material, such as walls, frontiers, or fences, or conceptual, such as race or gender divisions, borders constitute the very nature of societies by dividing, configuring, and leading social flows. Even when we peacefully inhabit our mother's womb, our beings are positioned under diverse groups that define how our life will unfold. Is it a girl or a boy? Where will you be born? These are common questions that, from the early stages of a human's life, designate our place in the world: where we will be belong and where we will not.

Intangible and Tangible Borders

One could refer to these first kind of classifications as intangible or conceptual borders, since they separate one from another but in a more ideological or cognitive sense. Conceptual borders might appear to be subtler than walls or other types of physical borders, yet their dividing effects are still very effective. In *A Cyborg Manifesto*,[1] Donna Haraway uncovers gender, race, and class as the three main social divisions that have rendered humanity fragmented for decades. Haraway points out the threatening nature of these ideological divisions that define the boundary conditions of societies by predetermining our identities and roles.[2] As Haraway states, the assertion and constitution of these taxonomies comes as a result of the hegemonic Western discourse: "Gender, race and class consciousness is an achievement forced by the realities of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism."[3] The successful inscription of these intangible borders in today's collective imagery performed by the power structures, therefore, has driven to the constitution of the world as a segregated body.

When borders are tangible, their material constitution and attached rituals of violence produce a more palpable break, by forcing a physical division between humans who are supposed to live in different territories or nations. Although there is an irrefutable distinction between intangible and tangible borders, it is also certain that they overlap in their conception. Both kinds of borders may differ in their materiality, but they both exist to expulse, distribute, divide, separate, classify, isolate, split, and so on. Certainly, the need for power structures to identify race and class as intangible borders among people have fed the increasing constitution of tangible borders all over the world.

The philosopher Thomas Nail has recently published *The Theory of the Border*, an extensive exploration of the notion of the contemporary border that starts by expressing the impossibility of providing a general theory of the border because of its complex composite nature.[4] Nail highlights that borders have historically had different names and differences, but they have always had something in common since they all imply "a process of social division."[5] Precisely, this commonality relates to Nail's approach to the border in relation to kinopolitics—a theory that understands societies as "regimes of motion" and not as "static, spatial or temporal"—by evidencing that the border cannot be reduced to an immobile or fixed entity because it is continuously negotiated and transformed while it is being used to regulate and distribute the movement of social flows.[6] Neil also introduces the "in betweenness" of the tangible border, as it is usually located "between states" so "the border, as a division, is not entirely contained by the territory, state, law, or economy that it divides."[7] This particularity, therefore, introduces an interesting field for exploring the breaches of the border as a constitutive

body. Walls or fences, for instance, are built up as dividers between territories, yet they touch both sides of the states that are supposed to divide. This demonstrates that, in fact, borders become an oxymoron in their very conception. So, even if the tangible border is meant to be a space of social division, what if it can also become a space to actively challenge, question, and reformulate these imposed norms?

Border Art and the México/U.S. Border

In recent decades, it has become increasingly common to see artists who develop art-works and collective projects in vulnerable territories of the world such as borders. Art activism is not something new, but since the Sixties there has been an exponential growth of artists whose practice is focused on actively reacting to the impositions of power structures, whether it is because of a political or social situation or because of climate change. According to the theorist Boris Groys: "Art activists do not want to merely criticize the art system or the general political and social conditions under which this system functions. Rather, they want to change these conditions by means of arts."[8] There are uncountable ways of performing art activism, but a specific artistic movement addressing border politics from a critical angle emerged on the México/U.S. border in the early Eighties.

The México/U.S. border, composed of different sections and materials, is 1,989 miles long and has become one of the most frequently crossed borders in the world.[9] Aiming to explore the political and social tensions of this border, in 1984 a bi-national group composed of David Avalos, Sara-Jo Berman, Víctor Ochoa, Isaac Artenstein, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Michael Schnorr, and Jude Edhard, who were all artists, activists, and scholars, founded Borders Art Workshop/Taller Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAF).[10] As one of the first collectives to emerge in the México/U.S. borderlands, they started to per-form their projects both in the city of Tijuana in México and at the borderline itself. Through their art projects, which mainly are site-specific interventions and live art actions that engage with the community, they aim to reimagine and subvert the condi-tion of the border.[11]

Since the appearance of BAW/TAF, there has been a rise in artists who have developed art interventions and projects in the borderline. What most of them have in common is that they usually question the state of affairs through a subversive method, by involving the participation of the communities of both sides of the border, which is to say, people who politically and ideologically are supposed to be confronted or sepa-rated. This means that, frequently, border art actions are community projects that crit-ically engage with border politics through participatory processes and exchanges. In this scenario, artists become researchers who aim to create a space for political and critical performances to take place.[12] Guillermo Gómez-Peña, one of the founding BAW/TAF members, described the experience of their actions as such: "We really focused on the border as a site of possibilities, as a spiral model as opposed to a divid-ing line."[13] This is why the notion of the border cannot be understood as a neutral line that only divides nations but rather as a site of social struggle composed of a cosmos of subjectivities, laws, and imposed hierarchies and taxonomies, whose meanings and nature can also be challenged through collective action.

Participatory Art and Bi-National Encounters

Participatory art involves all those works where the artist moves away from the figure of individual producer of objects and becomes a producer of situations and exchanges between people.[14] The theorist Claire Bishop alludes to Guy Debord's thinking on the human necessity for participatory art as a project since, "It re-humanises a society ren-

dered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production."[15] The living body, thus, becomes the central focus of live artistic actions, framing the uncertain fate of the body-body transmission in a determinate space and time as an intrinsic condition for its existence.

More precisely, the fact that the vast majority of artistic projects taking place on the México/U.S. border are accompanied by participatory actions illustrates the artists' need to involve other living bodies in order to engage with the reality of the border and eventually create a space where the norms can be challenged collectively with those who are directly affected by border politics. As the live art curator Lois Keidan stresses: "Live art is able to cross boundaries between art and politics and cross not only conceptual borders but also physical ones, due to its site specificity and responsiveness to its contexts and audiences."[16] Currently, there are dozens of examples that demonstrate how through site-specific live actions and interventions, cultural producers are able to circumvent the nature of the border, by altering its condition and *raison d'être* on a temporary basis.

A first example is the French urban artist JR, who uses photography to create subversive interventions in the public space. In October 2017, on the last day of his installation at the México and U.S. fence, which featured a huge image of a Mexican kid looking towards the United States side, the artist decided to organize a massive bi-national picnic in-between the fence. JR first created a giant dining table whose surface incorporated a picture of the eyes of a "Dreamer," which made reference to one of the young undocumented migrants who at that moment belonged to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.[17] The table straddled the fence in Tecate, on both sides of the border between México and the USA. The bi-national picnic was not officially announced or publicized because of the risk of being stopped by US Border Patrol agents, so the only way the artist could let the community know was through word of mouth.[18] Surprisingly, dozens of neighbors from both sides of the border started to show up. Eventually, hundreds of people—who historically have been forced to live separated—were sharing food, drinks, and music on a sunny day at the fence itself. Despite the border wall being on-site, reminding them that they were from opposed nations, they constructed a temporal space for coexistence and friendship, where nationalities, class, age, and gender were anything but relevant.

Also in 2017, Collective Magpie, formed by Tae Hwang and MR Barnadas and whose work is mainly linked to migration and the ways in which cultural configurations can be negotiated, presented their two-year-long project called *Globos* (which means balloons in Spanish). *Globos* started in 2015 as a series of workshops held in Tijuana (México) and San Diego (United States), where participants were invited to create triangular tissue paper pieces that would eventually build a giant hot air balloon.[19] The final structure of the balloon, which measured about 37 feet by 25 feet, was held together by thousands of these triangle tissue papers, which were all interconnected.[20] For both artists, the clear statement behind this collaboratively made giant hot air balloon was how such a simple gesture performed during diverse workshops could transcend the border condition.[21] The project culminated in a collective border-side balloon launch that took place on both sides of border: the bi-national Parque de la Amistad/Friendship Park in Plaza del Faro in Tijuana and the Border Field State Park in San Diego.[22] This way, as a metaphorical gesture, the participants of the workshops from both nations could see how the hot air balloon was able to cross the border over the wall.

More recently, on the July 30, 2019, *Teeter Totter Wall*, a performative sculpture conceptualized and designed by architects Rowland Rael and Virginia San Fratello, became a media sensation on social media.[23] People from all over the world were impressed to see that three temporary pink seesaws had been installed cross-border at the fence section that separates El Paso in Texas (USA) and Juárez in México.[24] Rael and San Fratello worked on the art project for over ten years, first starting with the sketches and then looking for different ways to make it happen. Finally, for half an hour, children from both countries went to the fence and played together with those seesaws, which allowed them to see each other from both sides, as if they were on a playground. This action was particularly relevant in a moment in which dozens of families were struggling to stay together due to the severe border politics imposed by the ex-president of the United States, Donald Trump, which forced kids to be separated from their parents. Even though it was just for a few minutes, the fence thus became a place to embrace children's innocence and joy.

There are plenty more artistic productions that have taken place on the México/U.S. border, but these three illustrate how collaborative site-specific performances with the local communities, who are directly affected by the violence of border politics, can become a means to circumvent the imposed narratives of dividing walls. Although these borderland communities are constantly confronted with the reductive power of borders, these artworks demonstrate that there are ways in which they can find in the tangible border a temporal "in-betweenness" for social resistance. As the professor Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary relates: "Fencing a border not only activates but re-activates a cultural production on the significances and meanings of international limits but also transform the original meaning of the fence itself."[25]

Institutionalism and Border Politics

Even though there are some exhibitions in more conventional art spaces such as museums or galleries that address border politics, by critically engaging with the notion of the wall or the frontier, one cannot ignore that these institutions also encompass certain processes of social division. Take as an example the exhibition *Borders* that took place at James Cohan Gallery in New York (USA) in 2019. Featuring the work of 28 artists with diverse nationalities, this show tackled a series of concerns regarding the rise of nationalism and the global refugee crisis in relation to borders.[26] The exhibition included a wide range of media: from art documentation of artists who had previously developed artworks on a border site to conceptual works or site-specific installations in the gallery approaching the physical and palpable violence of the border.[27] Yet, what remains important in this scenario is that generally these institutions and galleries are built of walls, creating a tangible division between the inside and outside. Likewise, even if they are free, they are not democratic and accessible to everyone; therefore, they involve a separation between those who have accessibility to "high culture" and those who do not. This exhibition was created as a site for reflection and contemplation, sparking a critical statement, but this lack of engagement with certain publics, almost turning the experience of art into something exclusive or elitist, leaves an open question: is Border Art supposed to be displayed according to the logics of a conventional art display?

When art is explicitly produced to take place on tangible borders, it cannot be framed within the logics of object-based exhibitions, since it usually establishes a direct and dependent relationship with the spatial context and the local community. On the one hand, even if there are several artworks developed on borders that do not involve the participation of the community, they are site-specific, meaning that the temporal and

GLOBOS at Friendship Park/Parque de la Amistad, Tijuana-San Diego,
Photo credit: James Reyes, Image courtesy of Collective Magpie

spatial frameworks of these artworks are essential to their existence. A certain social and political situation in a specific territory makes a difference to all those artworks that are in a direct relationship with a certain spatial context. On the other hand, when border artworks require the participation or presence of those who live on the border-lands, they also become site-specific. Generally, live art expressions have translated the traditional understanding of the artist as the only author into another state. Neverthe-less, in the case of border artworks, it is not a matter of audiences or publics, but rather the authorship is usually transferred to a whole community whose presence is indis-pensable for the artwork to exist. Imagine JR's *Picnic at the Border* without participants or Magpie Collective's *Globos* being made by the artists themselves. The political and social effects of those artworks would be much less powerful without the community's participation, if not negligible. In this way, therefore, authorship is built up in a collab-orative way by requiring participation for its constitution.[28]

There is, however, a particular case of art institutionalism on the México/U.S. border that relates to this site-specific nature of Border Art in relation to the engagement with the local community. The Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts (also known as the Rubin Center) officially opened in 2004 at the University of Texas El Paso (UTEP), which is located on the México/U.S border.[29] The project was born in the early 2000s when the art curator Kate Bonansinga started working as gallery director in the small art gallery on the university campus. Bonansinga felt that the bi-national envi-ronment and context of the UTEP, of which 80% of its students are Mexican American, was particularly challenging in relation to contemporary art; so, after working for one year in the gallery, she made the decision to fight for a more ambitious program in order to reach a wider audience.[30] Three years later, the Rubin Center—named after the main donors—opened in a much bigger space in one of the facilities of the campus. From the very beginning, Bonansinga's curatorial aim was clear: she wanted to create a space for art directly related to the México/U.S. border, where artists would become researchers, and art students would become their assistants, thereby triggering

cross-disciplinary discussions and learning.[31] The location was ideal for this to happen, so she turned the space into an ongoing research hub hosting commissioned art installations—mainly new media, sculpture and performance artworks—from selected artists who were either familiar with this particular geographical territory or experienced in addressing the theme of the México/U.S. border or borders in general through their art.[32] Furthermore, the fact that the students were part of the program, whose relationship with the border was relatable to their personal experience, endowed the Rubin Center with strong social bonds with the local community.

Curating on the Borderlands

When Kate Bonansinga founded the Rubin Center, she had a direct curatorial goal, which led her to create a successful program with a strong link to the borderland community. This particular example leaves therefore an important note on the figure of the curator in a borderland zone. The word "curate" comes from the Latin *cura*, which means "to take care of." The art curator, thus, first emerged as the figure within museums and institutions in charge of preserving art collections and cultural heritage. In recent decades, the conventional figure of the curator, understood as the organizer of art exhibitions, has increasingly been moving towards new directions and interpretations, making it difficult to delimit and define their role under certain contexts and premises.

Border Art introduces diverse challenges in relation to the curatorial because when artworks are developed at a border wall such us the México/U.S one, whether they involve the participation of the community or not, the responsibility of the curator is not about displaying artworks and facilitating constructive exchanges between audiences and artists within the exhibition space, but about answering a complicated political and social situation and framework in a particular time and location through an artistic project. Something that remains relevant in this scenario, though, is that a curatorial situation implies the development of patterns of hospitality, by providing the spatio-temporal conditions to engender encounters between unknown entities or bodies.[33] This is why the figure of the curator has experienced a shift, because in our times, art is subject to myriad variables relating to its mediums, locations, audiences, authorship, participants, and so on.

There are several reasons why artistic mediation has to be contemplated in artistic projects taking place on the México/U.S. border. On the one hand, if artworks involve the participation of the community, the curator might act as a supporter for the encounters between those who live on the borderlands and the artists, by facilitating those patterns of hospitality that will allow participants to be an active part of the project within a safe space. On the other hand, commissioned artworks taking place on the México/U.S. border are surrounded by a cosmos of challenges related to the complexities of this particular territory. Even if a border wall might be a potential place to find a grid to challenge the system, there are also norms and regulations that can hinder the complete realization of certain projects. Here, the responsibility of the curator entails understanding the hardships of the artwork, because of its critical and political nature, by knowing all the possible scenarios that the artist might have to confront during the whole execution. This is why curating on the borderlands is way more complex than exhibiting an artwork and translating its meaning to an audience. It requires deep knowledge and research, not just on the artists' practices but specially on the border condition, its structures, norms, and social and political context.

The Border as a Space for Social and Political Action

Irrefutably, art activism has transformed the relationships within the art world by configuring and triggering new ways of engaging with audiences and mutating the notion of the exhibition medium. In particular, Border Art has transferred art production into an extreme territory, where artworks reformulate the traditional narratives of the history of art by dealing with a strong political burden and creating bonds with local communities.

Nowadays, it seems that the border in all its forms is a perpetuated condition for the world's existence and constitution. However, it cannot be understood as a unique and fixed entity, because it implies a wide range of assertions, configurations, and materials. In *Border as a Method*, the theorist and Professor Sandro Mezzadra reinforces that the border is not subject to one unique definition because it cannot be understood as something methodological.[34] Mezzadra insists that the border is a complex matter of politics, subjectivities, processes of production, and so on, and the only method that one can perform to approach its nature is to question the vision of the border as a neutral line through different means.[35] Precisely, the artists who are developing their practice or works at the México/U.S. border support this idea by reinterpreting through art the notion of the wall only as a divider.

This ceaseless production of art at the México/U.S. border and other borders all over the world also illustrates an increasing global desire to question and dismantle the hegemonic Western discourse: its norms and taxonomies that create predetermined identities. As the activist, writer, and curator Lucy Lippard states in the foreword to *Curating at the Edge*: "Although the darker side of border relations unavoidably dominates artists' responses at this moment in history, works like these offer a hopeful determination to change."[36] The border might be a divisive entity, but it also offers a grid for resisting and reacting to the state of affairs, where imposed divisions can be superceded by unleashing a critical response to those constructed identities and social divisions. Even though Border Art only offers a temporary rupture in these preestablished regulations and separations, it has translated the meaning of the border into something else: a space where bi-national encounters and friendships have emerged against all odds. In this scenario, thus, art goes beyond traditional display, because it instead becomes a method to temporally circumvent the rituals of violence and expulsion imposed on the borderlands by the ruling power.[37]

Border walls as closed sites where "performative power is extremely powerful" present a new opportunity for the community that has been oppressed "to seize the wall."[38] Yet, what remains essential in this transformative process of the border, as a site for social resistance and political action, is collaboration. By engaging with a given political geography and social framework, Border Art shows that what is needed, more than ever, are ongoing processes of collaboration: between nations, between artists and communities, between communities, between artists and curators, and so on.[39] It is imperative, therefore, to use collaboration as a tool to actively challenge an imposed physical division and trigger critical reactions that will eventually echo worldwide.

Notes

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28 Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, *Hospitality: Hosting Relations in Exhibitions* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 7-19.

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34 Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, "The Proliferation of Borders," *in Border as a Method* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 1-19.

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36 Bonansinga, *Curating at the Edge*, xi.

37 Amilhat Szary, "Walls and Border Art," 213-228.
38 Ibid.
39 Prieto, "Border Art as a Political Strategy."

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Errant Curating
Nadim Samman

"I have no doubt about one thing, however, if we do not travel toward each other, we will eradicate each other."
– Vilém Flusser

Andrei Kuzkhin, *Tree,* Paradise Bay, 2017. photo courtesy Antarctic Biennale

But *we* are not just people. We are animals, plants and microbes too. Our "world of habit" has for too long proposed a we that represses ecology, locating non-human others beyond the pale of home. But this habit, this abode, "is becoming uninhabitable."[1] Its walls are perforated—bearing news/gifts/threats from beyond. What news? Waking dreams: a knocking at the door, for want of its own home; a breach in the firewall and a listener on the phone. There are termites in the floorboards and cockroaches in the cupboards. Insurgency. *They* are coming for us. *They* are already here. *It* also approaches: the oceans' rising hunger for land, from Manhattan to the Maldives. *It* has already happened, the Larsen C ice-shelf afloat in the Weddell Sea.[2] A plague of jellyfish in the Mediterranean, stinging bathers' toes; a leaking reactor, seeding global tides. In academic philosophy, the (meta)physical "great outdoors, the absolute outside" invading the Cartesian hearth.[3] Compounding the overturning of habit which Flusser associated with the

"telematic" age, *we* find it impossible to ignore the undermining of habitats—a refugee crisis and a sixth mass extinction.[4] Art's habitual residence?—the museum. The curator's habitual task, until the 1960s?—"hanging and placing" work on walls.[5] Today, the aesthetico-political shibboleth of a "big, beautiful wall" only bolsters Szeemann's demand that we abandon this task.[6]

Antarctica (-64.8499966 -62.8999964): piercing light across a bay of icebergs, whipped into shape by wind and sea. A rocky shoreline, soon becoming steep, upwards on one side approaching a lookout. On the far side of this ridge, a channel ringed by hulking glacial cliffs that fracture like Carrara marble at the water's edge. Above them, rising into the clouds and out of sight, ice upon ice; eons of snow. Here, today—taking up less than one square meter of the continent's 14 billion—is a live cocoa tree that has travelled all the way from the Ecuadorian rainforest. Set within a life support

system (a glass greenhouse whose interior climate reproduces equatorial conditions), its verdant leaves cast a surreal tint over the polar scene. This tree has wandered far from home. So has the artist who planted it.[7] Under the aegis of the 1st Antarctic Biennale, so has the institution of the biennale itself—and, most obviously, the curatorial mandate.[8]

In light of the above, the following question presents itself: How has the site of the exhibition wandered so far from its historical locus—the *home* of the muses? In attempting to answer, let us offer some notes toward a theory of the curatorial agent as monster, pirate, authority, and pilot—by appealing to her environmental engagements. Let us consider wandering as curatorial method—exhibition-making in an errant mode, beyond galleries, indeed, beyond cities. This curating traverses the globe, from domestic settings to geographical extremes—reconfiguring spatial, jurisdictional, identity, and narrative values through its (sometimes uninvited) presence(s); rescoring environments.

*

According to a prominent member of the strategic studies community, contemporary society is undergoing "a fundamental transformation by which functional infrastructure tells us more about how the world works than physical borders."[9] And yet, this infrastructure also clouds our vision. It is disorientating, insofar as it advances epistemological equivalence, apparently disclosing a lack of privileged vantage points from which to survey an intellectual/cultural scene. Under this hyperlinked condition, one site gives way to another—both physically and conceptually. But at least part of the "post-truth" lie—and the seizure of sovereignty that it enacts—stems from the less than visible characteristics of infrastructure itself. As the task of disclosure grows more urgent, mines, cables, server farms, and security systems are beginning to feature in exhibitions.[10] The expanded sovereignty of today's curating is obtained in the vector itself. That is to say, exhibiting the world consists in the function—"working the world": operating at least some of the control protocols of *spaceship infrastructure.*

My use of the term *spaceship infrastructure* proceeds from a reflection on the emerging wave of geopolitical theory, which sets out to 'map' the technical integration of the globe in order to comment on the contemporary condition(s) of sovereignty. In the detail and methodological basis of their diagnoses, writings by figures from opposing ends of the ideological spectrum (such as

Parag Khanna and Benjamin Bratton) dovetail in inviting the conclusion that Buckminster Fuller's book, *Spaceship Earth*, was less a manual and more prolegomena to any future one. Keeping the latter's spaceship earth dyad in the frame, we may suggest that both thinkers' reflections are turned towards the spaceship. The ship, as anyone who has spent an extended period at sea is likely to reflect, is a totally designed environment—one whose architecture scores, in the manner of choreography, life onboard.[11] Herewith, Khanna's explication of living within: "There is no undesignated space [even] the skies are cluttered with airplanes, satellites, and increasingly drones, layered with CO_2 emissions and pollution, and permeated by radar and telecommunications."[12] Bratton similarly speaks from the interior. His model "does not put technology 'inside' a 'society,' but sees a technological totality as the armature of the social itself."[13] We "dwell within" an "accidental megastructure [...] a new architecture" that "divide[s] up the world into sovereign spaces."[14] This megastructure incorporates "infrastructure at the continental level, pervasive computing at the urban scale, and ambient interfaces at the perceptual scale," amongst other things.[15] For Bratton (though reflected in Khanna's comments on the sky), maps of horizontal space (planar geography) "can't account for all the overlapping layers that create a thickened vertical jurisdictional complexity."[16]

Curatorial Authorship is, taking these considerations into account, a vector through various layers of jurisdiction, engaging each of their respective designations (or scores), and (re)interpreting them in turn. What Bratton terms the "design horizons" of each layer must be probed for unintended affordances—pieces of open source code, latent architectural possibilities. In some cases, layers may be totally redesigned. Beyond a purely material frame, we observe that "jurisdictional" accommodates the soft specificities of site identified by Miwon Kwon, namely "cultural debates, a theoretical concept [...] a historical condition, even particular formations of desire."[17] In light of all this, today's wandering curatorial enterprise—which we may term a *total* species of exhibition design—incorporates acts of renovation, rescoring/(re)interpretation, renegotiation, and even re-desiring, in its (sovereign) operations.

Rather than arranging objects on the walls of a gallery or museum, the first task of this layered curating concerns selecting what jurisdictions are to be put on display in a given project. The subsequent task of (critical) exhibition design consists in staging their relation to one another (drawing out their points of connection) as

Paul Rosero Contreras, *Arriba!,* Paradise Bay, Antarctica, 2017. photo courtesy the artist

a complex, and altering arrangements within each—arguing the case (installation). In this process of rearranging, we have recourse to existing choreographies supplied by artists, and the option of commissioning new works/levers. But we may not always need to deploy 'art' in our operation—or, at least, deploy it correctly. Moreover, in pursuit of real disclosure, the 'making visible' proper to the concept of the *exhibit*, we may find ourselves wandering beyond museums, galleries, and perhaps cities. We may even leave, at least to a cursory view, exhibition audiences behind. But, in fact, it is in this errant mode that the author/ship of curating actually steers towards them.

We errant curators 'leave' our walled cities (our greenzones) for geographical extremes not to escape, but to make the contemporary hearth more visible—spaceship infrastructure is always already *everywhere*, as far as we are concerned. If a curator wanders towards a place like Antarctica, it is because all putative elsewheres are already coming for us. In wandering, our procedure consists in toggling between (geographic or political) distance and functional proximity—an exemplary making visible of the latter. This mode of display (re)maps the audience's position in relation to 'distant' locales, for the purpose of tracing the former's impact on them (ecologically, for instance). Conversely, it illuminates the sway such spaces hold over one's immediate situation. This curatorial vector exhibits the condition of operative inseparability which binds seemingly heterogeneous economic, social, ecological, identitarian, and geographic domains. Rather than exclusive focus on "states and

their divisions" (the demarcation of borders, which, we maintain, need not be interpreted solely in a geopolitical sense, but which may circumscribe multifarious jurisdictions), we aim to deliver the exhibition as complex para-state and/or parasite. Rather than instituting visual and informational opacity, and spatial inaccessibility, within our projects in order to disenfranchise the audience, we do so in order to lay bare otherwise obscure mandates for authorship. We leave, in order to return (the audience's space to them). We take in order to give.[18] And so off we wander:

Vector (I): A Buried Exhibition
A 500-kilometer hard sail from the sweltering Costa Rican port of Golfito, Isla del Coco juts up from the Pacific deep. There is no way to fly in, and you cannot visit without a government permit. Covering just nine of the ocean's 64 million square miles, its shallows are an important spawning ground for coral, a cornucopia of fish species, and legions of predators. At any given moment, the island is circled by hundreds of sharks. Above the water line, cliffs—broken only by waterfalls—support a seething, virgin, jungle.

Perhaps the only place in the world where treasure-hunting is explicitly illegal, stories of what is buried in Coco's interior have developed into myth, inspiring novels and genre fantasies for more than a century. The best known concerns the so-called Treasure of Lima. In 1820, with the army of José de San Martín approaching, Peru's viceroy José de la Serna entrusted the treasury of the city's cathedral to a British sea trader named Captain

Alexis Anastasiou, *Hopeless Utopia,* Lemaire Channel, 2017. photo courtesy Antarctic Biennale

William Thompson. Instead of remaining in the harbor as instructed, Thompson and his men slit the throats of the viceroy's men and sailed to Coco. They were later apprehended, and all of the crew bar the captain and his first mate were hanged. The lucky two were spared after promising to guide their captors to the rich hoard.[19] After arriving on Coco, the pair ran off into the trees, never to be found. Several treasure-hunting expeditions would later be mounted on the basis of claims by a man named Keating, who was said to have befriended Thompson on his deathbed in Newfoundland and received a map to the hoard in thanks. Robert Louis Stevenson read about one such (failed) expedition in a San Francisco newspaper before writing *Treasure Island*, and some argue that the map he drew of his 'fictional' isle closely resembles numerous treasure charts of Coco.

Treasure of Lima: A Buried Exhibition (2014) involved burying an ensemble of commissioned works by 39 prominent artists at a secret location on Coco, with the permission of the Costa Rican National Park authority. The nature of the works themselves would be kept secret. They were housed in a bespoke capsule by architects Aranda/Lasch which looked nothing like a wooden treasure chest of old.[20] Its exterior was polished stainless steel, in the form of a truncated tetrahedron that opened (like an oyster) to reveal a sphere. This oversized 'pearl' comprised a vacuum-sealed glass vessel that would normally be used to protect underwater cameras, housing a series of aluminum boxes containing works on paper, small sculptures, LPs, and video and sound files stored on a hard drive. Upon arrival at Coco, the chest was

floated to shore on a raft, before being man-hauled inland, where it was eventually interred at a suitable location. Immediately after, the GPS coordinates of the site were logged. Upon returning to Berlin, the only extant copy of the coordinates were turned over to the Dutch artist Constant Dullaart. Working with a leading IT security consultant, who would remain anonymous, and following strict data-protection protocols, he oversaw their eventual encryption to the highest possible specification. The resulting cipher, over 2,000 characters long, was then given a physical form—3D-printed as a steel cylinder.[21] This was then placed in a second, unburied, version of the chest, which was then auctioned at a New York evening sale. Purchased for $185,000, the anonymous buyer took possession of an all but 'unreadable' map (no de-encryption key supplied), to a collection or 'exhibition' of works hidden on an island that cannot be visited without a permit, where digging for treasure is explicitly illegal. The project's commissioning organization, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, in collaboration with Costa Rican partners, used the funds to initiate a research and conservation project for the sharks that inhabit the island's surrounding waters.[22]

More than a physical incursion, *Treasure of Lima: A Buried Exhibition* effected a re-scoring/re-arrangement of the narrative/historical, legal, economic, and biological coordinates of Coco—one that, simultaneously, exhibited this complex.

Clearly, the project's title was borrowed from the original Treasure of Lima. This doubling was calculated to

effect a productive misfiling within the historical archive, whereby—in addition to being the first buried treasure on the island for two centuries—the smuggled content would expand the definition of 'treasure' encountered in the course of future researches into Coco's history. In particular, this move was ventured to impact narratives concerning ownership, exploitation, misappropriation, and colonialism. Hijacking the maritime dimensions of Central American history (in its pirate element), the project set these topics into relief, dramatizing modes of value and methods of identification in the present, and speaking to the topic of non-financial (biological) worth.[23]

The project further strove to exhibit the regulatory and enforcement framework by which Coco's natural 'treasures' are secured, on ecological grounds; also, to rescore interest in this system through the act of putting it on display. By negotiating permission to bury our exhibition—what real pirate would do that?—we acknowledged extant regulatory/ jurisdictional safeguards. However, by design, the endeavor instituted a possible threat to their enforcement: the intervention, publicized worldwide, certainly aroused interest in the chest's potential recovery. If anyone views the works contained within it, at some future date, this access will indicate a failure to enforce protection statutes, or their abolition entirely.[24] Curating as inoculation.

In economic terms, the project financially resourced a shark research and conservation scheme. This new project, itself, aimed to produce a resource of scientific information that could inform future biological management and regulation. Convening experts to draft an outline for this scheme was, it should be noted, a component of the curatorial enterprise.[25] In light of rampant poaching in the national park's waters, the 'exhibition' sought to diagnose the impact of ecological piracy and, additionally, palliative agendas—directly approaching the cure promised in the word curatorial.

Effecting a layered/vertical dramaturgy, the various 'burials' involved in the project manifested a translocational situation of author-ship. Beginning with the statement of buried artworks (announced as a practical fact involving mud and shovels), the project further entombed the GPS coordinates of the chest within the virtual crypt(ography) of Constant Dullaart's *Map* (2014). While denying the gathered artworks a chance to speak for themselves, burying them beneath visual and narrative mediations, the exhibition's 'making visible' abandoned the apparent antecedence of art docu-

mentation.[26] Considering the symbiotic relationship between *Map* and *Chest*, in terms of both symbolism and functionality, as well as their relation to the 38 artworks contained within the latter, *Treasure of Lima: A Buried Exhibition*'s 'venue' was not identified with any one-layer site but, rather, an entire complex spanning geographical distances and functional proximities.[27]

Extending even into the space of the art market, inscribing the actions of the collector within the exhibitionary proposition, the project further *contained* an implicit question regarding the exchange value of the works deployed in the project: Whoever bought *Map* has a better chance of recovering the buried *Chest* than most, but this neither guarantees practical nor legal possession. Indeed, the buyer took receipt of *Map* without a key to unlock its sophisticated encryption. In addition, there is the issue of gaining access to the island. Given that digging for treasure is banned, this might involve breaking the law. Notwithstanding these challenges, purchasing the map does not necessarily underwrite ownership of the buried artworks, even if they are eventually recovered. Legally speaking, only the physical *Map* was sold at auction. In this respect, the potential ownership of the buried artworks is, itself, buried beneath a set of challenges. This leaves the buyer with a performative score that they are free to interpret—or rather, display/ make visible within the field of the exhibition. They will have acquired some of the means by which to recover an amazing art collection; but what matters most to them? They will either put *Map* to use in an attempt to recover the works buried on Coco or enact a relation to both the superposition of art in the project and the value of restricting human access to the island. The latter is a relation of trust.[28] Herein, a (re)scoring of desire: ascertaining the GPS coordinates might allow one to drop a pin on a map of Coco, to thrust a spade into the soil and ultimately to observe the contents of the chest, but in this process something will be lost: once opened, *Map* is just a map; the exhibition, just the things in the box buried on Coco. Once opened, the curatorial operation is complete/over.

The aforementioned trust is of a piece with a general outlook that recognizes no operative separation between nature, culture, and humanity. What appeared to be an island separated from other lands is just one part of a larger system. Rather than there being a yawning gap between the sharks of Coco and metropolitan modernity, there is only interconnection and engagement. We cannot avoid affecting these creatures, either by focused exploitation or laissez-faire fallout. As the

curatorial rubric of the project makes plain—we must, today, critically appraise the design of relationships that span oceans and continents. We must curate them.

Vector (II): A Wandering Biennale

In March 2017, an international group of 65 artists, scientists, architects, and philosophers left the port of Ushuaia, Argentina – bound for the Antarctic Circle onboard the Akademik Sergei Vavilov (part of the Russian Institute of Oceanography's scientific research fleet). The voyage covered approximately 2,000 nautical miles, and made landfall at twelve sites in the Antarctic archipelago over a period of two weeks before returning via Cape Horn.[29] At each location, installations, sculptures, exhibitions, and performances were realized. Mobility, site-specificity, and ecological compatibility were key touchstones. Nothing was left behind, and no audience was present—notwithstanding the participants themselves, and Antarctica's native species. Actions included a landscape photography exhibition for penguins (they didn't seem to get much out of it) and an underwater installation for whales.[30] In addition to land and sea interventions, the Vavilov served as a floating studio, photo lab, exhibition, performance, and conference facility. Onboard activities included fifteen symposia, incorporating alternative histories of South Polar enterprise, and a daily screening program featuring commissioned videos.[31] Throughout, our discussions focused on the question, "What potential does the Antarctic Imaginary hold?," and on future cross-disciplinary collaborations.[32]

According to the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, the southern continent is reserved for peaceful scientific inquiry. Owned by no individual or nation (with sovereign claims suspended), Antarctica's legal-institutional framework is arguably the most successful example of international cooperation in modern history. Given that the system emerged at the height of the Cold War, this fact is doubly impressive. Moreover, it was initiated by a group of scientists, rather than politicians. The exclusive right that the treaty accords scientific enterprise, incorporating a proscription against the exploitation of natural resources, is justly celebrated as a model for global conservation initiatives. However, in a deeper sense, the treaty can be viewed as much more than this: as a foundational document for *a new form of universal community*. Indeed, the treaty system suggests an incipient supranational identity based on cooperation and a sophisticated regard for ecology whose relevance transcends whatever takes place on the continent. It was this implication that we—the artist Alexander Ponomarev and myself, founders of the 1st Antarctic Biennale—believed must be made more proximate, for those persons who do not work with (or in) the region.

Even before the commissioning of individual artworks, the establishment of the Antarctic Biennale was ventured as an assertion of Antarctica's status as a potent cultural paradigm. Our operation proceeded according to the idea that Antarctica affords an imaginary that is most prescient yet underexplored: following the USSR's collapse, the figure of the New Soviet Man was consigned to the scrapheap. Almost immediately, the American political philosopher Francis Fukuyama proposed liberal democracy as the "final model" for the "coherent and directional" development of civil organization; the history (of competing formats) had ended, he argued, and the Liberal-democratic subject was the "Last Man" standing.[33] Today, this is a wholly discredited idea. Foregrounding the (otherwise) repressed cultural dimensions of Antarctica through the proposition of a festival, our action issued from the hypothesis that Antarctic Man is a plausible world-historical successor. Beyond abstract formulation, this political subject outstrips (in legal principle) the paradigm of the nation state. This subject also incorporates a holistic view of the planet as a complex—unified—system. Furthermore, with regard to an anthropological frame, it is a worthy hypothesis: more than a century after man (men) first set foot there, Antarctica sustains a population of 1,162 throughout the sunless winter and 4,000 in the summer months. Given the time that has elapsed and the amount of human activity, why not speak culture (beyond official mission structures) peculiar to Antarctica? Perhaps, therefore, we should view it as the last terrestrial *new world*. Might not activities in Antarctica amount to a whole new set of customs, architectures, and attitudes, of relevance beyond the bases? Exploring this idea, our biennale was ventured as a (post)nation-building initiative—a manifestly cultural festival of and in Antarctica.

Proceeding according to this outlook, the biennale's pre-expedition communications maintained that Antarctica is underexploited. Not in a physical sense, but as field of visual and conceptual inquiry. The Antarctic Imaginary belongs to everyone and yet, we claimed (on public stages in Italy, the USA, Sweden, Spain, Argentina, and Russia), control over the regime of images issuing from this region is centralized.[34] For the most part, mimetic production is supplied by documentary photographers and filmmakers 'embedded' within national-scientific brigades, or else adhering to hegemonic interpretive frames. Thusly, what passes for Antarctic 'cultural' activity assumes a subordinate role to the 'useful' research

being carried out on bases, or the keynote messages issuing from them—via official media relations. Within this structural condition, there is little place for non-debentured, heterogeneous representations of the Antarctic Imaginary—no bottom up.[35] And we are all too aware of the limits of embedded reportage...

Under these conditions, the contours of Antarctic Man lack clarity, and are only being discovered in a haphazard manner. If we are to realize Antarctica's potential for *those who cannot go*, then cultural workers must seize the means of South Polar (image) production. In our view, it is only through intensified (and truly independent) engagement with Antarctica that we may discover—through aesthetic experimentation—its otherwise inaccessible intellectual, social, and political topography. It is this landscape that offers the most promising ground for harvesting radical images. Given the lack of an extant academic project addressing Antarctic Art History, the creation of a biennale assumes the character of a demand that this be undertaken.[36]

In addition to the inspiration supplied by Antarctica's supranational administration, we deemed creating an independent platform from which to engage with the continent's environment and science as timely. We will not see ourselves as *one* until we can view the biosphere, which encompasses our civilization as much as it does icebergs, as an integrated unit. Statistical proof of climate change and picturesque photographs of glaciers and penguins can only be so effective in altering the global public's self-image. The world requires a new regime of interdisciplinary image making *from below*, and the overdetermined outcomes of government-run residencies are not enough. Bringing together artists, scientists, and thinkers, the 1st Antarctic Biennale was established not just to cultivate artists' engagements with a space reserved for 'science', but to widen the scope of what is considered cultural while subjecting techno-scientific (post)sovereignty to a gentle challenge. This is to say, the biennale was as much about making visible (exhibiting) an image of a new cultural institution as a series of art objects.

With a limited on-site audience—indeed, with only participants present—the biennale departed from standard models of perennial exhibition-making and viewing. As such, it was the calculated performance of a leap beyond the luxury ghetto of what passes for the contemporary art *world*. Doesn't the very term ring sweaty when mentioned in the same breath as the Ross Ice Shelf? In fact, the Venice Biennale—the world's oldest

and most prestigious of art festivals—takes place amid entirely constructed terrain, where there are more stone carvings of flowers than real ones. Against the pageant supplied by this model biennale, Antarctica is a place that does not forgive hubris easily; a place where people sometimes eat their boots to avoid starving (and where sometimes expecting ice is too much).[37] "This is a biennale 'upside down,'" said my collaborator. "Instead of the usual national pavilions—the icy inaccessibility of the Antarctic continent. Instead of pompous apartments and hotel rooms—ascetic cabins. Instead of chaotic wanderings, through receptions and tourist filled streets—a dialogue with Big Nature, and an explosion of consciousness facilitated through the dialogues with scientists, futurists, and technological visionaries." As we conceived it, the Antarctic Biennale platform floated an *image* of succession from the hothouse of subterranean commercial dealing, spectacle, and social climbing that envelops the art of our times. The question of whether one can, or must, live up to an image remains open, however.

The 1st Antarctic Biennale was, both literally and metaphorically, a vehicle for facilitating *independent* cultural production in the South Polar Region. It was a mechanism for expanding the Antarctic Imaginary through aesthetic exploration and *interdisciplinary* encounters pursuing culture in a sense not limited to art. The theme for the edition borrowed Captain Nemo's motto from *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*: "*Mobilis in Mobile*," meaning "moving amidst mobility." Traversing the Southern Ocean, passing through the Bransfield Strait, between craggy peaks and glaciers, down through the Lemaire Channel, and into the Antarctic Circle, it was an expedition as festival. But the movements to which the motto referred also encompassed a trajectory through shifting currents in climate science, changes in ice-sheet cover, geophysical dynamism, and biological upheaval. Lastly, the title embraced a movement—or vector—cutting across developments within various disciplinary spheres.

Vector III: A New Art History for North Korea
North Korea's official art is a problem. It is a problem because it is a national project, born of a state whose modern cultural performance is wedded to a failed experiment in total design. It is a problem because, today, its internationalist ideological posture appears hopelessly—indeed, aggressively—provincial.[38] It is a problem because it proposes final solutions to wanting (and to having) that have been overturned by the courts of everyday life. It is a filter bubble, and it is post-truth. But the problem character of North Korea's official art

does not stop there: underpinning its depictions of missile arrays, *fully satisfied* youth, abundance, and daddy worship, it has a bad case of performance anxiety. Furthermore, it is structured around a political demand for assent whose rhetorical certitude and grand self-designations are so much mansplaining.

What does North Korea need? Certainly, none of the above. This said, if it must have a 'national art' then how might such an agenda perform better? This question guided my collaboration with the US-based Korean artist Mina Cheon, for *Umma: Mass Games—Motherly Love North Korea.* The project's first re-imagining of (North) Korean art was pursued through her assuming an ideologically charged alter-ego, contrived as a replacement for Kim-Jong-Un's man-boy-father principle: Umma (Korean for mommy)—erstwhile paragon of patience, understanding, good sense, and unconditional love. Appearing in various guises, Umma's 'attributes' included scholar, state-artist, dissident dreamer, victor, and martyr. An outsize hypothetical underpinned the host of painterly and photographic 'self' depictions installed at a New York gallery—namely, the only experiment in benevolent (yet total) dictatorship yet to be attempted in the modern period: *motherly rule.*[39] However, in addition to conventionally occupying a white cube, the *Umma* project involved programming a media channel within North Korea.

Our plan stemmed from discussions concerning the historical formation of the 'unofficial' art scene in the Soviet Union, in the 1970s. In particular, we were inspired by the importance that smuggled foreign publications (such as *Flash Art*) and embassy culture programs held for budding non-conformist artists.[40] Given that North Korea (the last purely authoritarian socialist state) possesses no documented unofficial art scene, we reasoned that if one does not exist then it must be created. We were aware that cultural materials are frequently smuggled into the country on USB flash drives, but that the organizations that select the content are not engaged with art. Normal payloads typically include international news, K-Pop, film, and television programs.[41] We decided that this underground cultural channel needed curating. The result was the first explicit re-articulation of the (contemporary) artistic imaginary addressed directly to North Korean viewers, delivered to them.

Cheon created a series of ten video lectures covering international modern and contemporary art, which she delivered in character—as a North Korean scholar who has made it to the South. The *Art History Lessons by Pro-*

fessor Kim (2017) invoked children's TV show formats while delivering commentary with titles including Art & Life; Art & Food; Art, Money & Power; Abstract Art & Dreams; Feminism; Social Justice; Remix & Appropriation; Art & Technology; Art & Silence; and Art & Environment. The breadth of foci amounted to a complete alternative to the official art history promulgated in the DPRK. Beginning with an excursus on Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), the founding act of artistic appropriation, Umma/Professor Kim appropriated her audience. Not least, by rhetorically addressing them in the manner of (her) children. In a wider frame, the project endeavored to expropriate a cultural imaginary. For, Cheon worked with underground networks, including activist groups of North Korean defectors, to smuggle hundreds of USB drives containing Professor Kim's lectures into the hermit kingdom. The drives were smuggled into the North overland, via the border with China, and also sent by balloons from South Korea. The artist was subsequently told that the Art History Lessons are also also being copied and shared within North Korean defector communities, in South Korea, as they find them accessible and interesting.

Arguably, the first such artistic 're-programming' engagement with the state to date, this project attempted to alter the course of North Korean art history. There is a very real chance that these lectures will be the first time, ever, that North Korean viewers encounter the stake of late modern, conceptual, and contemporary art—including post-socialist critical oeuvres such as Ai Weiwei's. What if persons who watch the videos are inspired to begin their own art practice? What if the birth of contemporary (unofficial) art in North Korea begins with this project? The true scope of the exhibition strategy is such—total embrace, to the point of penetrating North Korea's ideological space in order to seed it with visions that may lead to the birth of really new artistic phenomena. Cheon would force Kim Il Jun to bear her artistic children. North Korea's official art has a problem: In a parallel universe, a fictional scholar teaches its epigones how to become real conceptual artists.

*

All three case studies exemplify curatorial operations as lines of flight, leaving behind museums and 'art spaces' in order to reframe them. As a case study in errant curatorial author-ity, *Treasure of Lima* indicates how a contemporary exhibition may be an *inter-site-specific* performance. This mode of action is a sovereign wandering through spaceship infrastructure; and a *wondering* with

it, along a trajectory running through the layered condition(s) of placehood. We errant curators 'leave' our walled cities (our green-zones) for geographical extremes not to escape, but to make the contemporary hearth more visible. Spaceship infrastructure is always already *everywhere*, as far as we are concerned. Just like Isla del Coco, Antarctica is far from accessible to most of us. And yet, this geographical end of the world figures centrally in global conversations concerning climate change, underpinning claims about the *end of the world as we know it*, and the constitution of truly shared political space. As such, through this combination of physical remoteness *and* inscription within an international imaginary, it encapsulates a key condition that must be re-exhibited. North Korea might seem politically inaccessible, but curating need not always abide by official institutional channels. Errant curating discovers its fullest potential in the places where it is least expected.

This is a significantly altered version of an essay previously published in A Year Without a Winter*, ed. Dehlia Hannah (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).*

Notes

1 Vilem Flusser, *The Freedom of the Migrant: Objections to Nationalism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 39.
2 Douglas Fox, "The Larsen C Ice Shelf Collapse Is Just the Beginning—Antarctica Is Melting," *National Geographic* (July 2017), http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/07/antarctica-sea-level-rise-climate-change/.
3 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 7.
4 See Damian Carrington, "Earth's sixth mass extinction event under way, scientists warn," *The Guardian*, July 10, 2017, accessed August 2, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/10/earths-sixth-mass-extinction-event-already-underway-scientists-warn.
5 Harald Szeemann quoted in Carolee Thea, *Foci: Interviews with Ten International Curators*, New York: Apex Art Curatorial Program, 2001), 17.
6 Tracy Jan, "Trump's 'big, beautiful wall' will require him to take big swaths of other people's land," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 2017, accessed January 27, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/03/21/trumps-big-beautiful-wall-will-require-him-to-take-big-swaths-of-other-peoples-land/?utm_term=.5826ce7b252e.
7 The work, titled *Arriba!* (2017), is by Paul Rosero

Contreras. It was conceived as a kind of tropical time capsule, referencing the fact that, 50 million years ago, Antarctica itself had a wholly different climate. Fossils of tropical flora have been discovered in the region where the work was installed.
8 The expedition of the First International Antarctic Biennale, held under the patronage of UNESCO, left the shores of Tierra del Fuego on March 16, 2017, and concluded with a ceremonial reception in honor of the Biennale participants at the Faena Museum in Buenos Aires on March 29. Its Commissioner was artist Alexander Ponomarev, and its Co-Curator Nadim Samman. See: www.antarcticpavilion.com.
9 Parag Khanna, *Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization* (New York: Random House, 2016), xvi-xvii. He continues: "The true map of the world should feature non just states but megacities, highways, pipelines, Internet cables, and other symbols of our emerging global network civilization."
10 From attention to the geology of media in the art of Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen, to the mapping of transatlantic cables in the productions of Trevor Paglen and Lance Wakeling; from the labor conditions at Google scanning facilities, in a project by Andrew Norman Wilson, to Simon Denny's physicalization of the PowerPoint-ideology of the PRISM surveillance enterprise.
11 The work of artist-architect Alex Schweder, whose practice is self-defined as "performance architecture" is preeminently concerned with this condition.
12 Khanna, *Connectography*, 15.
13 Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (Boston: MIT Press, 2016), xvii.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 3-4.
16 Ibid., 4.
17 Miwon Kwon, "One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity," October 80 (Spring 1997), p. 93
18 Sometimes we display complete author-ity over objects (such as artworks), subjecting them to iconoclastic conceptual appropriation. Done without a critical conception of (dis)play, this move is rightly abjured. However, when we are endeavoring to disclose how certain spaces, and the objects within them, are already appropriated, travesty is unavoidable.
19 The original treasure consisted of precious metals, stones, and artifacts requisitioned by the Spanish from their Central and South American dominions, including 113 gold religious statues, one of which was a life-sized Virgin Mary; 200 chests of jewels; 273 swords with jeweled hilts; 1,000 diamonds; numerous solid gold crowns; 150 chalices; and hundreds of gold and silver bars. Its value today is reckoned at £160 million. See

http://www.businessinsider.com/british-explorer-
closes-in-on-legendary-treasure-of-lima-
2012-8#ixzz30OkhILxR, accessed July 30, 2014.
20 Rather than attempting to conform to an archaic
cliché, its look recalled the product design of market-
leading personal computing hardware. While by no
means illustrative, its hygienic surfaces and acute
angles intentionally suggest a kind of oversized digital
data-storage device.
21 *Map* is both a sculpture—a unique physical object
whose form has been determined by the artist—and a
tool or set of instructions for disclosing an elsewhere.
On the one hand, its cylindrical form serves to recall
antique maps or scrolls—an explicit reference to Coco's
maritime history—while staging its unreadable script as
a digital-era successor to the idiosyncratic markings
inscribed on the pirate charts of legend. On the other,
this form is also a feature of the encryption system.
Without any indication of where the code begins or ends,
it is exponentially harder to crack. Yet this design as
resistance is contradicted by *Map*'s utility for the would-be
code breaker, which allows the sculpture to be used as
a rolling printing plate—enabling the physical transfer
of data to paper by way of ink. With *Map*, our project's
dramatization of the interconnection between the
physical and the informatic is in focus. These considera-
tions raise the following questions—must *Map* be used,
rather than contemplated, in order for it to achieve the
status of an artwork? Or, rather, does it only remain an
artwork if its functional indeterminacy is maintained?
22 The Costa Rican partners were La Fundación Amigos
de la Isla del Coco and Misión Tiburón.
23 It declared the island a National Park in 1978, and
UNESCO named it a World Heritage Site in 1997. The
Seamounts Marine Management Area—the aquatic
reserve created in 2011 that surrounds the island—is
larger than the Yellowstone National Park and second
only to the Galápagos National Park in terms of marine
protected areas in the Eastern Tropical Pacific.
24 Under such circumstances, the recovery of the
buried exhibition (trash?) will mark an assault on
something of greater value.
25 As a communication and consultation exercise to
develop the "Pelagic Research & Conservation Project for
Isla del Coco," TBA21-Academy convened a symposium
at UCLA Ideas Campus on August 11, 2014. The sympo-
sium also highlighted shark conservation initiatives in
the Eastern Pacific and was accompanied by a dive
expedition around Catalina Island. For more information,
see https://www.tba21.org/#item--los_angeles--580.
26 The project took inspiration from Boris Groys'
insight that, today, art documentation enjoys a status

approaching near equivalence with artworks. In light of
this, and a recent assessment that broadcast media
practice was a vital dimension of historic Land Art, our
project was an attempt to exhibit this condition, and to
explore its potential.
27 These comments shed some light on how surveil-
lance—observation—relates to our new figure. Follow-
ing Snowden, it would seem that only enclosure within
a cryptographic strongbox allows for paradoxical
identification—to be one thing and another simultane-
ously. On a political level, personal data protection helps
us to maintain a translocational identity that amounts
to freedom itself. When we are observed and measured
as one thing or another by an external gaze, our para-
doxical potential—to be both outlaws and good
citizens, for instance—is dead in the water. We are
collected, put on file—some butterflies pinned, others
broken on a wheel.
28 Trust relinquishes control of immediate benefits—in
this case, the collector considers proximity to the buried
art objects or the island itself phenomena whose quanti-
fication does not necessarily indicate the quality of the
relationship: they trust that geographic distance, and
seeming lack of access to the art objects, is made up for
in functional proximity by moral/ecological quality.
29 Anchors dropped at the bays of Neko, Paradise, and
Orne; Cuverville Island, the Errera Channel, the Lemaire
Channel, Pleneau Island, Petermann Island, the Penola
Strait, Deception Island, and elsewhere. At each of these
locations, artists temporarily installed works, or
engaged in performances.
30 In total, over twenty artistic projects were carried
out, including performances, installations, exhibitions,
and sound-art experiments by artists present including
Alexis Anastasiou (BR); Yto Barrada (MA); Julius von
Bismarck (DE); Julian Charrière (FR/CH); Paul Rosero
Contreras (EC); Gustav Duesing (DE); Zhang Enli (CN);
Joaquin Fargas (AR); Sho Hasegawa (JP); Yasuaki
Igarashi (JP); Katya Kovaleva (RU); Andrey Kuzkin (RU);
Juliana Cerqueira Leite (US/BR); Alexander Ponomarev
(RU); Shama Rahman (UK); Abdullah Al Saadi (UAE);
Lou Sheppard (CA). A manifestation of the Aerocene
project by Tomás Saraceno (AR) also took place. For
further information about onboard projects, including
video program, see http://antarcticbiennale.art/wp/
category/expedition.
31 The symposia series was entitled Antarctic Biennale
Vision Club, convened by Nadim Samman and coordi-
nated by Sofia Gavrilova. This was the main platform for
Interdisciplinary Participants, who were: Elizabeth
Barry (USA); Adrian Dannatt (UK); Barbara Imhof (AT);
Wakana Kono (JP); Carlo Rizzo (IT); Alexander Sekatskii

(RU), Jean de Pomereu (FR); Susmita Mohanty (IN); Hector Monsalve (AR); Miguel Petchkovsky (AG); Sergey Pisarev (RU); Nicholas Shapiro (US); Lisen Schultz (SE). Video series included work by Adrian Balseca (EC); Yto Barrada (MA); Emmy Skensved+Grégoire Blunt (CA); Julian Charrière (FR/CH); Paul Rosero Contreras (EC); Marcel Dinahet (FR); Constant Dullaart (NE); Karin Ferrari (AT); Etienne de France (FR); Swetlana Heger (SE); Young Hae-Chang Heavy Industries (KR); Eli Maria Lundgaard (NO), Eva and Franco Mattes (IT); Jessica Sarah Rinland (UK).

32 Three resulting collaborations are discussed in a paper co-authored by the editor of this volume, delivered at the 2017 International Astronautical Congress. All involve artists' engagements with the prototype Self Deployable Habitat for Extreme Environments (S.H.E.E) developed/prototyped by Liquifer Systems Group for the European Space Agency. See Dehlia Hannah (with Barbara Imhof), "Art in Extreme Environments: Reflections of Space Research from the First Antarctic Biennale," Proceedings of the 68th International Astronautical Congress (IAC), Adelaide, Australia, September 25-29, 2017. (IAC-17 E5.3.9, x37172)

33 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992), xii.

34 Venues included Ca' Foscari University, Venice, 2014; Royal Geographical Society's 'Explore' conference, 2016; the Explorer's Club in New York, 2016; the Polar Museum in Gränna, Sweden, 2016; the Maritime Museum, Barcelona, 2016; the New York Yacht Club, Newport, 2016; the Pushkin Museum, Moscow, 2016.

35 Communications around the exhibition *Antarctopia*, at the Antarctic Pavilion in Venice, argued that lack of non-debentured reflection on Antarctic enterprise facilitates geopolitical scramble for resources. See http://www.antarcticpavilion.com/antarctopia-essays.html, accessed November 9, 2017.

36 Antarctica is not generally communicated as a cultural space, despite the fact that it has been inhabited for more than a century. The lack of will to cultural analysis is clearly indicated by the dearth of comparative studies of artistic production since man's first engagement. Indeed, there have been no attempts to investigate *image-making* practices in Antarctica across expeditions or personalities. While attention has been paid to the work of creators individually, no "Art History of Antarctica" has been written. Even excepting the will to intellectual synthesis, libraries are without anthologies of paintings or drawings made there. Given the opportunity that exists to successfully catalogue, without omission, the entire corpus of such images from at 1840 until the late 20th century, it is surprising

that no one has tried. The same applied to the question of Antarctic Architectural History—a question asserted at the inaugural Antarctic Pavilion, 14th Venice Biennale of Architecture, 2015, in the exhibition *Antarctopia*, curated by myself and commissioned by Alexander Ponomarev. For a full statement of this argument, see http://www.uncubemagazine.com/blog/13521899, accessed November 9, 2017.

37 In order to be wholly realized, a project by the German architect Gustav Duesing required the found condition of a below-zero air temperature within a given time. The condition was not obtained.

38 Indeed, the DPRK's nascent official realist art took its cues from the People's Republic of China's attempts at a "Great Leap Forward" by implementing Soviet-advised Five-Year Plan—right down to importing professors from the latter's art academies to oversee the production of ideologically useful images, concurrently with turning its attention to the production of useless pig-iron and the total eradication of sparrows that would bring on a locust plague.

39 *Umma: Mass Games–Motherly Love North Korea* was held at Ethan Cohen Fine Arts, New York City, October 20 - December 10, 2017. A catalogue was printed. My curatorial essay, "On the Necessity of North Korean Art," is available here: http://nadimsamman.com/the-necessity-of-north-korean-art.

40 Such as Ilya Kabakov. See Matthew Jesse Jackson, *The Experimental Group: Ilya Kabakov, Moscow Conceptualism, Soviet Avant-Gardes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 281.

41 See https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-03/north-korea-activists-sneak-films-music-usb-drives-regime-change/9210928, accessed June 15, 2020.

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"and here I am"—De-Colonial Aspects of Advanced Curatorial Work (of Art)
Ronny Hardliz

My tattoo is my Angelus Novus. It witnesses the catastrophe I produce by "piling up wreckage upon wreckage."[1] That the tattoo is a gift given to me by my daughter has turned the world and its time inside out. I understand: my daughter is not younger than me; we all are in the same age, the living, the dead, and the unborn; the child is only a paradigm of all the non-dissociable forces of life, of life as inseparable; we have been caught up in an eternal whirl; it makes us believe that there is succession, progress; that "what we call progress, [is] this storm,"[2] which, in the end, is the motivated architectural potential of eternal encounter. Always witnessed by the angel of history, this storm both demands and allows further research.[3]

Habemus *Angelus Novus*—The Anarchic Event

A last scene deserves attention, one that may be a continuous methodological reflection on the conditions of artistic existence and the work of art, rather than an art-project as such. The tattoo on my arm demands care or maintenance. This imperative allows me to have it, to bear it, and to use it. It is impossible to eliminate a tattoo. A tattoo cannot be dispossessed. Therefore, it cannot be possessed either. It is a paradigm.

Ella Hardliz, *untitled*, black tattoo drawing, arm-length, 2014 (photo: Ronny Hardliz, 2015)

When after a car accident I was spending more time at home, my then five-year-old daughter came to me with a black marker and said she was going to draw a tattoo on my arm. I decided to have this drawing tattooed on my arm right where she had drawn it. The tattoo's origin is the child and her or his relation to the parents. This relation may be denied but never annulled. While today eternal bondage has fallen into disgrace (seen as moral and as authoritarian domination and limitation), from the perspective of the impossibility of possession, the tattoo's indisputability is liberating. Precisely because the care of a tattoo, a child, or a garden, etc., is being demanded from me, it is a borderless having. Again, this having is not possession but habit. It is not merely doing or simple agency, not the factum as such that gives permission to what is done or made, that gives permission to the facts. Permission is given because the action to take care has been demanded.

Driven by a childish joy, Walter Benjamin bought Klee's aqua tinta print Angelus Novus in 1921 and hung it as his companion in every apartment he stayed in, even on vacations or during his exile in Paris. When he had to leave Paris in September 1940, fleeing from capture by the Nazis, he entrusted it to the custody of Georges Bataille, who concealed it in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, thus saving it for posterity. Two weeks later, Benjamin ended his life in Portbou.

For Benjamin, the Angelus Novus is the angel of history. He looks back on what the progression of history leaves behind. Embedded in times of war, Benjamin qualifies these outcomes as "wreckage" and "debris" resulting from "catastrophic" "smashing."[4] But the wind that carries the angel through time originates in "Paradise" and has a "violence" that makes us understand the universal condition of the angel of history. Perhaps our time has invented Paradise and history; and this violence, as a qualitative entity, comes with it. But what marks the Angelus Novus as an eternal creature beyond any current condition is the pure state of a witness to which he is reduced. In this state, he cannot but "fixedly contemplat[e]"[5] what he is being carried away from: "His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread."[6]

As human beings, however, we do not have wings. The "storm [...] blowing from Paradise"[7] is not carrying us steadily through time. Rather, we are doomed to build sails and sail against or into the wind, to take the wind out of someone's sails, to be upwind or downwind, and to be blown down at times. We do not just stare at the condition of the world: we make use of it. This does not necessarily mean that we should turn around and face the future progressively, or that we should try to prevent the smashing or even try "to make whole what has been smashed."[8] Maybe we should try to understand the demand presented by the current state of the world, as witnessed by the angel of history, and take it as the liberating permission of creating our own past.

PhD-Study—A Curatorial Problem

My daughter came to me with a black marker and said: "I am going to draw a tattoo on your arm." I decided to have the drawing tattooed, as a way of documenting her work. This moment marked some kind of an exit from the academic aesthetics of the PhD-study I was occupied with at that time. At once, there was another practice involved, a practice that was not directly responsive to the problems of the PhD and, nevertheless, closely related to many aspects of my work, my research, and my history. Although this practice could no longer be understood as discourse as art practice, it was still discursive: it allowed for a practical or material discursivity to speak in its own right as an equivalent part of the PhD discourse.

Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus,* monoprint drawing with watercolours, 31.8 cm x 24.2 cm, 1920 (Israel Museum).

When I started the PhD, it demanded the answering of some methodological questions: What is the practice at stake in a research project of which practice is a major component? What is the difference between art practice and research practice? What does it mean, specifically for an artist, to engage in such research?

My art practices are situated in the transdisciplinary field of art and architecture. The architectural base of my art practices generates a hybrid operational field that is always set in or in touch with the respective fields. Despite this clarity, the practical question of ethos with regard to a mixed-mode study is less obvious. To which practice does the study relate, and how, at the moment one's main practice becomes studying itself? Intuitively, the answer from a standpoint of ethos was clear from the beginning: there cannot be a separation between research practice and art practice, between the practice of studying and the practice of being studied, within one and the same person. The only way to engage in studying one's own practice is to use the practice of studying as one's own practice by means of one's own ways of doing. It's a question of finding a way of engaging in the study as an architectural art practice.

The double meaning of the word "study" as both research practice and architectural typology presented an entry point congruent to my art practices. This duplication of the "study" also reflects the double modality of the work: as both discursive and visual practice.

To engage in studying as a visual art practice the first step is to visualize the activity of studying: as a spatial activity in a study room, i.e., by documenting it with visual media such as film. Each practice when being documented—if conscious of it—changes under the apparatus of documentation. Documentation and its inherent complications with distance and neutrality, when applied to the intellectual and architectural examination of the "study," immediately reveals it as an inherently architectural art practice—a more particular form of critical spatial practice.

Studying is a spatial practice, albeit unspectacular. Filming the activity of studying is a first attempt to grasp it by means other than words and concepts. As the spatial conditions of a study room are often very restricted and prevent it from being fully captured on film, the means of documentation must be adapted. For example, the camera can be turned by ninety degrees in order to capture a wall's full height. The result of this simple rotary motion is a vertical image. More importantly, however, such rotation introduces the force of gravity into the medium of film. A sequence recorded in a vertical format when projected on a horizontal screen of a conventional cinema appears rotated by ninety degrees.

Consequently, it makes the spectators' heads turn. Documentation possibly changes both the documented practices and the practices of reception.

My study of the "study" by means of visual documentation provided valuable insights on fundamental issues of studying such as writing, reading, or thinking and its implications on the underlying trope of the "architectural." Nevertheless, in its rather hermetic logic, it also left the tentative "artistic" definition of a universal PhD practice, i.e., the practice of studying, in a loop. Although it is proven that hermeneutic circles are a reliable means of knowledge production, there was an urgency of breaking out of these loops, not without, however, rescuing previous methodological insights into the new practice. If knowledge can be embodied, then the task at hand was the translation of my current practices into practices that would embody—rather than examine—the new methodological knowledge. This then would be what I'd expect from a PhD: a radical transformation of one's own practices.

While the watershed of this translational move is indeed marked by the event of the tattoo, the strategic move towards it was propelled by an encounter with Irit Rogoff, the co-inventor (together with Jean-Paul Martinon) of the Curatorial/Knowledge PhD programme at Goldsmiths College, and my subsequent participation in this programme as a DocMobility fellow of the Swiss National Science Foundation. Both the thoughtful setup of the programme structure with approximately six three-day-seminars per year, thus allowing for the seminars to become a place of common experience, on the one hand, and the particular contents of the seminars, which I perceived as an advancement of post- and de-colonial studies through critical edges that emerged from a definition of the concept of "the curatorial" through the introduction of "the philosophical" as an intellectual, distantiated lens, on the other, made it possible to achieve this goal, the translation of one's own practices.

On curating, this is where my contribution must be situated. It is driven by the urgency to say: wait a minute—let's talk about curating, rather than just keep on curating. It is "the curatorial" as a research of "other ways to engage with our current woes"[9] that is applicable to the artistic practice of PhD study. The production of a PhD is, therefore, a curatorial problem.

Reflections on Rejuvenation

My daughter's marking may be interpreted as a form of reversed inheritance of a drawing talent. I never met my grandfather. My father told me he was a talented draftsman. He established and ran several bookbinding factories in Prague during the inter-war period, which was the time of the first Czechoslovak Republic. After World War II, the Czechoslovak Communist Party confiscated the factories. My grandfather's talent marks my daughter's drawing. His talent has passed through my father's body, through my own body, and through my daughter's body back onto my body: it is an indirect

signature of inheritance. I am marked by an indirect inheritance, passed on through the younger generation: a reversed or inversed inheritance. Such a drawing clears the way for an archaeological research practice that is not scientific in the sense of an uncovering of truths but, rather, to a drilling art practice of graving graves and unhinging gravities, thus creating truths. These issues concern life and death rather than knowledge.

So, instead of asking whether there were entanglements of my family with the machinations of the Nazi forces occupying the country during World War II, or if there are Jewish roots in my family that have been subsurfaced for those very reasons, this research does not lead back to the roots, back to my ancestors and their imbrications with those historical issues that irredeemably concern all of us in the West. Quite on the contrary, it leads forward to roots. Putting my personal life and history at stake in research allows for invigorated steps to yet unknown terrains, meeting current urgencies that have seemingly nothing to do with my past. Yet, related to the potential past of the tattoo, a past that is yet to come, current urgencies attain a potential for alternate readings.

While praising the concept of the Curatorial/Knowledge PhD programme I should not forget the vivid power it has generated by attracting curators, artists, and other scholars driven by a shared motivation. For this reason, it is by no means a coincidence that it was upon an invitation of one of these colleagues, the Israeli curator Joshua Simon, that the headstone for the translation of my practice was laid—within the frame of the PhD and beyond that for the current work. It allowed me to do collaborative work with kids in Arad using and further developing my filming methods. More importantly, however, it allowed me to decide instinctively to travel haphazardly through a sort of no-man's-land, the West Bank.

There, it was the visit of the Cinema Jenin that made me understand the importance of film in my work. No particular event or conversation testifies to this moment, except, maybe, the moment when I entered the cinema and there was a wild bunch of kids sack racing on stage to frenetically loud music: outbursts of joy!

My research travel to Israel and Palestine may be seen as a journey to my Jewish and Muslim roots. It is the responsibility, but also the privilege of an heir to Western history, a history that has always been intricately entangled with non-Western history, that gives me the permission to approach the non-West. Addressing some of the colonial realities that Western history has shaped is a way of translating my past into advanced art practice (as opposed to, e.g., uncovering and artistically wrapping facts about my own family's history). On another level, my father's passionate Super-8 filmmaking might also be interpreted as such a step forward to the roots, as a step away from my grandfather's drawing talent to an alternate form of drawing. My own step towards architecture is yet another variation, retracing a genealogy from making graphs to making cavities and unhinging gravities, which point towards a further set of practices of acting. The tattoo, which might also be seen as the empty sign of contemporary melancholia, symbolizes and gives permission to become active with potential sets of new critical architectural gestures and, beyond that, new forms of culture.

Missed Encounters—Beginnings of Idiotic Research

The idiot is neither the one who does what seems rational nor the one who does what seems pleasurable. According to Deleuze, referring to Dostoyevsky, the idiot is the one who knows that "beyond consciousness and passion" there is a question, there is a question, there is a question—but what is it? Maybe research is idiotic, when it is searching for questions rather than answers. To answer this question, one would have to start

with the end and then ask, by looking back, whether there is (or there will have been) a question. The result is, in short, and exclusively, a study that is a production of a mode of writing and also a production of other modes of researching. If there appears knowledge, then it has been hardly produced; rather, it has been having and using knowledge (or ways of knowing) by means of the work of art as the work that art has and does.

One could also, conveniently, distinguish between discourse and spatial practice. At least since Foucault's discourse on language, we know that discourse is a spatial practice. However, consequently, does he not also show us inversely, maybe unconsciously, that spatial practice is discursive? When building a (research) wall parallel to an already existing wall as its inverted model, then this entire setup—the walls, the gap between them, and the territories that are both supporting them and being separated by them—enter into a relation with various sociocultural and spatial discourses. Through an original sequence of spatial "quotes" and "glosses," the wall draws a line that is a critical sketch of original knowledge, with its own "logic" and "integrity," by constructing nothing new, as it were. As in writing, also in spatial practice disinterested desire may shine through, thus shedding lights hitherto unknown.

Such work of art may contribute to a formulation of art practice that spends itself in a voiding and thus becomes a critical life-form vis-à-vis dominant ideology. By looking at what has been done, a seemingly idiotic question for the work of art shows at the root of such work: How to receive the political through academic study?

This question shows its idiocy by means of showing. It politicizes a deeply rooted private use, which is idiotic. It reveals the question "What is the question?" as its foundation. To reveal idiocy is idiotic. But the question "What is the question?" is the most fundamentally critical, as the revelation of idiocy is a pure political act. What remains to be done, in conclusion, is to keep the distance and to stay in touch and to continue—go to the crossroads!

What is the question that joins three missed encounters in a research project into collaboration? First, the cinematographic exploration of the acquaintance and potential friendship between Bataille and Benjamin as an incommunicable instance of getting ready to overturn things; second, the cinematographic exploration of the current use of the prehistoric cave of Lascaux in the South of France as evidence of the current cultural capitulation; and third, the cinematographic exploration of artistic representations of the current state of Palestine as means of cultural resistance.

De-Doc: Decolonizing Documentary Film Methods in Artistic Research

An abysmal sensation of nausea or exhaustion has become prevalent for people around the globe. It is being produced by diverse colonizing conditions, all of which seem to be both universal and out of our sphere of influence: migration, climate change, digitalization, neoliberal management and politics, or private experiences of the individualist self. The powers at play can be countered through political action. Nevertheless, the question of how we can immediately cope with such divesting forces remains urgent.

The above-described sensation touches upon existential issues such as death, love, or ecstasy that are central to artistic thought and production. Art has the capacity to wrest these issues from people's everyday economic contingencies and reflect them in quasi-timeless realms of aesthetic episteme. It is possible to convey sensation of lost ground to the viewer through a particular technique of filming: by unhinging physical forces such as gravity or inertness within the reference of an architectural space.

The constellation of the three paradigms— the state of Palestine, the caves of Lascaux, and Benjamin's thinking in exile—provides aesthetic understanding of such states of exhaustion, which are useful for the invention of counter-strategies adaptable to everyday life. The appropriateness of the chosen paradigms is not scientifically justified. They follow an artistic intuition, in which materials associate via an aesthetic epistemic mechanism. The paradigms constituted themselves during doctoral studies as relevant and interconnected, yet largely unexplored instances for the rest of the studies. They lend themselves to further exploration with regard to one of the main outcomes of the doctoral studies: the autonomous camera. This is a camera that moves according to own logic.

These are the presumed paradigmatic counter-strategies: the Freedom Theatre in Jenin (West Bank) represents and resists the occupation of Palestine in a socio-cultural form of theatrical practice; the only everyday use of the caves of Lascaux in the South of France with precious prehistoric paintings consists in the cave keeper's daily control of the measuring instruments; during his exile in Paris, Benjamin kept a drawing by Klee called Angelus Novus like a guardian angel and maintained a curious friendship with Bataille that to date has remained largely unexplored.

Plays, paintings, or drawings and texts can be filmed, but they cannot just be performed in front of the autonomous camera. The director and the protagonists are forced to actively relate to the dominant logic of the camera. In this collaboration, content and form translate into new cinematographic representations. The cancelled physical forces within the projected architectural space generate the sensation of nausea or exhaustion: the sensations the documentary talks about become tangible for the public.

There is a risk that the chosen approach—the autonomous camera—by reproducing the forces it aims to examine, might colonize and suffocate the autonomy of the protagonists. Preliminary tests have shown that the protagonists rather rely on their embodied knowledge and confidentially perform what needs to be translated into the film. Paradoxically, the effect of the autonomous camera is in itself decolonizing.

"and here I am"—Unoccupied Territories

"Ahmed lives in the Jenin refugee camp on the West Bank. He has grown up under occupation, likes football, falls in love with a girl he spots on the street, and discovers an unexpected taste for the limelight when he accidentally walks into the local Stone theatre. However, he is also fascinated by the balaclava that he finds hidden in his parents' bedroom, a legacy of his father's time as a resistance fighter.

[…] Ahmed Tobasi performs his own story, written for the stage by Hassan Abdulrazzak, which charts his journey from being a member of Palestine's Islamic Jihad to becoming an actor. Along the way he asks if the stage really can be as powerful as an AK-47. The enthusiasm with which the audience claps at the end suggests that it can be, even if it's not entirely clear whether we are clapping the show itself or Tobasi's remarkable personal voyage of transformation that saw him imprisoned for four years at the age of 17 before coming under the influence of Juliano Mer Khamis, one of the leaders of the Jenin Freedom Theatre.

[…] Mer Khamis was a stern taskmaster, and a man who believed that 'theatre can be as violent as the gun'. He was gunned down outside the theatre in 2011."[10]

The continuous occupation of Palestine by the Israeli State creates a sort of unoccupancy of the territory, which is the fertile soil of Palestinian aggression and recalls the impotent angel of history. Such aggressions need outlets, and the Palestinians have become involuntary experts for the potential guidebook: How to engage with an occupying force? The Freedom Theatre in Jenin in the North of the West Bank has found a cultural means to deal with the on-going traumatization of the population. In workshops, it practices theatre mainly with kids and women of the refugee camp, and it broaches the issue of occupation in professional plays, which are shown throughout the West Bank and internationally. Instead of letting culture be oppressed through occupation, the theatre practices cultural resistance by disseminating its own narrative to the world.

"What is the question?"–De-Doc Also Reads As: De-Doctoral Study
Can the curatorial collaboration of a white, male, Western artist with a Palestinian cultural institution be de-colonial?

Can there be a de-doctoral practice, as opposed to a post-doctoral one?
Is there an "extreme" of advanced curatorial work of art that succeeds in evacuating domination to such an extent it leaves everyone—those living, the dead, and those yet to be born—rejuvenated to the same age?

Like an idiot, who asks what the hell the practice in a practice-based PhD is supposed to be, I'm haunted to continue searching for questions. No construction can possibly be erected above the merit of a PhD. Rather, there is lateral displacement that puts the work in yet another unknown light—and thus makes it advance.

Ronny Hardliz, *Unoccupied Territories (part 1) ‚and here I am',* film still, 4K video installation, 2019 (in progress).

And here I am, documenting particular cases of lost ground, thus telling these stories and my own in a unique collaborative invention, the invention of a new past. By means of using and translating their and my stories into new forms of representation, there might be a chance of saving us from becoming lost causes.

Rather than capitalizing on outcomes and climbing to post-doctoral heights, the study funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation is a de-move, a kind of back-folding or ritornello, a dwelling on the same, a moving still image, a decolonizing contemplation. "This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet"[11]: and here I am.

Notes

1 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 257.
2 Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 258.
3 The quote in the title of this article "and here I am" comes from the title of the play staged by The Freedom Theatre in Jenin Refugee Camp, which in turn was taken from a poem by Mahmoud Darwish: 'Take Care of the Stags, Father'.
4 Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 257-58.
5 Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 257.
6 Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 257.
7 Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 257.
8 Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 257.
9 Jean-Paul Martinon, ed., The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), viii
10 Lyn Gardner, "And Here I Am review: remarkable story of how a member of Palestine's Islamic Jihad became an actor," The Guardian, July 5, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jul/05/and-here-i-am-review-arcola.
11 Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 257

Ronny Hardliz is an art practitioner researching, filming, curating, writing, and building on discursive art practice, the concept of architecture, correlations in the thinking of Walter Benjamin and Georges Bataille, cinematic prehistoric art, Palestine, rejuvenation, Kunst und Bau, art and public spheres, and decolonizing documentary art practice. He studied architecture and urbanism at EPF Lausanne and Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. As artist fellow at the Swiss Institute in Rome, he began exploring the concept of architecture. He holds an art practice-driven PhD from Middlesex University in London (in collaboration with Goldsmiths and ETH Zurich), curates exhibitions on Kunst und Bau, and is actively involved in discourses on art-space-media-public relations. He holds a CAS in Documentary Film from Hochschule der Künste Bern. He lived and worked in Rome and Prague with his partner, where his two daughters were born. Today, he lives and works in Berne with his family and is active at Kunstkommission der Stadt Bern, as president at BAKUB Verein Basis Kunst und Bau, as member of the foundation council of Progr Bern, as board member of the Swiss Artistic Research Network and as artistic researcher at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. His exhibitions are regularly funded by public and private funds, and his research by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

"If You Want To Run Fast, Run Alone. If You Want To Run Far, Run Together." *African proverb
Galit Eilat

The invitation to contribute to the "Extreme" issue of *OnCurating* triggers questions about the notion of extreme and extremity of action, ability, position, distance, measure, and condition. However, what would happen if the extreme met its limit? But, maybe it's already happened?

Since WWII, western, northern, and central Europe has stopped fighting on its soil. Internationally, the patronage of the United States has permitted conflicts to be 'played out' on distant territories and with relatively little direct European engagement. How has this affected the culture and society in this part of Europe? Is a society that did not experience a direct conflict different from the one that has had such a fundamental experience within active living memory? If conflicts shape our societies, how we can measure them, or point them out for joint discussion? Does conflict only manifest itself as personal experience, or are there cultural phenomena that we can observe and discuss in terms of conflict as something to be held in common?

In comparison with the other continents over the past seventy years, (w,n,c) Europe seems to be an exception in terms of conflict within Europe, but further east in the former Yugoslavia or Britain and Ireland, ethnic and religious conflicts have been a more recent part of lived experience, and the words "conflict" or "troubles" are common expressions to describe conditions other than those between 1940 and 1945. In the European middle ground, the still buried traumas of WWII have promoted the avoidance of conflict, and the construction of consensus has been highly prized ever since. Even occasionally, the violent political campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s did not fundamentally disturb this trend and ended in the entrenchment of the status quo. The rubric "Never Again" has pushed many things under the carpet, namely 400 years of a violent colonial past and the transatlantic slave trade.

In these circumstances, questions about how to deal with disagreements or inevitable conflicts in our lives are avoided and repressed, especially as there are no easily available models to learn how to live together in conflict, or how conflicts could have or have not potentially progressive outcomes.

Today's North American and European democratic societies have a high number of new mental phenomena—burnout, especially among workers; a massive amount of resources devoted to simply fabricating happiness, coolness, and detachment. Creating superficially satisfied psyches ends up producing a form of quietism, passivity, and inaction toward the world, in a period that the political and institutional environment needs serious questioning, especially as it seems not unrelated to the chronic dissatisfaction, anger, anxiety and alienation that those psychological treatments address.

Whoever is angry, the surrounding culture overwhelmingly tells argumentative people that their anger is just a reflection of their private conflicts and inadequacies. The requirement is on the individuals to manage their 'private' emotions, and any failure to do so only shows (their) incompetence. But, are dissatisfaction, anger, anxiety, and alienation are private problems? Are there no systemic and chronic conditions that will produce conflict whatever an individual's psychology? To quote Eva Illuoz, "Of all emotions, anger is probably the most political one: without it, one can hardly think of revolutions, demonstrations and social protest."[1]

Conflict Zone
In 2001, I returned to Israel from the Netherlands to establish the Israeli Centre for Digital Art (DAL - Digital Art Lab[2]) in Holon. I served as the director for over a decade, with a mission, or the task we took upon ourselves, to try and connect art practitioners from neighboring countries to the ones in Israel. Such a task was not an obvious or easy one to achieve and was not considered a priority for the local art scene, and could not yield fast results for several reasons. For instance, artists from Syria and Lebanon were (and are still today) not allowed to maintain contact or co-exhibit with Israeli

April 1st. Abu Dis, Jerusalem, 2004. Image © Oren Sagiv

artists, since these are deemed as being in contact with an enemy agent in their respective countries. The situation is different when it comes to artists from Egypt or Jordan, countries that have signed peace treaties with Israel. Yet, artists from these countries have generally avoided co-exhibiting or cooperating with Israeli artists because of the prevalent social norms.[3] Israeli artists, in contrast, do not have a similar limitation or prohibition to co-exhibit or work together with artists from Arab or Muslim countries, but at the same time, no will to do so.

Much of DAL's curation endeavored to challenge the Israeli canon, often through indirect action, namely by reference to other conflicts that could be projected onto the situation in Israel. The latter included work with curators and artists from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia, and Turkey. Artists from these regions were invited to exhibit, thereby sketching analogies between Israel and these loci in regard to conflict, ethnic cleansing, territorial struggle, violent nationalism, denial of the freedom of the individual, and control of citizens' mobility. The emphasis was to generate empathy for the victims of other wars or conflicts and to sketch an analogy between these "other" conflicts and our reality, without confronting at first sight the exhibition's audiences, as a direct confrontation might have led to a rejection of the views and messages of the exhibition altogether.

The exhibition trilogy *Hilchot Shchenim*[4] (Neighbors' Laws[5]) (2003 - 2005) sought to create a cultural platform

for collaborations between artists and art institutes from the Mediterranean Basin, the former Eastern European block, and the Balkans.

It gave rise, among other things, to the engagement with the Artists Without Walls'[6] action on the evening of April 1, 2004, on both sides of the newly built separation wall that crosses through Ras-Kubsa, a Palestinian neighborhood of Abu-Dis near Jerusalem.

Two closed-circuit video cameras were positioned at the same spot on both sides of the separation wall. Each camera transmitted the view facing away from its adjacent wall, while each one was connected to a video projector that showed an image of the opposite side in real time. The two video projections together created a virtual window in the wall that allowed Abu-Dis inhabitants from both sides to see each other and interact or talk using their personal cell phones.

We wrote a short manifesto that read:

Media is a tool for bringing far away events of violence and war into people's living rooms. It is also a weapon participating in the fight over public opinion and forming the 'good' and 'evil' in those wars. In this project the cameras were recording and transmitting from only one meter away, inverting a technology used for controlling and governing the population in that place, we created a spectacle aimed to attract media attention to the harsh human situation.

The Separation Wall now being constructed in the West Bank is a monument to failure and a testament to pessimism. The Wall aspires to bring security to Israelis by separating Palestinians and Israelis. In practice, however, the real separation which the Wall creates is that between Palestinians and their families, jobs, hospitals and schools. Furthermore, the construction of the wall is expropriating land and houses owned by Palestinian people. In effect, this is a wall of occupation.

The segregation and confinement of people is only another step towards alienating Palestinians and Israelis from one another and dehumanizing the conflict. When one ceases to view the other side as made out of individuals with hopes and dreams, violence becomes much easier and the results are tragic for both sides.

Through nonviolent and creative actions, "Artists Without Walls" seeking to eradicate the lines of separation and the rhetoric of alienation and racism. "Artists Without Walls" - a permanent forum for dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian engaged in all fields of art and culture.[7]

However, there was also a blind spot among us (the Israelis) and a lesson to learn from this action, as artists from Ramallah could not come to the action even though it was in East Jerusalem.

Liminal Spaces[8] (2006-2009) emerged from the need to understand how the segregation system functions. Liminal Spaces primarily aspired to establish the absent but essential platform for joint work, action, and dialogue between the Palestinian and Israeli art communities. It aimed to be a platform that could exist despite the growing difficulties experienced by Palestinians under

April 1st. Abu Dis, Jerusalem, 2004, April 1st, Video Still

April 1st. Abu Dis, Jerusalem, 2004. Image © Oren Sagiv

Israeli occupation, such as the denial of freedom of movement and elementary rights. The basis for the project was an objection to the occupation and separation policy and hatred propaganda, which has been preserved throughout its phases with its most radical manifestation. Together with Reem Fadda, the director of PACA (Palestinian Association for Contemporary Art[9]), architect Philipp Misselwitz, teaching at the University of the Arts in Berlin, and Eyal Danon from DAL, we created a collective of micro-residencies, a production platform, a series of interventions, and site-specific seminars composed into one project.

Palestinian, Israeli, and international artists[10] were invited to attend three seminars and to develop a research project or new artwork. Three seminars were held as part of *Liminal Spaces*. These were based on hikes and tours from morning till midday that were guided by scholars, professionals, and activists from different disciplines such as sociology, history, architecture, and urban planning. In retrospect, one of the most challenging aspects of the project was to try to adapt our movements to the dynamic reality of political tension and military maneuvers. At the outset, we postulated that a network of collaboration and sharing of knowledge was crucial to such a project. Yet, we could not foresee how such a platform would evolve since we had no model or experience of a similar project that was operated under the conditions of military occupation. Together with the artists, we, the project initiators, sought methodologies that would support the artists' practice through examining the liminality of physical and mental spaces between zone A and zone C.[11]

Alongside the scrutiny of the mental and physical spaces together with the shared effort of artists, academic scholars, architects, and political activists, we

Jeff Halper, political activist and former Director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. Liminal Spaces, Abu Dis, 2006,
Image © Galit Eilat

Muhamad El Hatib's lecture, Liminal Spaces, Bil'in, 2007,
Image © Galit Eilat

managed to establish an infrastructure for the production of works. But, most importantly, we succeeded in creating the basis for ongoing communication and trust between the different partners of the project, which years later serves as a platform for other art practitioners interactions between Palestine and Israel.[12]

During the project, we had to reiterate and clarify our aims repeatedly. We underscored the fact that this was not an attempt at normalization, and that it was not meant to offer a model for peaceful coexistence between two equal partners. Rather, we asserted that the main aim of the project was to provide a platform of resistance and vocal opposition to the ongoing Israeli occupation and its direct effects on the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank. *Liminal Spaces* operated in a context in which the distinctions between art and politics were blurred (part of the office activity of DAL was to help Palestinians to receive a permit to enter Israel). We wished to examine the possible role of art as a catalyst for political and social change in order to trigger a more active form of political engagement within the art world. We felt that the clear political stance of the participants and the curators was the very basis for the network that *Liminal Spaces* offered.

Reem Fadda, together with Khaled Hourani, approached the Tanzim,[13] the military wing of Fatah that controlled Kalandia refugee camp,[14] for permission and protection, which they were granted. They also sought approval from the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI[15]) that was coming into formation at that time. PACBI wanted to avoid the illusion of reconciliation and asked for a written statement that avoids terms such as "collabora-

tion" because of its "informant" connotation—particularly referring to Palestinians that were forced to supply the Israeli military with information. PACBI also recommended that *Liminal Spaces* not accept Israeli state funding.

Despite all the difficulties and obstacles, the artists were determined to continue working; they ended up presenting a series of new works that examined the conditions of dally of physical, cultural, and mental segregation within the reality of the occupation. These artworks suggested the potential of art to serve as a tool for challenging power structures within the radically divided and fragmented urban region of Jerusalem / Ramallah—a laboratory for urbanism and radical ethnic separation. The third and the last seminar of *Liminal Spaces* operated back to back with the Second Riwaq Biennale[16] (2007), we shared travel expenses and provided invitations to visit Israel,[17] to these artists that came from abroad to participate in the Riwaq Biennale.

Many artworks were developed and produced under *Liminal Spaces* but never exhibited together under one framework, to mention a few: Yael Bartana's *Summer Camp* and Peter Friedl's taxidermied giraffe, both premiered at *documenta 12* (2007), Yochai Avrahami's piece showed at the Taipei Biennial in 2008. The Danish collective, Superflex, organized an appeal to the European Broadcasting Union to include Palestine in the Eurovision Song Contest.[18] Azra Aksamija produced the Frontier Vest. At the same time, Jumana Emil Abboud performed *Smuggling Lemons*, which had several components following smuggling operations.

Europe ~~Never~~ Again

The Mideast Summit (2008 - 2009) was an opportunity to sow the seeds for the future regional network. Given DAL's trust network among local actors, as well as a reputation for several successful projects, we were offered a support grant by German federal organization[19] in order to continue and develop our vision for the MENA region. However, the hesitation in generating an illusion of a normalized reality between Palestinian and Israeli art practitioners operating together led us to accept the grant with one condition: that we do not have to produce anything in return, no outcome or visibility. We offered a series of meetings among art practitioners from the MENA region to study the conditions in which each one of us is operating.

"*The goal of these meetings will be to gain an understanding of the different work environments and cultural conditions in which the participants operate. We will then analyze the professional possibilities for action in each case, and go on to investigate how we may create a shared and inclusive work environment for the different participants. In order to facilitate such cooperation and to develop a potential series of methodologies for such, we need to meet each other regularly and to discuss things further over an extended, though a limited time. These meetings should all be confirmed in advance so that we know in advance what space and time we have. This proposal is therefore written to secure dedicated support for this series of meetings, which will be among artists, curators and cultural actors from the Near/Middle East and North Africa. The purpose of these meetings is to initially create an open context in which we can understand the work environments of the different participants; the structure of each art field; the problems they face in terms of funding, censorship, production and its subsequent reactions; as well as the relationships between art and the political regime and between politics and economic power. The goal of this project is to gain knowledge of different cultural fields in order to create a professional and cultural agenda that is compatible with the expectations of the various participants.*"[20]

Yet, as an Israeli public art **institution**, it was unlikely that any art practitioner from the MENA region would accept an invitation from us,[21] even if the budget for the summit came from Germany with small additions from the Netherlands. Therefore, we proposed that these meetings needed to take place outside the region, where the invitees could travel without a complicated process to obtain visas. We secured assistance and facilities from the Van Abbemuseum in the Netherlands. Two meetings were held in the museum, and one meeting

WHW and Charles Esche, MENA Summit, Cairo. 2008, Image © Galit Eilat
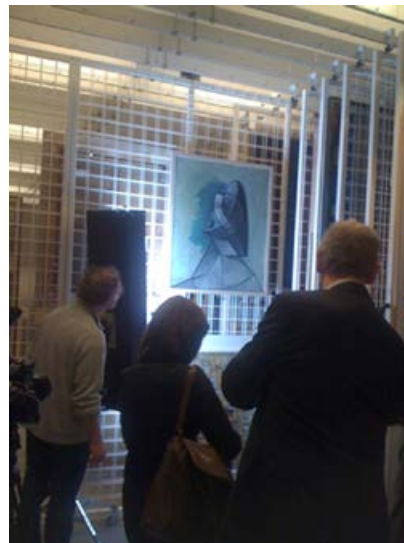
BKR's visit to the Van Abbemuseum depot, March 2010. Photo: Galit Eilat

took place in Istanbul, one in Rabat, and the last one in Alexandria; in the last two meetings, the participants became the hosts and prepared the program for each summit meeting.

Checkpoints and restrictions on movement are not unique to the case of Palestine and Israel or between Israel and neighboring countries; in fact, crossing borders and restricting movement between citizens of MENA is complex and sometimes impossible. But without the attempt to bring together cultural practitioners from the region, it was impossible for us to know how complex this actually is. Younes Bouadi, today the head of production and research at Studio Jonas Staal, wrote about the situation in the region and the summit potentiality: "The Middle East Summit is the unofficial name for a series of meetings between several key figures from the Middle Eastern art world. The reason this summit was held in Eindhoven came from the necessity to have

An Oral History of Picasso in Palestine, Galit Eilat, research curator Van Abbemusuem, 2014, Image © Michael Bears

a mutual place where several members of the international art community from the Middle East could come together. This was a solution for the problem that several nationalities from the Arab world, such as Lebanese and Syrians, are not allowed to travel to Israel, while Israelis cannot travel to those Arab countries."[22]

On the Van Abbemuseum's website, Charles Esche, the director of the museum, wrote: "In parallel to this process of encountering new influences in the Middle East meetings, the workers at the museum have been investigating a separate but connected question for ourselves; that is, what are the potential capacities of the European art museum of the 21st century? While western modernist universalism and European cultural hegemony are discredited concepts, the image of what may come to replace them is still barely discernable. One result is that in Europe we are forced to think about what we want to preserve or pass on to an emerging cosmopolitanism from this modern culture for which we were largely responsible. We can assume that the cultural values in formation will no longer be only 'western' in origin, but we do not know which precise elements of former western ethical and cultural inventions will be valid for the future."[23]

In the context of this summit, Khaled Hourani proposed bringing a Picasso from the collection of the Van Abbemuseum to the IAAP, which is headed by him. As he

stated, this would create a sense of what he referred to as "normality"; Palestine had to be on the international art map as a place where a Picasso could and would be able to go. The integration of Palestine within the contemporary art world, by means of the displaced Picasso, would thus be a metaphor for Palestine's possible recognition by the United Nations. The freedom of art would thus in a certain way represent the "democracy to come."[24]

In June 2011, a single painting by Pablo Picasso was presented at IAAP. The legend has it that this was the first time a work of a European Master was presented in Palestine. In the past ten years, *Picasso in Palestine* became a symbol of the triumph of art over the crimes of the occupation, reminding one of Picasso's famous phrase "Painting is not made to decorate apartments. It's an offensive and defensive weapon against the enemy."[25]

Hourani's imaginative proposition, which connects the presentation of Pablo Picasso's painting in Palestine to the recognition of Palestine as a state by the United Nations, did not emerge as a rootless fantasy or mere artistic imagination. The link between museums and nation-building is rooted in mid-eighteenth century, a link that has not weakened to this day, but on the contrary has become stronger. In the case of Israel, the role museums have played in the (re)construction of (national) identity, the melting pot of the clannish Israeli population and as soft power in the hand of the

Samer Kawasmi, Globus Subcontractor, An Oral History of Picasso in Palestine, 2014. Image © Michael Bears

state diplomacy is well known. Hourani's proposition follows the Israeli national mythology, which ties the notion's birth to the modern art museum. The Israeli ethos is that on Friday, May 14, 1948, the Declaration of Independence by the state of Israel was proclaimed at the museum building, at 16 Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv. A year later, on May 11, 1949, Israel was formally declared a member of the U.N.[26] Tel Aviv Museum was established in 1932, at the persuasion of Meir Dizengoff, the city's first mayor.

When Khaled Hourani offered to bring Picasso to Ramallah, he had in mind the propagation of a positive message from the Palestinian occupied territories to the world. Soft power is essential in a conflict situation, as non-coercive political values. Soft power works through attraction; as Joseph Nye[27] argues, soft power changes the behavior of others by changing their preferences. Soft power is cheaper, more effective, and more sustainable than hard power, which changes behavior through intimidation and coercion.

However, much has been written about *Picasso in Palestine*; the contemporary art scene in Ramallah had never received such generous media coverage nor had the Van Abbemuseum in the south of the Netherlands. But what happened there? Who ensured bringing the precious piece to its destination? Who were the collaborators who rendered the project possible? It is clear to

everyone that there is no possibility of smuggling an artwork with an insurance value of 4.3 million US dollar (according to the IDF's spokesperson blog)[28] through a military checkpoint without prior coordination with the Israeli Ministry of Defense. Michael Baers writes in the introduction to *An Oral History of Picasso in Palestine*:

> The project had induced in me a kind of vertigo, a sense of the temporal going in two directions: into the future where the appearance of a Picasso in Ramallah seemed to presage Palestine's further integration into the global art network, and into the past, back to the beginnings of the story, whichever date one chose for its inception—the proximate beginning of the project or the proximate beginning of the conflict itself. To my mind, the interaction of these two orientations created a complex of shifting temporalities of such instability dialectical thinking was no longer adequate to describe their behavior—a sense of time out of joint matching the fragmented space of occupation—the space-out-of-joint created by the Oslo map, hidden behind an ever-lengthening barrier of sectional concrete slabs. The *Buste de femme*'s fractured modernist space encountered this disorder; encountered as well the tiny white cube constructed for the *Buste de femme* in the Academy's single classroom, like a reduction of any museum gallery in the West.[29]

Pablo Picasso's *Buste de femme* (1943), acquired in 1956 by Edy de Wilde, the first director of the Van Abbemuseum (1946-1963) after the war. He acquired the painting from the Parisian Galerie Leiris[30], (whose reputation has been linked to the sales of looted art objects[31],) in the amount of 400,000 French Francs (around 4,000 euros today). The history of modern art misses one of the pillars that shaped the period: "During the German occupation of the Netherlands, which lasted from May 1940 until May 1945, a *hausse* took place on the Dutch art market. During this boom—which started immediately after the Dutch capitulation—everyone, from people with low disposable incomes to those with almost unlimited funds, suddenly wanted to acquire works of art. Prices and turnover multiplied as both Dutch and German buyers scrambled to purchase not only works of art of the highest quality, but also kitsch and everything in between."[32]

Provoking the status-quo around "art and social change" may liberate us from an equation in which art needs to justify its existence based on the transaction of values, virtue into market value. Therefore, to shy away from the mimetic and the glorification of the charismatic genius, the artists, the curator, and the museum director allowed for a new agreement between art and society to be signed based on social imagination.

Further to this text the video essay 'Good Museum Copy, Great Museum Steal" can be viewed here: https://galiteilat.net/2020/04/06/picassos-heritage/. The project Picasso's Heritage produced with support of Mondriaan Foundation (https://www.mondriaanfonds.nl/en/),

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Notes

1 Eva Illuoz, "How Therapy Became a Multimillion Dollar Industry," *Haaretz*, June 14, 2012, https://www.haaretz.com/how-therapy-became-a-multimillion-dollar-industry-1.5178522.
2 We used two names. One with Israel in the institute name and one without.
3 The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) campaign started in 2005.
4 Hilchot Schenim (checked 13/02/2021)
5 The name of the project was taken from the Mishneh Torah (Hebrew: מִשְׁנֵה תּוֹרָה, "Repetition of the Torah"). The Mishneh Torah was compiled by Maimonides between 1170 and 1180 CE.
6 http://w3.osaarchivum.org/galeria/the_divide/chapter19.html.

7 April 1st. Link to the video documentation: https://videopress.com/v/aKwAX2tv.
8 http://liminalspaces.digitalartlab.org.il/.
9 https://www.birzeit.edu/en/news/international-academy-arts-students-graduate-showcase-their-work-2018-degree-show.
10 Artists: Rene Gabri & Ayreen Anastas, Khaled Hourani, Inass Yassin, Sandi Hilal & Alessandro Petti, Yazan Khalili, Suleiman Mansour, Sami Bukhari, Oren Sagiv, Yochai Avrahami, Miri Segal, Tal Adler, Yosi Atia & Itamar Ross, Hagar Goren, Manar Zuabi, Anjalika Sagar & Kodwo Eshun, Lida Abdul, Sanja Ivekovic, Simon Wachsmuth, Mauricio Guillen, Michael Blum, Lia Perjovschi, Hans Bernhard, Solmaz Shahbazi, Artur Zmijewski, Yael Bartana, Oliver Clemens & Sabine Horlitz, Azra Aksamija, Inass Hamad, Jumana Emil Abboud, Ligna, Peter Friedl, Sala-Manca, Sameh Abboushi, Sean Snyder, Superflex.
11 Israeli citizens are not allowed to enter Ramallah (Area A: Palestinian territory under Palestinian authority) for they could be judged as disobeying the military law that forbids Israelis from entering Palestinian territories. Palestinians, on the other hand, are not allowed to move outside area A or B (Area B: Palestinian territory under Israeli authority): https://conquer-and-divide.btselem.org/map-en.html.
12 *Liminal Spaces* is the only project that operates between a Palestinian institution under Palestinian authority and a public Israeli institution. Other collaborations are between individuals or connected to international bodies.
13 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanzim.
14 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalandia.
15 https://www.pacbi.org/.
16 https://www.bidoun.org/articles/riwaq-bienniale.
17 According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I knowingly misled them and the Ministry of Culture when I appealed for their help to assist foreign artists to enter Israel, when, in effect, their goal was to enter the Palestinian Authority. I was also accused of coaching artists on how to respond if questioned at the airport. Some call these acts security offenses, but I was never officially charged. (The price paid was that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs froze its support for the Israeli Center for Digital Art.)
18 https://superflex.net/tools/palestinian_eurovision.
19 Most of collaborative projects between Israelis and Palestinians or other neighbors were supported by German funds, in addition to European funds. Today, it would be unthinkable to receive support from Germany as well from the European Union, due to Netanyahu's policies following the 2009 elections. The great success

of Netanyahu's government has been to turn the Palestinians from a political enemy into a mythical enemy.

20 An excerpt from the proposal I wrote in 2007 for the Mideast Summit, submitted to Georg Blochman, the head of Goethe Institute in Tel Aviv.

21 The BDS campaign was already two years old.

22 Younes Bouadi, "Picasso in Palestine: Displaced Art and the Borders of Community," *continent* 1:3 (2011): 180-186, https://www.academicpublishingplatforms. com/downloads/pdfs/ctn/volume1/201112281234_ CTN_Q3_2011_5.pdf

23 Michael Baers, *An Oral History of Picasso in Palestine* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2014), http://thekitchen.vanabbe.nl/2011/06/27/picasso-in-palestine/.

24 Bouadi, "Picasso in Palestine."

25 Alyssa Buffenstein, 8 Quotes to Celebrate Picasso's Birthday Artnet 2015. "Painting is not made to decorate apartments. It's an offensive and defensive weapon against the enemy." https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ pablo-picasso-birthday-quotes-347585

26 Tel Aviv Museum of Art - Full Guide - Travel Israel. https://www.israel-in-photos.com/tel-aviv-museum-of-art.html

27 Joseph Samuel Nye, Jr. pioneered the theory of soft power.

28 https://idfspokesperson.wordpress.com/2011/07/21/ picassos-buste-de-femme-exhibited-in-ramallah/

29 Baers, *An Oral History of Picasso in Palestine*.

30 Picasso, Pablo, Buste de femme, 1943
Inv. nr. TMS 387, aangekocht bij Galerie Louise Leiris te Parijs in 1956 (brief van De Wilde aan college van Burgemeester en Wethouders spreek van een aankoop via kunsthandelaar De Haucke, 6 februari 1956. Kan over beide aankopen gaan) Literatuuronderzoek: Opgenomen in H. en S. Janis, Picasso, 1946, pl. 84
Picasso, Pablo, Bust de femme, 1943
Inv. no. TMS 387, purchased at Galerie Louise Leiris in Paris in 1956 (letter from De Wilde to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen speaks of a purchase through art dealer De Haucke, 6 February 1956. Can concern both purchases) Literature review: Included in H. and S. Janis, Picasso, 1946, pl. 84

31 https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/guides_bibli-ographies/provenance/dealer_archives.html.

32 Jeroen Euwe – The Dutch Art Market, 1940-1945 1 The Dutch Art Market, 1940-1945. During the German occupation …

Galit Eilat is an interdependent curator and writer based in Amsterdam. Since 2018, she has been the director of *Meduza Foundation*. Her projects seek to develop conditions that enable collective encounters and experiences, underpinned by a critical view towards the status quo. Pivotal to her projects is the process of knowledge dissemination, which departs from the ethos that art is charged with the potential to ignite social change. Her current research trajectories deal with the *Syndrome of the Present*, *Art in Dark Times*, and *Picasso's Heritage*.

In 2001, she founded the *Israeli Center for Digital Art*, where she served as director for ten years. In 2004, she co-founded *Maarav*, an online arts and culture magazine, and in 2007, she co-founded the *Mobile Archive*. She co-initiated the traveling seminar series, *Liminal Spaces*, a platform for joint work and dialogue between Palestinians, Israelis, and international artists in 2006-2008. She served as the first artistic director of the *Akademie der Künste der Welt* in Cologne in 2013. Among others, she curated and co-curated projects such as *VideoZone 4* – Video Art Biennial in Tel Aviv, *And Europe will be stunned* – Yael Bartana in the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, the 32nd October Salon, Belgrade, and *31st São Paulo Bienial*. Inter-national collaborations have included projects with Wyspa Institute of Art, Gdansk; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; National Gallery, Kosovo; Kunsthaus Bregenz; MG + MSUM, Ljubljana; SALT, Istanbul; Malmö Konst-museum; Serralves Museum and more.

Museums as Contact or Conflict Zones
Johanne Løgstrup

The Museum as a Target for Change

In recent years, it has not gone unnoticed that museums have been the targets of protests, demands, and grievances concerning the ways they are governed. Especially in the Global North, numerous initiatives have drawn public attention to museums in inventive and unexpected ways.[1] Often, protesters have used the museums' architectural spaces, such as a grand entrance hall, as the focal points for their protests. They do this to get their message out. The protests are staged through carefully thought-out photo shoots that then spread and circulate their statement through social media and the press, and thereby attract more public attention, and prompt action.

Decolonize This Place deployed the above-mentioned strategy at the Brooklyn Museum, displaying banners with inscriptions such as "They Want the Art, Not the People" and "Decolonize This Place" in the entrance hall of the Beaux-Arts Court during the protest that took place on April 29, 2018. This protest was held to draw attention to issues related to gentrification and diversity. Another example is the protest initiated by artist and former opioid addict Nan Goldin, who held one of several campaigns in the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum building in New York, and targeted the influential Sackler family. The Sackler family made their fortune by marketing an opioid-based pain medication, one side-effect of which is addiction. Many in the Sackler family are board members of numerous cultural institutions around the United States. During the protest, small white flyers with prescriptions written on them swirled down from the top of the rotunda, to land on the floor of the lobby amid empty orange medicine bottles labeled "Side effect: Death," and people lay on the floor in a die-in protest. Also worth mentioning is *Liberate Tate*, which, after five years of campaigning, succeeded in pressuring the Tate museum to end its sponsorship agreement with oil company British Petroleum. One of the protests included a reanimation of Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* as a performative intervention in the Turbine Hall during a blockbuster exhibition of the artist's work, noting the oil industry's damage to ecosystems, communities and the climate.[2]

Acts such as those just described use the museums' authority as gatekeepers and sanctifiers of cultural values against them, to criticize the apparatus of the institution itself, meaning that the institution's prestige has proven useful for leveraging visibility, publicity, and pressure to spark political aims and movements.[3] This has been done by combining artistic strategies and activism, strategies that are inspired by the artistic tradition of criticizing institutions, where artists use their work to question the art institutions' ethical and structural stances. Guerrilla Girls, Hans Haacke, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and Michael Ascher, to mention just a few, are artists working in this tradition.

External cultural workers are not the only ones to take on the task of solving the problems presented by museums.[4] It is time that the museums, as producers of cultural meaning, start to assume responsibility for the changes taking place and their role in today's planetary culture. As museums have been the representatives of the dominant culture, it is time for them to come out of what may be seen as an illusion in present times and find a tenable position that acknowledges the necessity of diversity in society.

Museums as Conflict Zones

With reference to the chapter "Museums as Contact Zones" in History of Consciousness scholar James Clifford's book from 1993, *Routes*, I borrow the construct of museums as contact zones for the title of this text, but add "conflict," as I think we need to realize that conflict is inherited with the very idea of the museum, and therefore should be acknowledged and articulated.

In *Routes*, Clifford explains how he sees the museum as a manifold place for various groups to meet, with different purposes, around the artifacts: "Then the contact zone becomes the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict." He quotes literary scholar Mary Louise Pratt, who originally coined the expression of "Contact Zones" in her critical research on imperial literature.[5] The "contact" is to be understood as the way in which subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. Clifford writes that when museums are seen as contact zones, their collections established an ongoing historical, political and moral relationship—a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull. To aim for "contact" is the civilized and rational way to go about the interaction happening in the zones, but this may not always seem reasonable to the various participants.[6] Emphasizing the "contact zone" as the core term seems to eliminate the inequality of the constitution of the museum from the outset (although it is acknowledged in the foregoing quote) and underestimate the conflicted situation.[7] The museums' authority as sanctifiers of the cultural value of imperialism is what keeps museums from becoming egalitarian contact zones. Sometimes, the meeting place is not right from the beginning.

This is because the museum originates in a Western idea and tradition of explaining itself against one another. The collection is like an assembly, a place that encircle its culture, and the museum takes on a conflict that is inscribed in the very constitution of the museum.[8] The Western museum comes from the imperialist tradition with one hegemonic position, and meaning-making that embeds the rest of the world, either as becoming part of the reason-making, or becoming "the other," something to study, to look at, to be fascinated or repelled by. Or to be less polemical, many ethical questions arise with the museum, which concern collection practices as well as more current discussions of the reciprocity of cultural heritage in the collection, and raise further questions, such as, "Who has been excluded from the history that has been told so far, or been regarded as 'other,' in order to encircle the culture of Western history?" How do we tell different stories, and how do we relate to the objects according to our backgrounds as visitors, curators, mediators, researchers, and so forth, and how do we articulate and translate the artworks in a collection for relevant and present-day concerns? Or, put directly, how do we decolonize our museums? How do we radically transform them from within?

The foregoing thoughts are not new: some have been thoroughly analyzed by art historians under what has been called "The New Museology." Here, the idea of the modern museum defined by Enlightenment conceptions of knowledge have served to historically affirm Western cultural hegemony.[9] However, if we acknowledge these as the museum's inherited terms, it could become a space for highly relevant discussions about our times, and thereby contain the conflicts embedded in the museum, such as dominance-awareness in contrast to alterity and differences, acquisition and reciprocity politics, as well as handing down knowledge through the generations, but questioning whose story is to be told, whether it is relevant to tell it now, how it is told and by whom. By this, I mean that if the museum dared to address some of these conflicts dif-

ferently, started to take on the awareness of representing a highly hegemonic power, and began to question some of the assumptions that go with this position, it could gain an integrated and meaningful position in society. One place to start could be exhibition-making.

The Museum as a Keeper of Cultural Identity and Beholder of History

The museum as a space for the collective memory of a common culture is in crisis. Instead of playing an active role, encouraging the public to understand the complexity of the present world and to acknowledge the significance of memory of the past for the development of a society that is transnational and diverse, the museum has developed into a space for entertainment.[10]

The museum has lost ground to other institutions such as the biennial, and in the European tradition, the *kunsthalle*. The biennial and the *kunsthalle* are known for focusing on the contemporary and "the new," but in recent years some of these institutions have gone beyond that, and have become spaces that address current contested discussions of historical issues, to foster an understanding of the current situation.[11]

What is it that makes the museum worth holding onto as a place for collective memory, rather than letting it become a showcase for the spectacular, as it seems to be so successfully becoming? The museum can play a significant role as a place for a shared and diverse history that dares to create meaning, and not just reproduce popular discourses. The museum that is based on a local community is likely to have a collection rooted in a modernity constructed on a national ideology positioned in a colonial and imperial history that is up for discussion. It is necessary to come to terms with the shift that has taken place, and that means that national history is not sufficient, and that global/local and transnational history are concerns when it comes to relating to a heterogeneous history and to emphasizing differences and similarities in our present, referencing a history that is less repressive and more inclusive, which, one hopes, can make us more competent to meet the challenges of the future.

Sámi Dáiddamusea, 2017. Photo: Marius Fiskum

Sámi Dáiddamusea, 2017. Photo: Marius Fiskum

In the museum, the historical objects (artworks and artifacts) on display are witnesses of the past, and give the public access to a collective memory that is interpreted from a contemporary perspective. The objects tell a staged history, and the world inside the exhibition is laid out in its totality. This is done through research and knowledge-sharing, and the history is one that, depending on the perspectives assumed by the institution (curators and mediators) in their meaning-making, will have various points of departure and take different routes—and, always worth considering—could have taken others. In each exhibition, there is an experiment involving various modes of meaning-making. Curator Anselm Franke describes the exhibition as an ontology. It explores the threshold between consciousness and form.[12] The exhibition presents an idea of what the world is like, it can challenge our images of the world, and it can make other worlds possible, which also means that other interpretations of the past can take shape.

The history of Western philosophy has a tradition of being self-critical. By self-critical, I mean the ability to question and be reflexive about one's own discipline. This tradition started with the philosopher Immanuel Kant, who was the first to criticize the means of criticism.[13] Imagine if the museum assumed that position, and started questioning the history it has been narrating.[14] As political scientist Chantal Mouffe states, "Instead of deserting public institutions, we must find ways to use them to foster political forms of identification and make existing conflicts productive. By staging a confrontation between conflicting positions, museums and art institutions could make a decisive contribution to the proliferation of new public spaces open to agonistic forms of participation where radical democratic alternatives to neoliberalism could, once again, be imagined and cultivated."[15] What I would like to emphasize in the quote is the possibility of rethinking and reorganizing the institutions to make them productive when confronted with conflicted positions, to make the institutions open to agonistic forms, where various voices that may not agree and correspond, but express various aspects of history, may be heard. In the next section, I look at what I consider a successful example of how a museum can work with its exhibition-making, leading to radical transformations from within.

Sámi Dáiddamusea—Occupation from Within

In the early Spring of 2017, the Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum in Tromsø, Norway, closed to provide a temporary space for a new museum, Sámi Dáiddamusea (the Sami Art Museum), in a collaboration with local partner RiddoDuottarMuseat, a cultural history museum of Sami culture and an open-air museum. Prior to this new institution, Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum relied mainly on a national collection, with loans from the National Gallery of Oslo. On the other hand, RiddoDuottarMuseat holds the world's largest collection of Sami art and design, but has very little space, close to none in which to display this collection. Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum hosted a very small part of the collection under the temporary directorship of Sami performance artist Marita Isobel Solberg. The collaborators called it a "museum performance," thereby directing attention to the museum's capacity to respond to an immediate concern. The name also indicates how they were able to experiment with their own constitution, and from a self-critical position, by making the museum a performer.[16] Situated at the northernmost tip of Norway, quite far from any major city, the collaborators emphasized a powerful communication and design strategy to attract attention. The museum announced its opening through an emotion-charged press release with the opening lines: "Finally, Sápmi, Norway and the world has a museum dedicated to Sami art! After almost 40 years of activism, acquisition, negotiation, lobbyism and stubbornness, the world of art enters a new era. A big day for Sápmi. A big day for Norway. A big day for the world."[17]

The museum performance was held for two months, with an exhibition that presented some of the collection and represented the work of sixty artists, but also drew attention to the long struggle to establish a museum for the collection as the press release text stated. The collaborators called the exhibition, *There is No*, an ambiguous title with several meanings: one was that there is no Sami Dáiddamusea. Despite the attention drawn to the need for a museum to host this collection, there was still no permanent institution to present the Sami art collection. The title also referred to a long discussion surrounding the hierarchy of art. One of the repeating aspects of colonialism and the dismissal of indigenous or non-Western people has been the reiterated claim that these cultures are without art, and have different relationships to art objects, for example, regarding them as crafts or as relics. This self-affirmation signaled a rejection of the standard fine art category of reception and understanding. So, by playing on this colonial legacy, the collaborators reclaimed the opportunity to invent a way to reframe the collection, simply by making their communication strategy a set of statements, which went like this: "There is no set of rules for Sámi art. There is no fixed definition of Sámi art. There are no limitations on Sámi artists." By resisting the implicit power structures' ways of defining the status of art, the newly acclaimed institution was able to define the collection in a way they found accurate.

A similar method of reframing the collection may be addressed by what art history professor Jennifer A. Gonzalez calls "rhetorical topoanalysis," a term she uses for the institutional critique artist Fred Wilson's method, which she coined for her analysis of his 1992 exhibition, *Mining the Museum*, at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore.[18] As Gonzalez describes it, "The rhetorical topoanalysis is to be understood as every buried secret and every surface becomes part of a new logic that maps the institution's history."[19] By inserting a few items into a commonly known display structure, a well-known history is turned around, and what were previously accepted as the traditional hierarchy and inscribed truth when recounting local history are no longer taken for granted. For instance, a pair of slave shackles was placed in a display of silver goblets entitled "Metalwork 1793–1880," and in a section called "Cabinet making 1820–1960," a group of finely crafted nineteenth-century chairs was arranged like an intimate

concert around a wooden whipping post. The solid cruciform whipping post became emblematic of violent punishment, of abjection in the face of power and privilege. By making unexpected connections, by simply bringing together surprising objects, some of the overlooked, suppressed, and invisible histories of slavery and racism are suddenly revealed, and tell a different history. Gonzalez points out that, "What emerged from these historically researched and carefully juxtaposed displays was the overwhelming sense of the complex ideological intersection of power and violence with high culture and the fine arts allowed for, and depended upon, a slave economy to survive."[20]

This method resembles the way in which the Sami Dáiddamusea was carried out. Here, the "rhetoric of the topoanalysis" was applied to the joint mission to create awareness of an underestimated art tradition in the local area, and of the typical museum communication strategies. It was a method for remediating the neglect of a specific local position and identity, and for actualizing some of the discussions that emerged over the years in Sami culture. By using the known formats of what is expected when communicating and displaying a traditional exhibition, and then inserting elements that confuse the expected message, a different story is revealed, a story that brings out many current questions concerning how the museum has persistently expressed ideologies that now are up for debate. So, by using the customs of how to communicate exhibitions in the museum—only this time for the temporal museum performance—a different inscribed truth but possible future was laid out.

Exhibition view of *There is no,* Sámi Dáiddamusea, 2017. Photo: Marius Fiskum

From Tokenism to Actual Change

The example of the Sami Dáiddamusea shows that change can come from within. Museum director Jérémie McGowan states, "So, all the critique that the project launched was, of course, very crucially, also directed at ourselves, at Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum and our legacy/history/practice (which stretches back to 1985). As a director, it also had the feeling that small, steady changes were simply not enough—there was a very real need for total and comprehensive upheaval, to avoid 'tokenism,' for example. To mean business—not talking, but action."[21] This was not accomplished with a single exhibition, but continued at Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum in the extended aftermath, after the museum performance. That was only the first step. The museum is slowly but steadily changing its collecting activities, focusing on issues such as how to balance things, by always exhibiting with a local and global awareness in order to nourish the differences and multiplicities of voices, new acquisitions, classification of the artworks, and, it is hoped, changing the collection's mandate to include Sámi art.[22]

At this time, many cultural workers, activists, scholars and knowledge-producers present examples of how to decolonize institutions that are based on European imperialism. There are many suggestions. One to follow could be reparation as a practice, as suggested by artist Kader Attia, and followed up by modern culture and media theorist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. The idea of reparation relates not only to recapturing a previous state, but also to the process of making new again. It does not remove the scars, but makes them appear and thereby acknowledges them. This brings a certain agency with it.[23] Azoulay proposes combining reparation with the practice of potential history, which is also the title of her recent book, as another way to understand our institutions and work with them.[24] She suggests that the way we use the imperial institutions, such as archives, museums and libraries, should be by withdrawing from them and finding other ways than the commonly known ways of reproducing the technology of knowledge production. This could be done by not always seeking out the new, insist-

Exhibition view of *There is no,* Sámi Dáiddamusea, 2017. Photo: Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum

ing on progress, and positioning violence safely in the past. Instead, we should withdraw by un-expropriating and unlearning. One example of this practice that Azoulay presents is Tamara Lanier's lawsuit against Harvard University, concerning its rights to daguerreotypes of Lanier family members, who were former slaves. Those daguerreotypes have been archived, deposited, and distributed in the name of science, which means that these portraits have been made publicly accessible without the family's permission. Azoulay calls for the right to repair and care for relationships outside the terms set by imperialist institutions, and the right to deny perpetrators and their descendants the imperialist right to continue to own and profit from what was once taken without consent.[25]

It is to be hoped that over time, there will be more and more examples of ways to withdraw from the known museum models. This requires changes in how to articulate and present the activities taking place in the museums, but this can happen only by experimenting, envisaging, and rehearsing other practices. The conflict zones need to be taken out into the open, and not exonerated by doing business as usual. As Chantal Mouffe suggests in the statement above, let's make the existing conflicts productive.

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Notes

1 In this article, I do not differentiate among the various kind of museums, but as its background primarily involves art, I base my knowledge mainly on the discussions of and around art museums.

2 For further reading about these protests, see *Artforum News*, "Decolonize this place, activists occupy the Brooklyn Museum", *Artforum*, April 30, 2018, https://www.artforum.com/news/decolonize-this-place-activists-occupy-the-brooklyn-museum-75238; Masha Gessen, "Nan Goldin Leads a Protest at the Guggenheim against the Sackler Family," *The New Yorker*, February 10, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/nan-goldin-leads-a-protest-at-the-guggenheim-against-the-sackler-family; and MTL Collective, "From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art," *October* 165 (summer 2018).

3 I am drawing on the article, "From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art" by MTL Collective. In this article, they present many examples of the intensive politicization of the art system in recent years, especially in the United States. Of similar acts in the Nordic countries, and specifically Denmark, where I am based, it is worth mentioning *I Am Queen Mary*, by artists Jeannette Ehlers and La Vaughn Belle. The two artists produced a sculpture of the leader of the slave revolt at St. Croix (previously a Danish colony), and placed it in front of the Danish West Indian Warehouse at Copenhagen harbor in 2017, the centenary of Denmark's sale of the Virgin Islands to United States. For more information, see https://www.iamqueenmary.com.

Also worth mentioning is a workshop by Nuuk Art museums director Nivi Katrine Christensen, together with ULK (The Youth Laboratory of Art) at the National Gallery in Denmark, on June 21, 2019. In the workshop, which was held in the museum's galleries, they questioned the omitted part of Greenland's history as a former Danish colony, and by extension, the relationship between Denmark and Greenland. Members of ULK hung a banner next to the information sign for the collection of Danish and Nordic art, which read, "Minus Greenland." See: https://www.facebook.com/ulksmk/?eid=ARC71WqByhL7WOqYZM1KPk9cB79XRTZjz5c-LnqqAFa2vL-BEmQ_R-hNQuNHVEN9WdhZweuKUPhWWiJA4.

4 This criticism of external cultural workers providing a critical perspective is not new, and was discussed by art historian Miwon Kwon in *One Place after Another* (2004),

where she questions Fred Wilson's intervention in institutions as an easy and light way of being critical. She calls this institutional practice "commissioned critique," p. 47. For a more recent analysis of a similar situation, see Anna Vestergaard Jørgensen, *Please do it for me! Affective Labour in (De)colonial Exhibitions* (forthcoming).

5 James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," in *Routes*, p. 192. Clifford quotes Mary Louise Pratt's work on travel literature, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation.* In Pratt's article, "Arts of the Contact Zone," she describes in greater depth her use of the "contact zone," and she is also clearly concerned about asymmetrical power relationships. It is worth mentioning that Pratt analyzes historical literary material, whereas Clifford considers how museums currently address colonial encounters.

6 Both "rational" and "civilized" are also words that emerged from Enlightenment philosophy.

7 Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," 192.

8 See Nora Sternfeld, "Deprovincializing the Museum: What would a museum be if not a Western concept," in *Body Luggage: Migration of Gestures*, ed. Zasha Colah (Berlin: Archive Books, 2016), 158–161; Walter Mignolo, "Museums in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity: Fred Wilson's Mining the Museum (1992)," in *Fred Wilson: A Critical Reader*, ed. Doro Globus (London: Ridinghouse, 2011), 374–390.

9 See Griselda Pollock, "Un-framing the Modern: Critical Space/Public Possibility," in Griselda Pollock & Joyce Zemans (eds.), *Museums after Modernism: Strategies of Engagement*, (Malden, MA, Oxford: Blackwel, 2007), Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex" in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson & Sandy Nairne (eds.), *Thinking About Exhibitions*, (London: Routhledge, 1996) 81-112 and Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship" in Ivan Karp & Steven D. Lavine (eds.), Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991) 88-103.

10 See Rosalind Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," *October* 54 (Autumn 1990); Piotr Piotrowski, "Museum: From Critique of Institution to a Critical Institution," in *(Re)Staging the Art Museum* (Berlin, Revolver, 2011); and Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology or, What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art* (London: Koenig Books, 2013).

11 Worth mentioning is the multiannual program, *Kanon-Fragen*, at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (2016–19) which dealt with the question of how to expand the Western canon. This was done through exhibitions and discursive events. A similar initiative was *Former West*, by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst (2014–16), a transnational exhibition and research program on Western European self-perception after the Cold War ended. Art historian Nina Möntmann discusses the historical perspective in connection with the biennial in her article, "Plunging into the World: On the Potential of Periodic Exhibitions to Reconfigure the Contemporary Moment," *OnCurating* 33 (June 2017).

12 Anselm Franke, "The Third House," *Glass—Bead* (2016), https://www.glass-bead.org/article/the-third-house/.

13 I am aware that the tradition of criticism to which I refer comes from the same tradition of modernity that I am criticizing. Therefore, I also apply the idea of multiple modernities, introduced by curator Okwui Enwezor and others. For more on the subject of the tradition of criticism, see Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1961) in *Art in Theory – An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

14 This seems to be slowly happening, with an increased awareness of the overlooked roles of women and non-Western artists in art history. See reviews of MoMA's new collective hanging of the work of Helen Molesworth, "The Kids Are Always Right," *Artforum,* Vol 58, nr. 5 (January 2020); and Claire Bishop and Nikki Columbus's "Free

Your Mind," *N+1*, January 7, 2020, https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/paper-monu-ment/free-your-mind/.

15 *Chantal Mouffe, "Museums as Agonistic Spaces," Artforum International 48 (2010): 326–330.*

16 My knowledge of this exhibition is based on an e-mail interview with director Jérémie McGowan of Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, in February/March 2020, and on the website that was made for the temporary museum. See https://www.sdmx.no/en/news/sami-art-museum-open.

17 The temporary website for the Sami art museum: https://www.sdmx.no/en/news/sami-art-museum-open.

18 Jennifer A Gonzalez, *Subject to Display – Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art,* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 64–119.

19 Ibid., 87.

20 Ibid., 91.

21 Interview with McGowan, February/March 2020; also, see Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum website for the current program, which shows the many exhibitions and initiatives since 2017, when this performance at the museum took place: https://www.nnkm.no.

22 Interview with McGowan, February/March 2020.

23 For a further introduction to reparation as a practice, see Theo Reeves-Evision and Mark Justin Rainey, "Ethico-Aesthetic Repairs introduction," *Third Text*, 32, no. 1 (2018).

24 *Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism, Verso, 2019*

25 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, "Free Renty! Reparations, Photography, and the Imperial Premise of Scholarship," *Hyperallergic*, March 2, 2020) https://hyperallergic.com/545667/free-renty/.

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Borders and Forms
Anastasia Chaguidouline

In November 2019, I visited **Petr Pavlensky** on two occasions in Paris, where the Russian artist has lived since 2017. The artist has been active since 2012, when his first action *Seam*, as a response to Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer*, rapidly gained international visibility. Since then, he has performed five more actions in Russia and at least one in France, as he continues the process of the affirmation of borders and forms of political art.[1] After his then latest action, *Lightning*, in October 2017, he spent roughly eleven months in the Fleury-Mérogis Prison, most of the time in solitary confinement, where he held two hunger strikes. He welcomed me into a house in the 19th *arrondissement* that he "opened," the third one in this quiet area that reminds me more of a small French town than of the Paris I know.

He "opened" a house for his ex-partner and his two children who, after being homeschooled in Russia, are presently enrolled in the French school system. He has received help with the procedure of "opening" and is also willing to share his temporary housing, currently with two political refugees who are on the waiting list for social housing. He himself rejects any form of state subsidies, stating that "the feeding hand is always the hand of a master."[2] Consistent in his critique of governmental power, he feels that being in upheaval against it, while accepting its "helping hands," could be comparable to the childish uprising of a teenager against his or her parents.

According to Proudhon, "Property is theft,"[3] which is, of course, not directly perceivable when thinking about minor property such as an mobile phone or a pair of pants (on a larger scale, these goods and especially the conditions under which they are produced could certainly be considered as depriving someone of his or her time and humane working conditions). However, this principle becomes much more visible on a larger scale, in relation to real estate or works of art. When someone purchases a piece of art, he or she can decide whether to make it publicly accessible or whether to deprive the public of its presence by locking it up in storage. The houses than Pavlensky "opens" are empty and deteriorating, while Paris is populated by thousands of *sans-abri* (homeless) and asylum seekers who are put on endless waiting lists for social housing, yet do not know where to stay or to sleep until they might get lucky. While most of us would probably name it "occupying" a house, people who live there will most of the time take care of it, preventing its deterioration. "It is important that nobody becomes a victim in this situation" ("opening houses"). This procedure can be seen as an occupation without the right of possession.

Regarding possessions, the artist from St. Petersburg likes to quote Nietzsche: "Possession Possesses. Only up to a certain point does possession make men feel freer and more independent; one step farther, and possession becomes lord, the possessor a slave."[4] An individual's behavior changes and becomes adapted to the goods one possesses—one locks the door, one pays insurance, one becomes afraid.

In one of his interviews, the Moscow actionist Oleg Kulik affirms that Pavlensky is a singular phenomenon, because he is apparently fearless. Pavlensky states that nobody is fearless, perhaps only individuals in psychiatric hospitals and/or being treated with strong psychopharmaceuticals. Anyone is, however, capable of a fearless deed, trans-

Fig. 1 Petr Pavlensky, *Threat*. Action. Lubyanka Building, Moscow. 9.11.2015. Accessed on 25.03.2020. https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1DZchkrF4a-5RJUfsgCxLDt1luv_sufBd?fbclid=IwAR1AGlvWSTRTqZkuOo 1H2WfBtb1TtyHLl_DOYMG2_BercdGsMbrYbA1jEKY

Fig. 2 Petr Pavlensky, *Lighting*. Action. Banque de France, Place de Bastille, Paris. 16.10.2017. Accessed on 25.03.2020. https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1DZchkrF4a-5RJUfsgCxLDt1luv_sufBd?fbclid=IwAR1AGlvWSTRTqZkuOo1 H2WfBtb1TtyHLl_DOYMG2_BercdGsMbrYbA1jEKY

gressing borders and subverting what is believed to be true and real. What is imagin-able or not imaginable to a person, as well as what is considered fearless, is deeply dependent on individual priorities.

Dissident and subversive artistic practice in Russia traces a long history: from the Tsarist regime, through the avant-garde that was often forced to "voluntary" emigra-tion, the "bulldozer" exhibition, the apartment art movement, Moscow Actionism, and finally the performative, activist, and artistic practices of post-Soviet and Putinist Rus-sia. Censorship, expatriation and the narrative of madness and otherness seem to be the guiding lines, when it comes to the encounter of the "language of art" and the "lan-guage of power."[5]

In the year 2012, Pussy Riot was charged with "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred," their protest art action was condemned as "impudent," and one can only won-der if this notion was mainly deployed because Pussy Riot has mostly female members. The same year, Petr Pavlensky protested outside of the Kazan cathedral, holding a poster that said: "The action of Pussy Riot was a replay of the famous action of Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:12-13)." Totalitarianism and the return to extreme Christianism is dominating today's Russia. The separation between the church and state has progres-sively been reduced. A return to (self-)censorship, to so-called "traditional" values, after the country has been atheist for almost eighty years, is the reality of the Russian art world and the regulations and restrictions it has to deal with. The question of territori-ality becomes unavoidable when, similarly to how the Russian government's action has systematically led to many intellectuals and avant-garde artists leaving the coun-try in the direction of Europe, Israel, or the United States in the nineteenth and twenti-eth centuries, members of the Voina group and Petr Pavlensky have recently sought asylum in Europe.

"Nowadays, nobody needs art."[6] According to Pavlensky, there are two types of instrumentalization that art and artists undergo today: either one becomes a creator of goods and thus a slave of the capitalist market, or one becomes an agent of propa-ganda. In the latter case, it is no longer important what the artist is doing, but for or against whom he or she is doing it. This becomes clear when looking, for instance, at Pavlensky's "diptych" *Threat* (2015) (fig. 1) and *Lighting* (2017) (fig. 2). In this two actions, the artist was deeply interested in creating a symmetry, displacing an action that had been done in Moscow, Russia, namely setting the Lubyanka building (head offices) of the Russian Federal Security Services (former KGB) on fire in 2015, to setting the office of the Banque de France on Place de la Bastille in Paris, France, on fire in 2017. Both actions shared a similar aesthetic, and the artist was arrested immediately after both occurrences. The difference was that when lighting up the hotbed of Putinist power, he was applauded by the same critics and journalists that were to harshly con-demn his action in Paris. The main problem is the lack of resistance and the general compliance of artists and those working in the field of art to fit into the fashion of being pro, being contra, being an "activist" or being impartial, as long as it does not get too uncomfortable. In these "dark times" that, in Pavlensky's opinion, came with the end of the Situationist International, the servitude to either the market or the state can be described as a prostitutional behavior. Artists are not assuming the responsibility for whom they give their work. They give it to those who are willing to pay the most. Therefore, it is a question of responsibility of each and every person in this sector of knowledge, to defend it and to not make it an instrument of the market or governmen-tal power. One has to defend it despite one's material comfort.

While the late Tsarist regime saw the birth of the Silver Age of Russian poetry, with currents such as Symbolism, Futurism, Cubo-Futurism, and the first Russian avant-garde with Malevich, Goncharova, Kandinsky, and Larionov, the visual artist in general was still mainly considered the server of the court. The era of Socialist Realism that followed in Russia started after the Bolsheviks gained hold of power after the October Revolution in 1917. The concept was first suggested by Maxim Gorky, the Russian writer at the First Congress of Writers in 1934.[7] Socialist Realism was understood as a reorganization of the world in accordance with communist ideals. Its main features were: pathos, life-affirming topics, nationality, socialist internationalism, the inseparability of society, and the fate of the individual. Although this new kind of art was considered art at the service of the people, the state was its main commissioner and consumer, and culture was appropriated as an agitative propaganda tool for the new order in Russian society. Additionally, there was a certain state authority that decided upon the presence of the artworks displayed in an exhibition, about the promotion of an artist, or his or her downfall.[8]

The paradox of that time was that this totalitarian approach towards art was trying to declare and decide what was human. However, in the excessive passion for the revolutionary construction of the new world, it left no room for the individual. That's exactly what the "underground" alternative art began to stress: a different kind of humanity which would put individuality back at the center of creativity. Individuality for the Soviet regime meant non-conformism, as the socialists strove to stress the idea of society as an entity. Such artists, unable to display their works in public spaces, localized their lives in private areas: artist studios and apartments. Their art was created and exhibited at the same places. By the time of the 1960s, a network of addresses became known as "places of pilgrimage" for the underground Soviet bohemia that had formed in Moscow.[9] Day after day, people came to these addresses, not only to see a different kind of art, but also to discuss unpublished or not yet translated books (as there were many books that were censored or forbidden), current philosophical trends, and contemporary art concepts. Some "places of force" were widely known for their special atmosphere and hospitality. For example, the apartment of the outstanding pianist Sviatoslav Richter (2/6 Bolshaya Bronnaya Street), a keen connoisseur of painting. In his apartment, he organized exhibitions of Dmitry Krasnopevtsev's paintings, who was a nonconformist painter and author of "metaphysical still-lifes," twice, in 1962 and 1975.[10]

After moving to Moscow in 1966, the later polemic political figure and one of the most known Soviet dissident writers, Edward Limonov, came into contact with the under-ground literary and artistic movement in Moscow and became an avant-garde poet. Limonov was expatriated from the Soviet Union in 1974 and immigrated to the USA. He would return to Russia only in 1991, when Gorbachev would restore Soviet citizen-ship to the already world-famous writer. Limonov became known as the dissident among dissidents, harshly criticizing the Soviet regime and capitalism alike. He protested against capitalist power structures and accused the USA of having a similar system to the Soviet Union, merely with the advantage of disposing of more eloquent propaganda mechanisms. Having only found a publisher for his auto-fictional novel *It's Me, Eddie* (1976) in France in 1979, he moved and lived there during the eighties, where he pub-lished, amongst others, his second most famous book *Memoir of a Russian Punk* (1985).[11][12]

Meanwhile, one of the best known events that was censored by the Soviet government was the "bulldozer" exhibition that took place in Belyaevo, back then a suburb of Moscow on September 15, 1974. As the avant-garde painters strove to publicly exhibit

their artworks, they encountered the impossibility of doing so in the political situation in place. The open-air event showed works by twenty artists, among them Oskar Rabin, and after half an hour of exhibition time, the event was dispersed by policemen, workers on bulldozers, and agents. The international press and diplomats who were present on site were shocked.[13] There were three bulldozers involved, and the workers driving them were sedated with vodka before their attack on the "enemy," occupying their territory and preventing them from working, according to the claims of the agents responsible for this sabotage.[14]

In 1982, the artist Nikita Alekseev founded an apartment gallery, which he named APTART at 48/4 Vavilov Street, in which the idea of a thoughtful arrangement, a curation of the underground exhibitions was developed. APTART took the shape of many exhibitions in private apartments. The exhibited artists were no longer merely painters. Influenced by the tendencies and artistic developments of the West (performance art, happenings, Fluxus), they collected city rubbish and old posters, created intentionally kitsch assemblages, parodying the roughness of late Soviet life, poor public spaces, pollution and the dullness of shared apartment life.[15] Sarcastic and colorful, these installations paradoxically undermined the distinction between art and life.

The atmosphere of poetry evenings and table discussions, the lack of money and poverty of 1990s, the passion for obscenity and European philosophy led to several artists uniting as the group of the Brotherhood of New Blockheads. The backbone of the group consisted of V. Kozin, I. Nagel, I. Panin, S. Spirikhin, V. Flyagin and photographer A. Lyashko, who documented their performances. In 1998, they were joined by O. Khvostov. On different occasions, the group collaborated with K. Alekseeva, I. Mezheritsky, E. Neverdovskaya, I. Orlov, and others.[16] Founded in 1996 in St. Petersburg, the Brotherhood of New Blockheads revived the St. Petersburg tradition of idiocy, "poor knighthood," and foolishness (often seen in Dostoevsky's characters), the scandalous behavior of the Futurists, and the philosophy of the absurd. The incompleteness or the unfinished character of many of the group's works, as well as the indifference to the production of final products and projects, became their response to the newly appearing neoclassicist and neoliberal mood in post-Soviet Russia.[17] The Brotherhood of New Blockheads appeared at a time when post-Soviet Russia did not have a contemporary art scene, but a mere foretaste of it.

Around the same time, while the country went through chaos and restructuring, Moscow became famous for its Actionism, said to be the predecessor of Voina, Pussy Riot, and Petr Pavlensky's generation of artists, the Red Square, where Pavlensky executed two of his famous actions, already then becoming an important territory of negotiation between art and the state. It was snowing in 1995 when Alexander Brener, one of the most important Moscow Actionists came out only wearing boxing shorts, shoes, and gloves and shouted, *Yeltsin, Come Out!*[18] Art and the political situation of the country then entered into a close debate that was to be continued by the new generation in the new century (of Putinism). In 1991, the art group E.T.I. (abbreviation for *Expropriation of the Territory of Art* in Russian) founded by another leading figure of the time, Anatoly Osmolovsky (also founder of the radical journal *Radek*), performed their action *Dick at the Red Square* (fig. 3). Thirteen people (anarchists, hippies, punks, and members of the group) arranged their lying bodies into the Russian slang/swear word for dick. In terms of dialectics, *Mat* (Russian swearing language) dominated the early post-Soviet literature and art, having sprouted in the Soviet underground and dissident literary practices, in Limonov's writing for instance. Three days before the action, a law was passed that forbade the use of this kind of language in the public

space.[19] In 2010, the art group Voina (which means war in Russian), a radical leftist, activist group known for their conceptual protest art, undertook an action in St. Petersburg that can be viewed as reenactment or a new version of E.T.I.'s action. For *A Dick Captured by the FSB* (fig. 4), the group painted a giant penis on one half of the Liteyny Bridge in St. Petersburg that, when the bridge opened, had an effect of a raised middle finger in the direction of the nearby FSB building.[20] In his work, Pavlensky has deployed both themes as well, nailing his scrotum to Red Square and setting an FSB building on fire in Moscow.

Fig. 3 E.T.I., *E.T.I. text / Dick on the Red Square*. Action. Red Square, Moscow. 18.04.1991. Photo by: Reporter MK. Courtesy: Anatoly Osmolovsky. Accessed on 25.03.2020. https://artguide.com/posts/1019 Fig. 3 E.T.I. "E.T.I. text" / "Dick on the Red Square". Action. Red Square, Moscow. 18.04.1991. Photo by: Reporter MK. Courtesy: Anatoly Osmolovsky. Accessed on 25.03.2020. https://artguide.com/posts/1019

Fig. 4 Voina. *A Dick Captured by the FSB*. Action. Liteiny Bridge, St. Petersburg. 14.06.2010. Photo courtesy: Voina, Moscow. Accessed on 25.03.2020. http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/brown/voina4-29-11.asp

The activist and political artistic practices might have had their origin in Moscow Actionism, however the times and political direction have since changed, going from a state of chaos and possible liberalization of the Russian state to a strict return to traditional values. Since Putin came to power in 2000, the focus of cultural discussions in Russia has gradually been put on restoration, heritage, the resurrection of Marxist positions in art, or religious and nationalist values. One therefore needs to see the actions of the younger post-Soviet generation of artists in a different context, one of political repression. Pussy Riot were not the first ones to challenge the Orthodox Church with their *Punk Prayer* in 2012; however, their prosecution for blasphemy allegations became an internationally watched trial. In the year 2000, former member of E.T.I. Oleg Mavromati performed *Do Not Believe Your Eyes* (fig. 5)*,* in which he was crucified (his assistants tying him, nailing his hands to a cross and carving, "I am not the son of God" with a razor on his back). This performance took place in the courtyard of the Institute of Cultural Studies in Moscow, directly facing the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, where Pussy Riot were to perform their *Punk Prayer* over a decade later.[21] Similarly, in 1998, during the Moscow Art Fair, Avdey Ter-Oganyan invited the audience to destroy cheap reproductions or prints of Orthodox icons and when nobody in the audience was willing to do it, he proceeded to destroy them with an axe himself (fig. 6). One has to say that both Mavromati and Ter-Oganyan were accused of "promoting religious hatred," and they eventually emigrated to Czech Republic and Bulgaria, respectively; however, the level of legal prosecution and international attention differed from Pussy Riot's case. Pavlensky and Voina are meanwhile joining a long line of forced emigration that started during the Soviet Union. Still, there are Russian artists and activists that because of these examples feel strongly about staying in Russia, among them Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, a founding member of Pussy Riot.[22]

Another line of preoccupation for many contemporary Russian artists is the rejection of copyrights as a way of rejecting the capitalist system among others. Kirill Medvedev, a Soviet and Russian activist, musician and poet gave up the copyrights to all his works in 2004. Similarly, the artist and activist collective Chto Delat, which was founded in 2003 and whose practice includes filmmaking, employ an open-source policy for their films, texts, and image production, thus making them openly accessible through their website, for instance. Chto Delat are merging political theory, art, and activism in the post-Socialist condition[23] and stand as a vivid example of the reconsideration of socialist, communist or anarchist values that is visible in various artistic and literary practices in the realm of the post-Soviet, going hand in hand with the rejection of accelerated capitalism and its exclusive economy. The collective Chto Delat from St. Petersburg, composed of philosophers, activists, artists, choreographers, writers, directors, and critics, operates as an alternative (to the state) institution. Their self-organized practice includes a house of culture and an art school (Rosa's House of Culture, The School of Engaged Art).[24]

Pavlensky has never asserted any copyrights on his works, nor earned money with his art. In 2019, he posted the link to his open archive on Facebook (open for repost), thus granting everyone interested access to high-quality images and videos of his artistic practice. He states that, otherwise, if earned money with his art, his practice would be devalued and turn into "work," a parasitic word in his opinion, as in our vocabulary, even if one has rejected the concept of "working," the word remains imperishable. "Lighting up an FSB building, nailing one's balls to a square, going to jail...what kind of job is that supposed to be? Not a very 'nice' one."[25]

Fig. 5 Oleg Mavromati, *Do Not Believe Your Eyes*. Performance. Institute of Cultural Studies, Moscow. 01.04.2000. Accessed on 25.03.2020. https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Oleg_Mavromati

Fig. 6 Avdey Ter-oganyan, *A Young Blasphemer*. Performance. Moscow Art Fair, Moscow. 04.12.1998. Accessed on 25.03.2020. https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/9264/beyond-pussy-riot-controversial-actionism-artist

Regarding his artistic practice, Pavlensky had a clear and simple idea: doing something and giving it away, to the public, to society that is free to do with it whatever they like. In return, when the artist needs something, (financial) support, he would ask the public. This practice, as it is subverting the capitalist exchange system, has proven to be problematic, as especially people with power and money tend to consume and seldom give back. "Possession and money are sacral in our society and if one tries to negate it, one will encounter unsurpassable barriers."[26]

"Ne travaillez jamais" ("Never Work"),[27] the slogan written on a wall on Rue de Seine in Paris in 1953 by the French writer, theorist, filmmaker, poet, and founder of Situationism, Guy Debord, is a core principle for Pavlensky. Working is exchanging one's time for money, giving one's body and time to the interest of third parties. For Debord, a crucial objective was to live without dead time, thus without killing time with work or counter-revolutionary boredom, as to argue in the capitalist sense, the only capital that one truly possesses is one's time.[28] Any government or governing apparatus will try to take this time from the individual, as without it there would be no economic development. Seeing the body as a production unit is the basis of this mechanism, and as centuries have shown, there are two main approaches to this mechanism, either enslaving individuals outside one's country by colonizing another country, or enslaving individuals within one's own country. Or, as it was formulated on a poster on the one-year anniversary of the "*Gilets Jaunes*" movement in November 2019: "Travaille, consomme et ferme ta gueule!" ("Work, consume and shut your mouth!").

Pussy Riot formed in 2011 as a punk band, referencing bands like Bikini Kill and the Riot Grrrl movement. Some of the members of the newly formed group were previously part of the art group Voina. It was founded by, among others, Peter Verzilov and his wife Nadia, and they became most known for their 2008 performance, *Fuck for the Heir Puppy Bear*, in which several couples had sex in the Federal Biology Museum to protest the presidential candidate Dmitri Medvedev (his surname is derived from bear, *medved* in Russian). Both Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Yekaterina Samutsevich were previously part of the Voina group.[29] Peter Verzilov was a member of both groups. The Voina group still operates; however, some of the founding members have pursued asylum in Western countries, for instance, Switzerland, Germany, and Czechia. Pussy Riot was officially active as a collective, primarily producing video works, until 2015. Their last internationally known action included an intervention on the football field during the final match of the FIFA World Cup in Moscow on July 15, 2018.

Following the arrest of Nadezhda Tolokonnikova (22), Maria Alyokhina (24), and Yekaterina Samutsevich (29)—who were suspected of being part of the Pussy Riot group, an art collective consisting of about a dozen young Russian men and women based in Moscow—who held a so-called punk prayer service *Mother of God, put Putin away!*[30] (fig. 7) in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior near the Kremlin (the center of Russia's political power) on February 21, 2012, the group became a symbol of radical resistance to both the political regime in present-day Russia and the clericalization of public life. At the same time, this action itself continued a long series of their creative endeavors, both in the sphere of contemporary art and in the sphere of political protest. They previously introduced guerrilla-style protests that they had been conducting for two years to counter the violence against journalists in Russia and in the wake of the Arab Spring: "After the Arab Spring, we had come to understand that Russia needed political and sexual emancipation, audacity, the feminist whip and a feminist president."[31]

Fig. 7 Pussy Riot, *Punk Prayer*. Performance. Christ the Saviour Church, Moscow. 21.02.2012.
Accessed on 25.05.2019. https://creativeresistance.org/punk-prayer/.
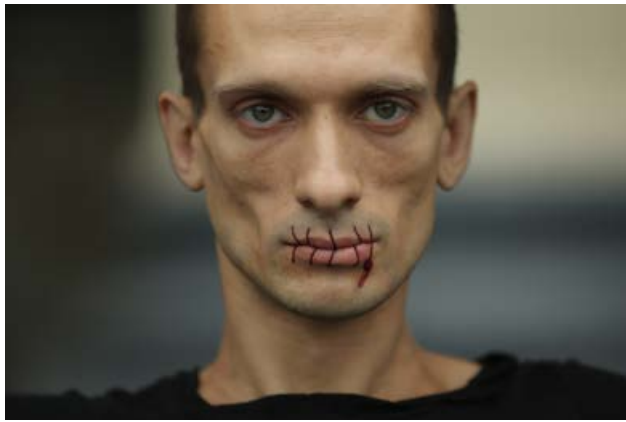

Fig. 8 Petr Pavlensky. *Seem*. Action. Kazan Cathedral, St. Petersburg. 23.07.2012. Accessed on 25.03.2020. https://
drive.google.com/drive/folders/1DZchkrF4a-5RJUfsgCxLDt1luv_sufBd?fbclid=IwAR1AGlvWSTRTqZkuOo1H2WfB
tb1TtyHLl_DOYMG2_BercdGsMbrYbA1jEKY

One week before Orthodox Christianity's Great Lent, Pussy Riot's members walked
into the cathedral. Four female members took their winter coats off and pulled brightly
colored balaclavas over their heads. They were dressed in leggings, short dresses and
boots, they started jumping around, punching and kicking the air, singing, shouting,
kneeling, and crossing themselves, while being videotaped by other group members.
Within less than a minute, the performance was interrupted by the guards, and the
group was removed from the cathedral. On the same day, the group released a video
showing the action, its termination, and they revealed the full lyrics of the song.[32] The
evening after the performance, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin condemned the act on
national television and called for the prosecution of the group's members. On March 3,
2012, the day before Putin's re-election as president, two members of the group who
had performed in the Christ the Savior Church were arrested. Alyokhina and
Tolokonnikova were charged with "hooliganism (undermining civil order) motivated
by religious hatred."[33] Samutsevich, a group member who had not actively performed,
was arrested on March 15. The three women were not only sentenced for
"hooliganism." In addition, their behavior was denounced as "vulgar, impudent and
cynical."[34] On August 17, all three women were convicted and sentenced to two years of
imprisonment in a penal colony. In October 2012, the Moscow court confirmed the
sentence for Alyokhina and Tolokonnikova; Samutsevich was freed with a suspended
sentence. On December 29, 2013, Alyokhina and Tolokonnikova were released under a

general amnesty marking the twentieth anniversary of Russia's post-Soviet constitution. Vladimir Putin proposed the amnesty considering the approaching Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014 and the sharp criticism by Western human-rights organizations.[35]

The action of Pussy Riot criticized and showed the dangers of the new alignment between the regime and the Russian Orthodox Church, which results in negative consequences for everyone who is considered to be the "other" or the "enemy" by this new patriarchic coalition: LGBTQIA, women, artistic and political dissidents, and those who oppose the neoliberal turn and corruption in Russia.[36] This performance addressed its audience and state on the private (belief, individual limitations) and the public (societal) levels. The government reacted not only by direct restrictive means of imprisonment, but also by joining forces with the Church and the mass media. They pushed their interpretation of the action forward, which essentially simplified and falsified the action as blasphemy, and appealed to the vast majority of Christian Orthodox population in Russia. Essentially, by positioning the action of Pussy Riot as a sin, the government won over public opinion, and the prosecution could take place without any major protest from within society.

Moreover, the very brief publicly known activity of Pussy Riot (the group became known on November 7, 2011) became a catalyst for processes in the field of civil-artistic activism and political art, among which the action in front of the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg on July 23, 2012 was held by Petr Pavlensky, who sewed his mouth and held a poster "The action of *Pussy Riot* was a replay of the famous action of Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:12-13)."[37] **Seam** (fig. 8) became the first political art action of the artist, until then an art student in St. Petersburg, who at that time was twenty-eight years old. In his art, Pavlensky speaks about the visualization of chains and mechanisms of power, and it was his first action in itself that occurred as a reaction as well. In this case, the governmental repression of Pussy Riot became a catalyst for *Seam* and, one can notably argue, his oeuvre to follow. It provoked a chain of important reactions and actions and came full circle in 2018, when the Ukrainian activist group Femen sewed up their mouths in an act of solidarity and stood outside of the building in Paris where the trial of Pavlensky was being held. Not only is the artist thankful for the support of the group, but above all for the dialogue between male and female expression that the group continued. The action of Femen in this context was perceived as an action of great symbolism.

For Pavlensky, criminal prosecution does not mark an end to his action. The prosecution is much more of a consequence, an opportunity for a self-disclosure of the mechanisms of power. In his second and third actions, **Carcass** (covering his naked body in barbed wire on Red Square) and *Fixation* (nailing his scrotum to Red Square) in 2013, he, his bare body, and his action were concealed by the policemen deploying a blanket—the blanket thus becoming a symbol of censorship.

Pavlensky has never tried to pursue an ideal goal or thought about a "better" Russia with his actions, stating that the ideal world might only wait for us in "heaven," if there is one. He does not see himself as an idealist, nor an activist. As an artist, he is doing political art that functions within the apparatus of power, forcing the power to reveal itself. Instead of "working" himself, he forces the apparatus of power to "work," by setting prosecutors, psychologists, judges, policemen, and other parties in motion. All these pieces of governmental power are thus "working" in the realm of political art.

In most of his actions, Pavlensky is alone, which is a strong artistic choice. "Everything I say is subjective, I say it from my own perspective!"[38] In his art, Pavlensky addresses the "trauma of the small person in the prison of everyday life."[39] For ***Fixation***, the artist had nailed his scrotum to Red Square in November 2013, referencing, already for the second time, practices of prisoners deprived of their human dignity: sewing up his mouth, because nobody is listening and one has to shut up, or nailing his scrotum to the floor as a symbol of the last "thing" that one has power and will upon, when the authorities have taken everything from an individual.

The action ***Freedom*** marks an exception to the solitary canon of the artist. On February 23, 2014, the Defender of the Fatherland Day, Pavlensky organized an action in St. Petersburg in support of Ukraine. His action required more participants, as it was conceived as a re-enactment of Maidan, a movement of thousands and millions of people. Of course, the date played an instrumental role, as the discussion about the realm and the territory of fatherland was central to this action.

Although this action was created in solidarity with a political and activist movement, Pavlensky does not consider himself an activist or "artivist." He even states that he was "always an artist, never an actionist."[40] The artist wants to strictly distance himself from the "brand" or "fashion" of activism. He is convinced that this brand is harming the art world, as it creates half-art and half-activism and ultimately "bad" art and "bad" activism, justifying mediocre practices under the moral sheet of "humanism." Ethics then play the role of justifying or covering up poorly executed aesthetics and vice versa. If an artist is creating a formally underwhelming piece, yet can cover it up with great ideas and goals, or an activist group is not reaching any of its goals, yet has created striking visuals along the way, it leads to excuses under the overarching umbrella of "artivism."

According to Pavlensky, art and activism pursue very different goals and have different priorities. An activist wants to solve a concrete problem, to help a more or less concrete critical situation, and should primarily not be concerned with the questions of aesthetics. When activists start to think about images and exhibiting their work, they run the danger of compromising their primary goal. An artist, on the other hand, is concerned with questions of form and aesthetics, as art is about the visible or visualization of notions, ideas, mechanism, or problems; about introducing the visible into a larger discourse. The politics and the logic of good deeds and the politics and logic of art differ strongly from each other. In the end, "useful" art is always bad art.

Pavelnsky's statements are embedded in a larger current debate. His practice is often regarded as activist, and his roots in Viennese and Moscow Actionism, by people who write about him, who invite him, who exhibit his work. Are we as authors and art practitioners too rapid in judging, in tagging artists with our favorite buzz words, in classifying so their art becomes graspable and understandable within our own categories? Aren't we then ultimately instrumentalizing these artistic practices, making them fit into our own comfort zones and discourses? Pavelnsky makes it clear every time he speaks that what he is doing is political art, that he is an artist not an activist, not an actionist. Nevertheless, there are a multiplicity of definitions about what he is and is not, as there are many different definitions of what art, activism, actionism or "artivism" actually are. That is primarily where the difficulty of this debate resides: while some would consider the Situationist support of the 1968 student movement in Paris an excursion into activism, other would strongly argue that the Situationists are by no means activists, but instead the last "real" artists that more than anyone before and

after them, succeeded in bringing art and life together. In addition, one could, of course, argue that images and visual language (the color red for socialism and communism, red and black for anarchism, anarchist star, etc.) have always been used (propaganda) and commodified (Che Guevara t-shirts) by activist groups. Maybe it is because images and art in service of a (political) purpose have such a long tradition in Soviet Russia (Socialist Realism) that Pavlensky so harshly rejects this practice as necessarily "bad" art.

On October 19, 2014, Pavlensky sat on the wall of the Serbsky psychiatric center in Moscow and cut off part of his right earlobe with a large kitchen knife in his action. ***Segregation*** was clearly a protest against the return to restrictive and inhumane Soviet-era methods in psychiatry in Russia, as well as the general use of psychiatry for political goals. Furthermore, the artist directly referenced Vincent Van Gogh, whose cutting of his ear is to a great extend mystified, as it is not known how much of which ear exactly he has cut off in Arles in 1888. While referencing Michel Foucault and Guy Debord in his talks and his writing, the reference to Vincent Van Gogh remains the only deliberate art historical reference in Pavlensky's actions. The artist's work has been compared or contextualized in relation to many art historical references: supposedly having its roots in Vienna Actionism (related to self-harm) or Moscow Actionism (related to the Red Square, the public space in Russia, the image of the Red Square), to Voina, to David Wojnarowicz (*Seam*), to Chris Burden (again because of self-harm). The artist claims to not have used specific art historical references so as not to narrow his practice down to one category or one specific context, but to keep it open and ultimately speak about the "small person" and the political conditions in which our societies occur: to not propose a gesture out of an artistic context, but place a general gesture in an artistic context.

Psychiatry, as normativity and as an instrument of power is a recurring theme for Pavlensky, since he was examined both in Russia and France, with futile attempts to diagnose him. In the latest case in which he is involved, the website *pornopolitique*, where he revealed personal tapes of a sexual nature of the Paris mayoral candidate, Benjamin Griveaux, who has since resigned, which were sent to Pavlensky's partner Alexandra de Taddeo, psychiatry as an instrument again plays a substantial role, as the order was made to psychiatrically evaluate de Taddeo after her testimony.[41] Being pre-occupied with this subject of how the discourse and language of psychiatry has been used in the past and is used in our present, for a long time, Pavlensky refers to, for instance, times of slavery in the early US, when trying to escape from captivity was considered a disease, and the therapy proposed was the amputation of the slaves' toes. In a more recent case, Ulrike Meinhof's brain became an entity of great scientific interest and symbolic relevance. The brain of the core member of the R.A.F. (Rote Armee Fraktion), a leftist terrorist group in Germany and formerly a known, successful journalist, has been inspected multiple times for anomalies that could have led to her radicalization. Symbolically speaking, depriving the corpse of this woman of its brain and thus not burying the brain speaks of assertive state measures and control over the individual outlasting his or her death. As it is always easier to find a pathological diagnosis as an explanation for subversive behavior, science reveals itself as an apparatus of control as well. Science, like all spheres of human life and knowledge (art, philosophy), is in danger of being instrumentalized by the government as entities of control.

With ***Threat*** (2015) and ***Lightning*** (2017), the artist has succeeded at creating a diptych that would bridge his practice between the East and the West. Formally, the artist was interested in the idea of borderless symmetry, as he regards meaning and form as

inseparable. The two works set the mechanisms of power (police, legal entities) in motion; there was, however, a big difference in the public reaction to the two actions. While critics applauded the setting of the FSB (formerly KGB) building on fire in Moscow as formally precise and beautiful, since President Putin was formerly a KGB agent and it represented the heart of Putinist power, the same critics regarded the setting of the Banque de France at Place de la Bastille on fire in Paris as vulgar and prosaic. The action *Threat* was additionally conceived as a protest against the incarceration of the Ukrainian filmmaker and writer Oleg Sentsov from Crimea. Because Sentsov was at that time accused of terrorism by the FSB and sentenced to twenty years in prison, the artist stated that he wanted his action to be reclassified from vandalism to terrorism. In 2016, after spending seven months in prison, the artist was sentenced to pay 500,000 Rubles, which he did not pay, while he states that others (activists, for instance) are sentenced to around ten years for attacks on administrative buildings. "There are no real standards in law. The system is deciding what is profitable and what is not."[42] As the international arena was following the artist's case, his case was treated differently.

While Pavlensky is not interested in urbanism per se (in contrast to the Situationists), he understands his practice in the realm of the negotiation of territoriality in the public sphere, raising the question of to whom (society, state, corporations) the space in question belongs. The Banque de France building at Place de la Bastille is meanwhile a striking example of architecture as an historical demonstration of power. Place de la Bastille is symbolic for the resistance of the people against the tyranny of the royal regime, where the storming of the Bastille prison, where among others Marquis de Sade was imprisoned, and its destruction took place between July 1789 and July 1790 and marked the beginning of the French Revolution. In the 1920s, the Banque de France that was, according to the artist, officially supporting the upheaval of Paris with seven million Francs, while secretly sponsoring Versailles with 315 million Francs, decided to open a branch at the very Place de la Bastille, thus marking its territory, silently and without further ado. With his action, Pavlensky wanted to show this paradox and ultimately expose power's mockery of society. One year after his action in Paris, art entered into the realm of life, as members of the "Gilets Jaunes" movement lit up the Banque de France in Rouen on December 30, 2019. The deployment of the hegemonic apparatus of power happens everywhere; thus, one cannot see Pavlensky's practice as merely Russian. The artist also participated in the protest of the "Gilets Jaunes" after he was released from prison.

"Gratitude has entered like a poison into the heart of the crowned idiot!"[43] (Lautréamont). A common critique towards Pavlensky's actions in France, one that was also expressed by the judge in his latest trial, is that he does not show any appreciation for having been granted political refuge. The feeling of gratitude is once again an instrument of power, of subordination. When the artist was questioned about his intentions in France, he remained honest, stating that he would continue to do political art and explore its forms, possibilities, and borders. If the condition would have been to stop doing political art, to stop being an artist, he would have rejected the refuge.

On January 10, 2019, Pavlensky has dedicated his trial to Marquis de Sade, the writer who inspired the spleen of the Symbolists, the "conclusive" beauty of the Surrealists, the notion of sadism in sexual psychology, Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye*, the search for freedom and transgression that preceded the existentialists by 150 years and challenged them (Simone de Beauvoir, *Must We Burn Sade?*). According to the artist, de Sade is the greatest Frenchman in history, who revealed the real nature of power and the real nature of human beings,[44] and thus opposed the conception of humanists who

were convinced that the real nature of human kind is good and is only perverted by experiences and circumstances. Marquis de Sade showed that the real nature of humankind is both good and evil, tendentially more evil, and that morals are an artificial and often hypocritical construct. On that day, the public trial of Pavlensky should have been the first one in the morning; however, his interpreter refused to translate his dedication to de Sade, and his trial was postponed until a new interpreter could arrive. That's when the Marquis de Sade indirectly but quite ironically became responsible for revealing a case of an old gynecologist. The case that in turn was presented as the first one on that date was the case of a young woman who accused her gynecologist of sexual assault. The case was not resolved, as it was a "he said, she said" situation; however, due to presence of journalists, this case became public, and more women joined the case at a later stage, ultimately leading to the sentencing of the gynecologist.

Adorno argued that Marquis de Sade's writings were a logical consequence of Enlightenment and not its negation.[45] Recent occurrences have repeatedly confirmed the human nature as rather "evil": the case of Jeffrey Epstein (the underground corridors that were poured with concrete, the doors of the buildings that would only open from the inside in buildings on his Little St. James island); Anneke Lucas' story (who was raped and abused for five years between the age of six and eleven by a secret Belgo-European pedophile circle); the cases of pedophilia in Catholic convents.

These are exactly the preoccupations that lead to the construction of Pavlensky's banned website ***pornopolitique***, launched in early 2020, with articles on the abovementioned topics, as well as an article on Benjamin Griveaux, who the artist accused of hypocrisy, as the married man was sending videos of sexual content to the artist's partner Alexandra de Taddeo. The site was shut down, and Pavlensky is currently facing allegations regarding a different occurrence—a knife stabbing on December 31, 2019 in which the artist was apparently involved.[46] Griveaux wants the artist to face allegations for violation of privacy and the dissemination of private video material without consent. Pavlensky's lawyer for these cases is Juan Branco,[47] a young activist lawyer who has written an extensive book on Julian Assange. This political action has set in motion the mechanisms of power, surpassing the realm of art and approaching life as close as ever before in his oeuvre, adhering to the ideals of his Situationist examples.

Before one could decide whether to consider this action political art or not, one would have to ask Pavlensky himself. Any other decision would once again mean art theoretical assumptions and involuntary categorization. One has to let the action speak and give it time to reveal what it has set out to do. As cultural practitioners, I would like to see our role as one of collaborators, allies, and supporters in solidarity with the artists we care about and write about, not judges and classifiers. What one can observe is that this political action clearly resembles his previous actions in terms of meticulous orchestration, tying in other agents (Alexandra de Taddeo, Juan Branco, the authors of the articles for *pornopolitique*) and it setting the mechanisms of power to work towards self-revelation and self-sabotage (as Griveaux has resigned). Meanwhile, formally speaking, one can observe a strong shift between the current and the previous eight actions by Pavlensky. One will have to wait and see how his actions, his oeuvre will progress in the future to be able to fully understand what occurred in February 2020. Having followed Pavlensky's practice, one can expect the unexpected and him being a step ahead. We will be hearing from him soon.

Notes

1 Petr Pavlensky, interview with the author, November 30, 2019.

2 Petr Pavlensky, interview with the author, November 16, 2019.

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4
Free Culture: Post-Humanist Technologies and Algorithms as Alternatives to Techno-Capitalist Industrial Society

Vitalist Materialism—Life Mining
Laura Netz

Introduction

Vitalist Materialism—Life Mining is a concept that updates the humanistic bases of Marxism, dialectics, and Eurocentric discourse. What the concept of Vitalist Materialism (departing from Rosi Braidotti's posthumanist theories) raises is a re-enactment of Marxist aesthetics in a context of technological studies. This article aims to create a critical basis for the practical development on the expository level to reformulate the role of contemporary art and the current museum. Based on art and technology relations, the article focuses on practices beyond pure digital art, based on innovation and scientific evolutionary progress, and here the artistic-technological practice is put in the relational context of the posthuman, presenting Vitalist Materialism as a critical aesthetic and new geopolitics of media art.

Philosophical references

Vitalist Materialism emerged during the nineteenth century when vitalist theories of life were contrasted with mechanistic hypotheses regarding the nature of life. According to philosophers and biologists, Materialism understood life as inherent to organisms and a mechanical function that could be scientifically explained. Vitalism formed a cohesive view of the world as one living organism in which the property of life was present in all living things, but not inherent.

After repudiating atomism, Margaret Cavendish described a new theory of matter, Vitalist Materialism, according to which there are "three degrees of matter: two self-moving and one inanimate."[1] The different inherent motions of matter give rise to particular creatures and phenomena. Cavendish's development of Vitalist Materialism over time, between her first version (1653) and her last (1668), differed in the claim that parts of nature have free will, which was only transversally mentioned in her early presentations but became explicit in her later works. Similarly, Cavendish's theory of occasional causation was not fully worked out until her last texts.

More recently, studies of Vitalist Materialism by Jane Bennett use art and politics to analyze Spinoza's concept of vitality in the human and non-human. To this definition, Jane Bennett adheres Althusser's aleatory materialism and Latour's description of objects as expressive actants and the concept of agency in Actor-Network Theory. Jane Bennett also takes Heidegger's incalculability of the thing, Foucault's productive power, and works with the concept of extreme perception, originally in Bergson as a subtractive perception process. Jane Bennett also develops categories of Ian Hacking's philosophy of science, according to transcendental nominalism (also dynamic nominalism or dialectical realism). Nowadays, Jane Bennett is one of the New Materialism's leading thinkers, who argues that non-human (and particularly non-biological) matter is imbued with a liveliness that can exhibit distributed agency by forming assemblages of human and non-human actors. Bennett's "thing-power" exemplifies the ability of objects to manifest a lively kind of agency. She explains: "Thing-power gestures toward the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of aliveness independence, constituting the outside of our own experience."[2] Bennett also builds on the ideas of early twentieth-century critical vitalists, as well as the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, to bring together materiality, affect, and vitalism.

In the same direction, Pamela Richardson-Ngwenya's studies state: "The interactions and miscommunications involved between different vital agencies brought her to express the possibility of a way of communicating through more-than-human materialities."[3] Her vitalist geographical imagination is receptive and open to the liveliness of materialities and the significance of relational becomings. Following Pamela Richardson-Ngwenya, the perspective of Vitalist Materialism is aligned with geographical studies, introducing the references to use in a comparison between human actors and geographical entities, also reformulating geopolitics in a more inclusive media art discourse.

Another author who questions principles of vitalism is Alexander Wilson, who argues how new materialism's goal come to terms with the non-living origin of life. In this sense, Alexander Wilson puts forward the question of how to recognize how *dead materials* are always in some sense incipiently alive. According to Wilson: "This vitalist position is also known as a panpsychist neomaterialism, which emerges from the recently developed theory of consciousness as integrated information in Tononi."[4]

This consideration of *dead materials* in the chain of life's production is connected to media archaeology and reverse engineering consisting of the deconstruction of physical industrial processes in the assembly of technology. Both conform a methodology towards understanding materialism within an analyst perspective, which compiles an extensive philosophical explanation in the relationship between life, minerals, biology, nature, and technology. Following considerations of Vitalist Materialism about *dead materials*, discussion of minerals, mineralogy and extractivism bring to light how the Earth is a resource in the age of the Anthropocene, a standing reserve for extraction policies.

This posthumanist conception of matter produces a re-engagement with the material realities of everyday life and broadens towards geopolitical and socioeconomic structures. Vitalist Materialism implies a perspective of the ethics of life in a more holistic, non-mechanical approach, such as it happens in *organicism* and posthumanism. Vitalist Materialism also develops according to the concept of agential realism in Karen Barad.

Rosi Braidotti represents another position in Vitalist Materialism, which revises ideas from poststructuralist theory. Rather than Giorgio Agamben's bare life (*zoē*), Braidotti's re-reading of Spinoza and Deleuze and Guattari lead her to formulate a *zoē* that is the potentiality of all matter to form transversal connections or networks with all other matter. In *Homo Sacer* (1995), Agamben argues that: "The Western biopolitical distinction between political and non-political life (what he calls *bios* and *zoē*, respectively) can be traced to antiquity."[5] It is the connection of sovereign power to biopower that distinguishes for Agamben a crucial cut between beings with no legal status, humans included, and beings with the privilege of legal rights. So, Braidotti revises critical vitalism and biopolitics alike to argue that posthuman subjectivity is a *zoē* with an immanent potential for self-assembly along transversals, or the tendency of all living matter to form associations with other material systems. Posthuman subjectivity, therefore, raises important ethical questions, since it is neither bound to the individual subject nor singularly human. Moreover, this research takes the critical point of view against biogenetic capitalism, which transforms life into an economic resource to control under data gathering policies.

To finish this introduction to Vitalist Materialism**,** Salomé Voegelin's words about Sonic Materialism should be highlighted. According to Voegelin: "Sonic Materialism joins a current debate on new materialism by developing via sound and listening the idea of materialism as a transformation that reconsiders an anthropocentric world-

view without bestowing objects with mythical self-determination, and that accounts for the object's autonomous agency rather than placing it in a mathematical frame."[6] Voegelin suggests that: "While a *masculine new materialism* insists on the absence of the human to get to the unthoughtful, and thus ultimately proposes the end of philosophy in its mathematical probability, a *sonic-feminine new materialism* brings us through the creative performance of matter and language to the seemingly unthinkable, to perform it not in words but on the body and on things: doing, digging, and gardening as a re-vocalization and re-physicalization of theory through its inter-being with things."[7]

A Curatorial Proposal

Entering an age of mass extinction brought on by industrial production excesses and consumption, technological exploitation and obsolescence become transformative situations of the human, social, and natural systems. Economically and ecologically, these processes face disruption on one hand, but a disaster on the other. If planned obsolescence makes new devices appear on the market, the same disruptive economy implies a massive environmental catastrophe, which involves transforming the landscape, as technology and innovation are directly connected to resources' exploitation and waste.

However, DIY artists, hackers, makers, and critical agents reflect on technology's role in reshaping the world's economic and ecologic horizons. Following Félix Guattari's *Three Ecologies,* an integral force and a critical proposal for promoting alternatives to the techno-capitalist industrial society is formed by: "...social ecology, mental ecology and environmental ecology."[8] Therefore, art is considered an alternative model, with the transformation of the industrial process, which is also happening in individual entrepreneurs. However, in this same context of late capitalism (or techno-capitalism), any alternative practice is also subsumed in the economic system, as Maurizio Lazzarato expresses through concepts of precariousness, intellectual work, immaterial labor, and new subjectivities, which are totally under the influence of cybernetics and computer control. There is almost no anti-capitalist approach because this requires the structural organization of political and economic systems founded on networks, servers, and other technological deployments. Technology has been created under a scrupulous dependence on the scientific objectifying of hyper-structures (technoscientific laboratories, for instance), which result in being extremely hard to disbelieve, doubt, and dissent, leaving the confronters impressed, without power and resources to contest and dispute their authority, as Bruno Latour details in his explanation about counter-laboratories. According to Latour: "The dissenters cannot do less than the authors. They have to gather more forces in order to untie what attaches the spokesmen and their claims. This is why all laboratories are counter-laboratories just as all technical articles are counter-articles. So the dissenters do not simply have to get a laboratory; they have to get a better laboratory."[9]

Besides, in Jonathan Kemp's words, this makes alternatives subsumed to capital. Nevertheless, there is still an *in potentia* within capital to cultivate rival forms of production based around what is called, in Kemp's words, "*commons-based peer production* (or *social production*)."[10] This is based in hacking and open-source methodologies, but their arguments consistently fail to surmount the structural similarities with late capitalism. The labor invested in producing free software is given publicly. Then, since the efforts and end-products of cooperation and collaborative production can be readily appropriated and framed by capital, and it is again an expression of a new form of labor rather than a rival to capital itself, therefore any rival form ultimately operates in a manner subsumed under capital's organizational form.

Although subsuming processes in late capitalism, Benkler states: "Individuals are using their newly expanded practical freedom to act and cooperate with others in ways that improve the practiced experience of democracy, justice, and the development of a critical culture and community."[11] Collaboration and self-organization are shared across both business and free software/open hardware. In this regard, the collaborative practices at the intersection between art, science, and technology and making use of hacking and DIY methodologies are set to criticize the phenomena of planned obsolescence produced by ICT companies and the dynamics of desire towards technological devices by consumers.

This article is contextualized along with theories and aesthetics that follow recent discussions concerning cultural politics of the environment, ecological contexts of contemporary media, and debates concerning the Anthropocene. Furthermore, Nathan Ensmenger's *An Environmental History of Computing* understands "how computing intersects with the environment, from the mining of minerals essential to the construction of digital devices, to the massive amounts of water and energy used to generate virtual commodities, to the pollution associated with the production and disposal of electronics."[12]

The primary focus and interests of this research rely on ecological transition, geopolitics, the posthuman, the human-nature dichotomy, biodiversity, cultural diversity, self-sufficiency, race and gender, and intersections between ecology, feminism, and practices that challenge ways of engaging the world of humans and non-humans. Likewise, the discourse is similar to curatorial projects developed in the framework of Anthropocene theory about how technology is affecting the environment. This theoretical reference is core to this research, which is continually questioning the relationship between technology and nature.

Moreover, the interest in mineral materials fits with media archaeology theory by Jussi Parikka, Benjamin Gaulon's project *Recyclism*, as well as the collaborative practices at the intersection between art hack practice and DIY production.

Vitalist Materialism—Life Mining analyzes natural resources exploitation, is interested in the Anthropocene, and denounces necropolitics from the First World to the ex-colonies. Knowing that all ICT needs minerals to be created, the dependence of any piece of hardware computing on the source of natural wealth that are minerals is evident. Currently, computers need rare minerals and minerals. An investigation into the production channels of these technologies reveals that most of the minerals come from ex-colony countries that have been mistreated by colonialist policies. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is currently suffering from post-national politics based on imperialist capitalism that is intensely technological, and resulting from these policies are child exploitation, the emergence of guerrillas who control these mines, and the displacement of people, with the consequent famine and unhygienic living conditions. In Congo, red mines are not regulated by the government of Congo. On the contrary, green mines are those that are subjected to government controls and issue certificates of authentication to EU and US corporations. Curiously, most minerals arriving in the First World have not been issued a certificate.

For example, for years, Apple sourced cobalt and tantalum—which are used to power lithium-ion batteries—from Congo. Only after extensive reports of child labor, worker injuries, and worker deaths did Apple stop sourcing these materials from small mines in Congo specifically. Following this example, here I use a quote from Marx, who

argued that: "...commodities do not derive their value from their use. That is because by definition, they are not necessary for basic survival. Instead, they derive value from the invisible labor that goes into making them."[13] Following with the same discussion, David Michaud, a mining consultant, states that: "The iPhone 6 was found to contain 0.014g of gold, 0.66g (0.5%) of tin and 0.025g of tantalum. There were no precious metals detected in any larger quantities, maybe a dollar or two."[14]

Furthermore, a lot of the precious stuff is difficult to get and mined in places with little to no regulation and dangerous, even deadly conditions. The iPhone is .02 percent tungsten, for instance, which is commonly mined in Congo and used in vibrators and on screens' electrodes. Cobalt, a crucial part of the batteries, is mined in Congo, too. Gold is the most valuable metal inside the device. However, in 2010, a financial reform bill passed in the US, aimed at discouraging companies from using conflict minerals from Congo. Brian Merchant adds: "Apple uses dozens of third-party suppliers to produce components found in devices like the iPhone, and all of those use their third-party suppliers to provide yet more parts and raw materials. (…) However, this system means most of our electronics begin with thousands of miners working in often brutal conditions on nearly every continent to dredge up the raw elements that make its components possible."[15]

This connects with Jussi Parikka's media archaeology theory. This high-dependence of the computational on minerals transforms the geographical condition into a geological dimension. According to Parikka: "The interest of the materials lies in the so-called materialization of the media, where geophysical elements express the scarcity of resources, the technological regimes, the geopolitics of labor, the planetary excavations, and the aftereffects of electronic waste."[16] Moreover, media archaeology proposes a new understanding of linear history, ensuring that the category of deep time is affecting media archaeology devices. According to Parikka, the materiality of progress is not linear as rationalism proposes, but a link between geological eras, understanding how most of the minerals and geological resources are the result of long-time processes. *Vitalist Materialism—Life Mining* offers a critical position in terms of planned obsolescence in a techno-capitalist system and its unsustainable model of innovation. Allying with Technological Sovereignty and the Degrowth Movement, this research proposes an ethics of autonomy in regard to the logic of late capitalism.

According to Technological Sovereignty (TS): "Autonomous servers, decentralized networks, encryption, peer-to-peer networks, alternative virtual currencies, the sharing of knowledge, meeting places, and cooperative work constitute a wide range of initiatives already underway towards Technological Sovereignty."[17]

So, if the Technological Sovereignty movement proposes an ethical model for the ICT infrastructures' use, the materialist part of the project is defended through an alliance with the Degrowth Movement. The latter proposes: "an autonomous perspective towards capitalism and the globalized world, through *artivism*, the care revolution, and climate justice based in the environmental movement and radical ecological democracy, proposing practices of food sovereignty."[18] Besides, degrowth practices apply the principles of the free software movement and policies of the commons, towards a solidarity economy and a universal basic income.

For example, according to Graham-McLay, we can see these as an influence in New Zealand's policies: "The center-left government of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern sets its priorities in a budget that is moving away from more traditional bottom-line meas-

ures like productivity and economic growth and instead focusing on goals like community and cultural connection and equity in well-being across generations."[19]

Artists' Proposals

Through this research, many current environmental issues have been highlighted, which are a result of technological production. Therefore, e-waste and planned obsolescence appear to be one actor more in the IT chain production. Artists are considering working with these materials through "the creative practices of recycling and its possible applications in different productive fields—including art, of course—but also product and fashion design, architecture, object-data integration practices in the Internet of Things, and augmented realities."[20]

So, how do artists and curators work and address all these matters? How do creative practices denounce the exploitation of natural resources?

This research describes different artists and collaborators developing environmental and sustainable media art practices related to mining, DIY, and hacking OS/OH. For example, Tin Dozic's *Goldrush* focuses on the presence of gold in personal computers and suggests "an alchemical activity—the extraction of this valuable metal from electronic waste that was once also a status symbol. Computer parts are dissolved, and the gold is purified by aqua regia, resembling an alchemist's process as old as the eighth century."[21]

Along the same lines, BJ Nilsen's work *UGOL* is "part of a more massive project called ORE, an art project revolving around mining and its impact on society and cultural relevance. *UGOL* touches upon the logistical side of coal, in this case where coal travels by train from the Kuznetsk Basin in southwestern Siberia via Murmansk and from there reloaded and shipped out internationally."[22]

Alejandra Pérez Núñez, with the artwork *Antarctica 1961-1996*, presents a sound installation initially commissioned by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Rome (MACRO) for the exhibition *Otros Sonidos, Otros Paisajes*. The work is described as a contribution "to the displacement of dominant forms of human 'truth' in which the imperceptibility of the non-human remains inaccessible and insignificant. Moreover, the artist locates the mineral resources in Antarctica on a map as a tool to point out where those are. Due to factors of extreme climate change, the scientific explorations in the South Pole area are becoming more interested in the emergence of the Rocky Mountains, which will be used shortly as extraction sites for the benefit of post-technological capitalism."[23]

There are some other great examples of resource exploitation related to colonialist narratives. For example, *This is Congo*, a film by photographer and director Daniel McCabe, who states: "The film delves into the illegal mineral trade and cyclical violence marring the Democratic Republic of Congo. The film begins in 2012, as a rebellion mounts in the North Kivu region and closely follows the rise, tumult, and fall of the conflict and its direct effects on the nation and its inhabitant over a three-year journey."[24]

Moreover, Tatjana Gorbachewskaja and Katya Larina's work *Nikel Materiality* is about: "Nikel through the prism of the unique material substances that it has created. The story of Nikel is that of a place that transformed the natural environment, seemingly no longer dependent on its geographical, geological, or atmospheric attachments to the Earth. The materiality of the artificial organism of the city started to interact directly with the natural conditions of the unique Arctic climate and ecosystem, forcing Nikel's artificial materiality to adapt to survive."[25]
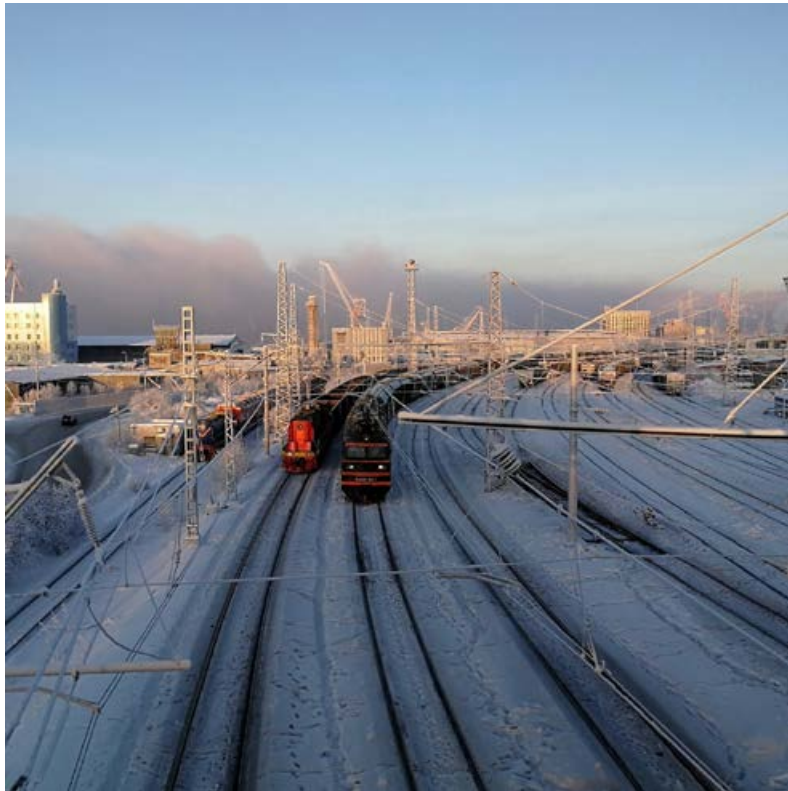
BJ Nilsen, *Ugol,* 2019. Courtesy of the artist.

Another artist denouncing abusive practices of exploitation in late capitalism, rooted in colonialism, is Dani Ploeger. According to him, his work "*Hi-Tech Wound* (2015) results from a collaboration with a group of scientists and cultural theorists with whom the artist participated in an e-waste recycling job on a dump site in Lagos, Nigeria. Afterwards, he suffered a wound to his arm. It got infected: electronic waste performed on the artist's body."[26]

Catherine Hyland, the author of *Lithium Mining | Atacama Desert*, states that "[She] traveled to the salt flats of the Atacama Desert in Chile to photograph the environmentally contentious production of lithium—the metal used to power everything from smartphones to Teslas. Chile is the only country in the world where water resources and management are entirely privatized, and SQM, the lithium company photographed by Hyland in her series, currently owns the water rights for the region. Companies like SQM are increasingly at the center of environmental debates around water, accused of exploiting the natural resource in regions that are in drought or prone to water scarcity. To create lithium, they are drying out rivers, streams, and wetlands."[27] This work is an astounding photographic documentary about non-human mineral elements and how the policies of extraction are jeopardizing the environment, being correlated to anthropocentric and Western thought that establishes barriers between the human and non-human. From a post-anthropocentric and posthuman perspective, inclusivity and ethics must reinforce egalitarian practices in between species, but the concept must be broadened to mineral and soil elements, not just the non-human understood as animals and plants. Deforestation and mining are active agents in the forest and landscape that determine life and our biodiversity. Focusing on the issue of mining, deforestation, and land-endangering practices, posthumanism must address the exploitative relations of late capitalism still benefiting from abusive and invasive colonialist policies.
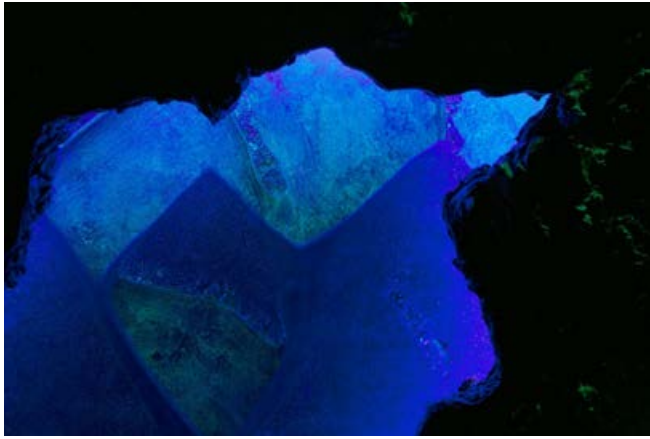
Greg Orrom Swan, *Measure of Minerality,* 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

Matterlurgy by Radiophony 29 is a site-specific performance that was presented on an abandoned copper mine, Klovakärrin kaivos in Finland. According to the authors, the work combines "performance, radio broadcast, installation, and sound to foreground the social, political, and material genealogies of copper and the radio. This iteration was thirty minutes in duration and pivoted around different areas of the mine. The performance included the sonification of rocks, digital text, copper objects, spoken word, sounds from the environment, and live broadcast."[28]

Another example, denouncing capitalism is the work by The Otolith Group, *Anathema* (2011). It is described as "a contemporary Fantasia on the notion of the network and its inherent instability, where the organic networks of human relations and the crystalline lattices of silicon-based technologies intertwine and often tangle. Anathema re-imagines the microscopic behavior of liquid crystals undergoing turbulence as a sentient entity that possesses the fingertips and the eyes enthralled by the LCD touch-screens of communicative capitalism. Anathema can be understood as an object-oriented video that isolates and recombines the magical gestures of dream factory capitalism."[29]

Within the same aesthetics, Semiconductor's work *Crystallised* is defined as "a series of digital mineral crystal animations generated and animated by sound recordings of ice crystals. Each structure takes on a different form, growing and evolving in exquisite detail. Mineral crystals reveal atomic structures in their rawest form and provide a window into the make-up of the physical world, where simple shapes come together to create intricate and complex formations. With this series of works, Semiconductor draws a parallel between these basic molecular structures and the building blocks of the digital world, which has become the prism through which we increasingly experience reality. The animations suggest pre-ordained patterns and order that appear to underlie everything and lead us to question our experiences of the very fabric of our world."[30]

In the same direction, working with the digital, Greg Orrom Swan presents *A Measure of Minerality* (2018). The artist describes it as follows: "In this cave-like installation a combination of atomized particles of phosphate rock, fertilizer, and mammal bone mineral rotate and flow past one another perpetually. Patterns form and reform, molding, a reference to the cycles we are part of, woven with and about."[31]

Also working with minerals is the artwork by Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen. *H / AlCuTaAu* (2014), which is introduced by the artists as "precious metals and stones which were mined out of technological objects and transformed back into mineral

form. The artificial ore was constructed out of gold (Au), copper (Cu), tantalum (Ta), aluminum (Al) and whetstone; all taken from tools, machinery and computers that were sourced from a recently bankrupt factory."[32]

Remarkably similar, is the work by The Crystal World Open Laboratory, at CTM - Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien (2012), during Transmediale, presented Martin Howse, Jonathan Kemp and Ryan Jordan experiments, with Ralf Baecker showing his installation, *Irrational Computing*. During the Lab, "Participants and team undertake the recovery of rare and precious metals from a variety of electronic junk. In a further room, Baecker's irrational computers consisted of five interlinked modules that use the different electrical and mechanical particularities and characteristics of crystals and minerals and, through their networking, form a kind of primitive macroscopic signal processor."[33]

Moreover, this research refers to diverse curatorial practices and exhibitions. Another contemporary attempt to exhibit practices related to *Vitalist Materialism –Life Mining* is the curatorial project The Metallurgical Ouroboros (2018), with Stephen Cornford, Caroline Jane Harris, Samantha Lee, Victor Seaward and Rustan Söderling. The curatorial text explains: "The materiality of technology is bio/geo-logical and nature is fully intertwined in processes of both its production and consumption. The nature of transmutation sees the technological artifact becoming the philosopher's stone - the archetypal symbol of alchemy - turning base metals and minerals into a new gold. [...] This process has created a (un)natural Ouroboros created by entangled copper network cables, a modern-day life cycle to be melted down in the cultural foundry."[34]

Finally, the article would like to mention the exhibition curated by this same author *Sounding DIY III. Vitalist Materialism*. Part of a curatorial residency at HOP Projects, Folkestone (England), the exhibition presented the works of the artists Greg Orrom Swan (video); Erin Sexton (video); Claude Heiland-Allen (projection); Stephen Cornford (print); BJ Nilsen (audio) and xname (sculptures). As written in the curatorial text: "The exhibition relies on the so-called DIY and handmade culture that currently sets as an exponent of the free culture and open source. The exhibition focuses on the practice of hacker and maker at the intersection of art, science and technology, but inspired by sound art and music production. The development of these artworks and hacked prototypes subvert the inertia of the capitalist system. In this shift of production logic, the sphere of techno-capitalism is presented as an unsustainable and abusive threat."[35]
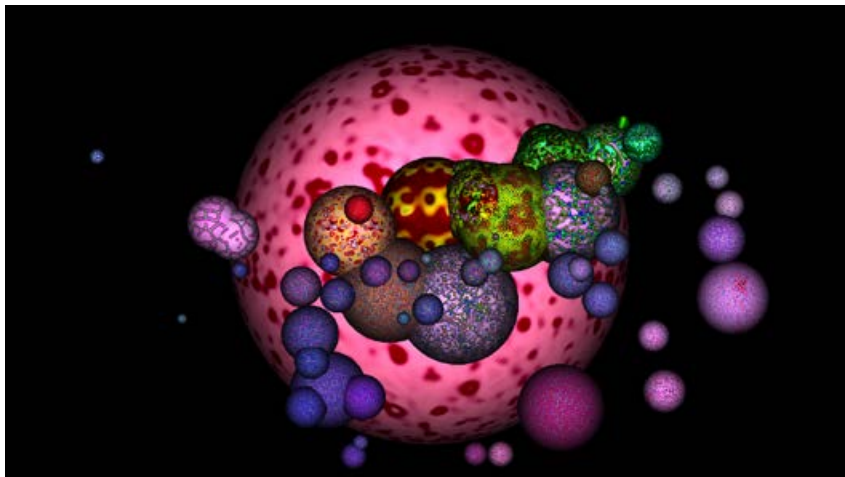
Claude Heiland-Allen, *rdex*, 2008-2019. Courtesy of the artist.

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Laura Netz (b. Barcelona, 1982) is a curator, artist, and researcher. She is currently an MPhil student at CRiSAP – UAL, where she studies the new tendencies in curatorial practices in sonic arts. In 2006, she graduated with a degree in art history (University of Barcelona). Subsequently, she obtained a Master in Cultural Practices and New Media Art (University Ramon Llull). Netz attended the curating course at Central Saint Martins, UAL. In 2011, attended the professional course on New Media Curating led by Beryl Graham (University of Sunderland). As a curator, she has taken part in many international events such as exhibitions, workshops, conferences, publications, and concerts in Spain, Portugal, UK, Mexico, Colombia, Canada, Serbia, Russia, Hong Kong, the U.S., and Brazil. Among the collaborations, she has developed projects with various institutions such as Fonoteca Nacional de Mexico, MACBA Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona, CCCB Centre of Contemporary Culture Barcelona, MOTA Museum of Transitory Art, and ISEA International Symposium of Electronic Arts. She has worked with the following new media festivals: ArtFutura, MUTEK, and Alphaville. She collaborates with artists such as Locus Sonus, Scanner, Roy Ascott, Konrad Becker, Fran Illich, Milo Taylor, and Arcangelo Constantini, among much more.

Algorithmic Extremes in *Terram in Aspectu*
Park C. Myers

> *"It is this opening of the situation beyond codified effects that I consider to be so very necessary in an age of machine learning outputs. One could be doubtful of the claims of a human guarantor of ethics, and of the bias and discrimination that could be excised from the algorithm, for example, and begin instead from the unspecified risks emerging between the algorithm and the data corpus from which it learns."*
> – Louise Amoore, "Doubt and the Algorithm: On the Partial Accounts of Machine Learning"

The scattershot follow-through of an art adequate to the speculative time structure of the present and concomitant technoscience was written in the interstices of its vanguard's theories and projects.[1] While there has been an adept survey in critical and philosophical enclaves regarding the synthesis of neoliberalism, technology, global economy, and infrastructure—broadly speaking—recent contemporary art and exhibitions are extremely incongruent with the co-constitutive reality of the algorithmic epoch. Both institutionally and curatorially, this is not only a matter of insufficient exhibition methodology; it also concerns the fractured epistemology wherein anthropocentrism remains at the forefront. As an anecdotal aside, let us look at a product presentation by SpaceX and Tesla CEO, extraplanetary colonialist, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) alarmist Elon Musk. In the unveiling of the Cybertruck prototype, Musk mutters two phrases evincing his frustration with the collusion between technology and matter. During the unveiling, Musk asks a colleague to throw an object at the armored, unbreakable glass window of the intelligent vehicle. At first throw, the window breaks. Musk, surprised: "Oh my fucking God." A second throw results in another break in the window, and later Musk weighs in, "We'll fix it in post."[2] The truth of the technology was trusted and exhibited with audacity. The origin of that truth was at first unquestioned, and when tested, the human-centered logic and expectation shattered. He exposes a behavioral misstep of anthropocentric futility, yet "fix it in post" hints elsewhere.[3] Liliana Farber's *Terram in Aspectu* concerns geopolitics, veracity, and the structure of thought in the age of the algorithm. From there, what bearing does this line of inquiry have on exhibition and discursive methodologies wherein public engagement is of specific concern?

Liliana Farber's work *Terram in Aspectu* provides a thought experiment in how truthfulness is determined in the extreme state of the post-truth era.[4] Developed and produced through machine learning, *Terram in Aspectu* is a series of Google Earth screenshot images of various islands purported to exist in extreme locales. For this experiment contemporary art should be understood as a set of complex adaptive systems that evolve at the extremes of order and chaos. Complex systems theory is extensive and diverse, though here I will refer to James Crutchfield's swift explanation, "The world economy, financial markets, air transportation, pandemic disease spread, climate change, and insect-driven deforestation are examples of truly complex systems: They consist of multiple components, each component active in different domains and structured in its own right, interconnected in ways that lead to emergent collective
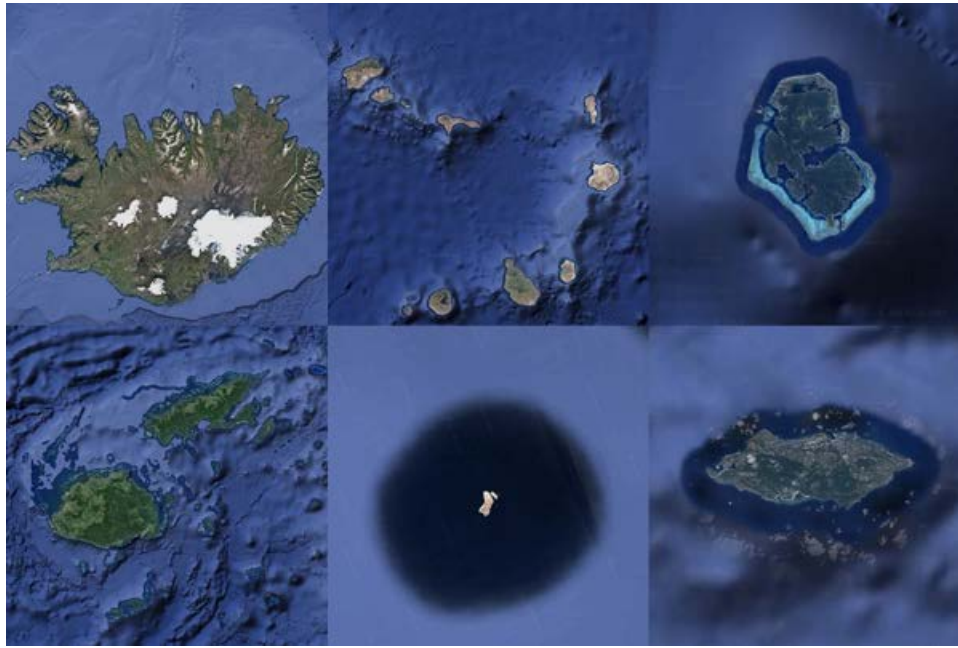
Liliana Farber, *Array of Google Earth Screen Captures*, 2020. Courtesy of the Artist.

behaviors and spontaneous architectural re-organization."[5] Second, this thought experiment requires recognizing what advances in AI—and more specifically, machine learning—add to this complex assemblage.[6] Farber's work is also a case study of the impact of machine learning on geopolitics, veracity, and reason in the algorithmic age. I postulate, though do not resolve, how to practically involve uncertainty in curatorial practice and specifically exhibition contextualization and stewardship. This consideration of uncertainty, potentially understood as an extreme state (far from equilibrium), may be a way to develop a different type of agency in an age of future extremes.

Farber's algorithmically produced work exemplifies a shift in critical thinking, pointing out that the means in which knowledge, intention, and expectation in exhibitions is communicated and ascertained follows a rubric that prioritizes only a pointedly human subjectivity and is no longer sufficient. The linearity of this assumptive and prescribed interpretive thinking seems to be increasingly incongruent with the complex state of globally networked social and political relations.[7] This is augmented by machine learning and big data. My insistence on thinking with uncertainty does not outweigh or diminish individual identities, individual levels of interest or engagement, or influence by proxy in the experience of any given exhibition. Rather it is to examine the paradox of progressive thought and the limitations imposed on thinking mediated by the connectivity of the algorithmic age.[8]

Recently, I have observed that the inherent means of determining truth in exhibitions—in which traditional deductive and inductive logic is the basis of interpretation—has not met the expectations of certain audiences, participants, viewers, and contributors. When faced with uncertainty, there is a retreat to basic logic as a means of protecting a predetermined or assumed truth. Further, by not recognizing the fallibility of human thought, agents in the field of contemporary art remain unchallenged. Taking a cue from machine learning, given its pervasiveness, inextricability from social behavior, and pace of evolution, we can derive some novel strategies for how truth is conceptualized.

Liliana Farber, *Array of Google Earth Traced Landmasses*, 2020. Courtesy of the Artist.

What follows is a brief, technical breakdown of machine learning, an assessment of the geopolitical issues that *Terram in Aspectu* underscores, an outline of a speculative form of reason and thought in the age of machine learning, and concludes with a curatorial proposition that advances uncertainty in the terms developed throughout.

Machine Learning and Terram in Aspectu

Terram in Aspectu raises questions that involve an extreme form of colonialism that is inherent to big data and cartographic facticity.[9] This work elucidates the relatively simple means by which machine learning algorithms can be manipulated to produce inaccurate outcomes—for example land masses that do not physically exist but are rendered as real in the visual-informational context of Google Earth. Through the presentation of the errors and inbuilt biases of machine learning arise seismic shifts regarding how geographic knowledge is produced, distributed, and retained.

It is no surprise that great alarm surrounds AI—from science fiction origins to Silicon Valley moguls and online conspiracy communities. Something irreversible has occurred that has catapulted these imaginaries into reality. That is, the actual integration and successful application of machine learning and a subset of this—what Farber's work is created with—deep learning. Machine learning has gained the most traction and notoriety in the areas of facial recognition and human image synthesis under the heading *computer vision*. This is paralleled in avionics, self-driving passenger vehicles, drones, and de facto police and military surveillance. These technologies are without question coming on the heels of what many call the contemporary re-establishment of the post-truth era.[10] There are plentiful accounts of fear, speculation, and outright malice regarding AI to be found elsewhere. Suffice to say that as much as the errors within the development of automated thinking have caused crimes against humanity, there are as many humans who see this technology as a means to harm others and consider that one of its successes. So, rather than recapitulate long-standing—albeit renewed with urgency due to machine learning—bastions of proponents and alarmists, my point heeds these advances as signposts for political and methodological forks in curatorial practice and critical thinking.

Conditional Generative Adversarial Networks

The algorithmic architecture Farber has used is a deep learning model called a Conditional Generative Adversarial Network (cGAN). One main goal for cGANs in image-to-image translation is to "make the output indistinguishable from reality."[11] Deep learning is an algorithmic network in which patterns are extracted from data sets in order to acquire knowledge. This network is built of neural nets that are purportedly based on and mimic the neural structure and activity of the human brain. From the knowledge acquired, the computational machine then makes future decisions automatically or independent of the programmer. Deep learning contains increased, hidden layers of neurons and is hierarchical in the sense that the machine learns from a series of successive outputs. cGANs are one form of deep learning algorithmic architecture. "It mimics the back-and-forth between a picture forger and an art detective who repeatedly try to outwit one another. Both networks are trained on the same data set. The first one, known as the generator, is charged with producing artificial outputs, such as photos or handwriting, that are as realistic as possible. The second, known as the discriminator, compares these with genuine images from the original data set and tries to determine which are real and which are fake. On the basis of those results, the generator adjusts its parameters for creating new images. And so it goes, until the discriminator can no longer tell what's genuine and what's bogus."[12] Key to this design is the process's inherent randomness and the fact that it is unsupervised. This means that it labels data through autonomous learning beyond a human annotator, and noise and randomness are integrated to assist in the network's generative function.[13][14]

Randomness and Complexity

So as not to conflate the terms randomness and uncertainty, randomness should be defined technically and conceptually. Simply put, randomness in machine learning is a feature of the algorithmic architecture that makes the network learn more adeptly by introducing variations to a dataset. If—in basic computation—inputs match the exact (completely predictable) known output (1+1=2), then no new information is generated.
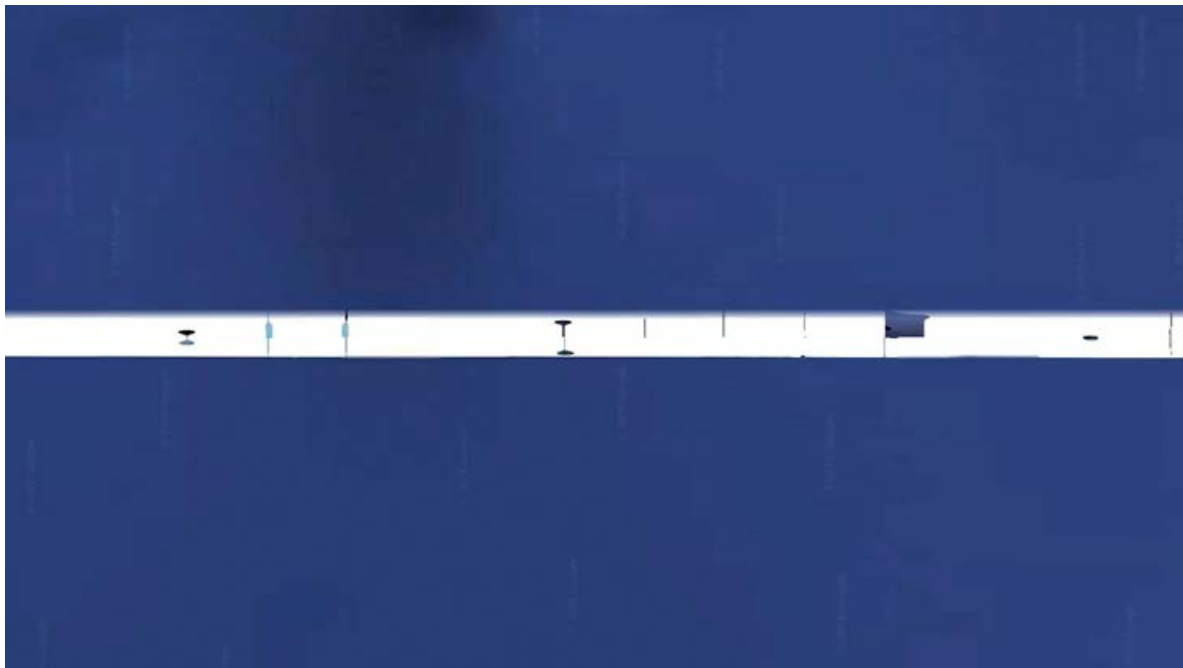
Liliana Farber, *0.0*, 2019. Courtesy of the Artist.

Conceptually, we can examine how algorithmic randomness reflects other complex systems. Following James Crutchfield, novel or generative activity and interaction occurs at the interplay between order and randomness. Put differently, there is a spectrum in between perfect predictability and perfect unpredictability. At one end nothing is new, and at the other end completely incoherent and thus equally non-generative. Machine learning algorithms generate new, increasingly complex outputs due to the fact that network architecture is built so that structure arises at a state between order and randomness. In Crutchfield's words, "We now know that complexity arises in a middle ground—often at the order-disorder border. Natural [and computational] systems that evolve with and learn from interaction with their immediate environment exhibit both structural order and dynamical chaos. Order is the foundation of communication between elements at any level of organization, whether that refers to a population of neurons, bees or humans [...] Chaos, as we now understand it, is the dynamical mechanism by which nature develops constrained and useful randomness. From it follow diversity and the ability to anticipate the uncertain future."[15] I am referring to uncertainty to suggest that inculcating uncertainty in critical thought is to embrace the randomness out of which complexity arises.

> *"On the gigantic liner of Spatial Big Data analytics sailing in either right or wrong directions, heading ourselves towards benefits and value lies in the reliability of the chart."*
> – Wenzhong Shi et al., "Challenges and Prospects of Uncertainties in Spatial Big Data Analytics"

Spatial Big Data and Ground Truths

The generated images in *Terram in Aspectu* may be indistinguishable from reality to a certain degree of human-perceptual success. Yet, not only are the images themselves machine-generated, they are trained on a dataset that may not be based in fact, but rather is aggregated from spatial big datasets collected through a complex system of human and non-human sources. These training datasets are referred to as the "ground truths." The terms are elusive in both their implication of "truth" as an ethical (and potentially juridical) consensus, and "ground" as though there is a physical ground in which this truth can be proven. Louise Amoore offers a detail of these terms, "In fact, though, the mode of truth-telling of contemporary algorithms pertains to the 'ground truth': a labelled set of training data from which the algorithm generates its model of the world."[16] In *Terram in Aspectu*, Farber uses Google Earth screenshots as the ground truths, and outlines of phantom islands as inputs so that the algorithm generates images of non-existent islands that appear truthful in the visual context of or appearance of a Google Earth screenshot. Phantom islands are in Farber's words, "bodies of land that appeared, sometimes for centuries, in maps, but were proven not to exist."[17] What is to be done, as with Google Earth, when the ground truth is not trustworthy in the first place? The scale of these datasets is so large and constantly undergoing transfer and re-distribution that they can never be contained. Further, the data and the algorithmic architecture are never true, at least on the basis of *true or false*. In algorithmic architecture, truth is based on the immediate acceptance of a dataset to be true regardless of its accuracy in real, spatial terms.[18] In the observation, collection, and application of spatial big data (geographic, geospatial, and geolocational information), especially in machine learning, uncertainty is of primary concern. Uncertainty and unpredictability are inherent to reality as well as algorithmic processes. This underlines my concentration on co-constitutive human and non-human cognition, or what Kath-

erine Hayles refers to as a "cognitive assemblage."[19] In this assemblage involving spatial big data, an interplay occurs between source data and its various applications. While multisource geographic datasets increase richer knowledge, there is also an increase in spurious and dubious results.[20]

In spatial big data collection veracity is impacted by the uncertain nature of how and through what means the data corpus is compiled. Generally, the veracity of data ranges from more accurate sources like healthcare monitoring (considered to be highly accurate) to sensor technology (least accurate and fraught with noise and discrepancy). Within this spectrum, there also are other sources: enterprise and social media. Within spatial big data, some researchers are advocating for not only accounting for uncertainty from the data extracted, but for uncertainty-based methods to their analytic process. In doing so, their aims are "to understand, control, and alleviate the ubiquitous uncertainties in the real world and each stage of knowledge extraction from [spatial big data], thereby assuring and improving the reliability and the value of resultant knowledge."[21] Driven by a need for more reliable data, nations, corporations, climatologists, and many other disciplines have looked to the potential of machine learning.

Geopolitics and Coloniality

Terram in Aspectu also underlines interrelated geopolitical concerns: first, that of the neoliberal, corporate, and state entities that maintain a stronghold over the means of processing power required for data input, extraction, and storage; second, that of the relations between governmentality and the resource ownership of territory (land, offshore, island, seafloor, extra-planetary.) James Bridle points out, "These technologies are tainted at the source by their very emergence within cultures of capitalism and the inherently racist logic of the nation state itself. They are too easily commandeered and redeployed by those with access to more network nodes, to greater carrying capacity, bandwidth, processing power and data storage—in short, by those with access to capital."[22] Along these lines, if cartographic data remains in the control of financially dominant entities, then borders, planetary assets, and populations are directly and indirectly impacted without overt or immediate material proof. This is a hidden data colonialism that is in the cloud and underground.

The machine learning process that produced *Terram in Aspectu* is unsupervised in that it automatically recognizes patterns and creates labels from that data to generate new images. Google Earth and Google Maps—in part due to their usefulness—are taken as factual renderings of our planet. Truth here is proved by functionality: I input an address into Google Maps and when I arrive at the intended location have built trust. This trust is both affective and informational. Though *Terram in Aspectu* uses and manipulates machine learning in Google Earth to generate Farber's results, the question posed is: At what level is the image and subsequent information retained by the user trustworthy? Therein lies the deeper geopolitical dimension of this question. It is not just that any person, corporation, or government can use new spatial media to construct then act on a geopolitical narrative (a cartographic-colonialist activity), but that said narratives are created by unsupervised machine learning. This is biased, prone to overfitting, and importantly, inherently incapable and altogether unaware of the human subject.[23] To put this differently, efficiency is priority, not human expectation. It would be a devastating mistake to take the seeming neutrality of Google Earth as one without its own geopolitical subjectivity.[24] That is, machine learning networks are learning to think on their own and generating new information from geospatial ground truths and randomness, but as a double bind, state and corporate actors are collecting, managing, and conditioning the data, effectively establishing an extreme

hyperstate in which we are already implicated. (See Google's *Earth Engine Data Catalog.*) Bridle poses the question of what can or should art do, and how, at the hands of this hyperobject:

> What the new technologies of the state continually reveal, unwittingly and often in opposition to their stated goals, is the incredible diversity and uncomputability of their subject both at the level of the individual and at the level of physical geography. Through the network, we are all already transnational, which is revealed by social media and international finance as clearly as by our lived experience. At the same time, the accelerating and leveling actions of anthropogenic climate change forcibly remind us that borders will not protect us from what happens beyond the horizon...The challenge is to view these things anew in light of what we have learned and can still learn from our technologies, because no ecological plea can be sufficient if it simply entails going backwards, or rejecting the immanent possibilities of new systemic forms.[25]

Liliana Farber, *Terram in Aspectu* (Taprobana), 2019. Photograph by: David Hale. Courtesy of the Artist and 1708 Gallery.

Faced with real, physical consequences, a different type of geopolitics is to be constructed. Geopolitics now must concern both territorial space and the mediatic infrastructure of the data corpus upon and from which political action is taken. The ubiquity and black-box aspects of machine learning architecture make it increasingly harder to locate how, who, and why state decisions are made. Bridle's notion is both a call for extreme cautious awareness and an epistemological shift in how we think as the human and non-human become further enmeshed. This is not only about eventualities, but also concerns what can be gleaned from the architecture of these technologies to make this shift in the acquisition of knowledge.

Cognition and Uncertainty

In an attempt to follow this proposition of *what can be gleaned*, a return to the structure of human thought is built in the inquiry itself. Machine learning has ushered in new challenges to the nature of human thought. These challenges are not posited as a return to anthropocentrism, but as the notion that if cognition can be automated outside of the human brain, then the anthropocentric philosophy of the mind unravels. Thinking *how* machines think immediately implies that cognition is not essentially human and is distributed across non-carbon-based entities and intelligent networks. This entails a complex social dynamic with and between humans and machines. Take for example, if social media is widely understood as software programs wherein the human is deemed the primary cognitive agent—constructing individual identity and subjectivity—then a critical point in this dynamic has been overlooked. The algorithm(s) is also, albeit much differently, a social agent by dint of the generative capabilities of machine learning addressed above. Machine learning is at best a highly sophisticated pattern recognition network capable of "weak abductive" thinking, but is nonetheless irrevocably enmeshed in the present and future evolution of social and political behavior.[26] The latter statement may seem obvious at the level of interface, enterprise, and human social connectivity. My emphasis is rather to address the sociality of algorithmic thinking itself.

In uncertain environments and circumstances inference and proposing hypotheses are a means of critical thinking. These approaches are, of course, ingrained in contextual and curatorial practice, yet in light of the algorithmic age their function must be deployed with the openness of the uncertain state itself. The nature of the algorithm and machine learning requires a knowledge of the potential unknowable—the uncertain infinity of potential. For Parisi, "The question of automated cognition today concerns not only the capture of the social (and collective) qualities of thinking, but points to a general re-structuring of reasoning as a new sociality of thinking. Automated decision-making already involves within itself a mode of conceptual inferences, where rules and laws are invented and experimentally structured from the social dimensions of computational learning."[27] The issue at hand is not to take extreme measures in efforts to try and extricate ourselves from the algorithmic world in which we are embedded. This approach would not garner any more agency as suggested by Bridle. Instead, I am advocating for a new state of thinking that re-opens a space for thought that is uncertain and incomplete. This is what leads to an advocacy for accepting uncertainty as inextricable from reality, and for an exhibitions methodology from which learning can develop in novel ways.

Uncertainty in Exhibition Practice

This essay attempts to present information regarding an artist and work that allows for speculative thought about geopolitics and curation. It is often that, as curators, we find ourselves in situations where the prescribed means of public discourse reproduce unchallenged ideologies in the pursuit of maintaining dominant narratives. As a colleague mentioned recently, "We need to stop curating for curators." I found this direct statement relevant as is, but worthy of developing another version of what that activity would look like given the topics at hand. In this sense, the pre-determined, conventional curatorial methodologies hinder the criticality in the complex ecology of human and machinic thought. This is foremost a challenge of thought and thinking *uncertainty*.

The exhibition space is at times paradoxically formulaic. Hypothetical thought processes are deprioritized for direct, determined explanations, often preceded by assumption. The issue and ramifications then are the decreased efforts in discovering diverse and individual subjectivities. If uncertainty is part of the co-constituted ecology of the present (as noted in the editorial invitation to this issue and in the critical theories referenced), then it would be prudent to allow for more uncertainty in exhibition practice. This is not a call for ambiguity and less accountability—quite the opposite—it is a call for accountability to think more openly and hypothetically. Conditioned by a sense or requirement of full complete knowledge acquisition at different stages of practice, there are instances in which extreme assumptions are made about the state, truth, stake, and purpose of exhibitions often prior to their experience. These instances, exacerbated in the age of the algorithm, fall closely to the ethical and political

Liliana Farber, *Terram in Aspectu*, installation image from *Proximal, Distal, Adrift* at 1708 Gallery, 2020.
Photograph by: David Hale. Courtesy of the Artist and 1708 Gallery.

decision-making that has contributed to extremely catastrophic and malicious acts on societies, populations, and our planet. Louise Amoore, noting Donna Haraway, poses this question of uncertainty qua doubt:

> I am interested in how posthuman ethics might begin from a doubtful account, or from the impossibility of giving a coherent account of things ... What kind of relation to self and others is entailed by the algorithm's particular claims to the truth? Could ethical relations between technoscience and society begin from the plural and posthuman doubts that grow and flourish when the boundaries of human and algorithm, always arbitrary, 'highly permeable and eminently revisable', are relinquished (Haraway, 1997: 11)?[28]

From this position, we can begin to envision uncertainty in how we think through and present exhibitions. Uncertainty requires responsivity, and thus more deeply involved learning audiences, participants, viewers, and contributors. This may give rise to a multiplicity of individual subjectivities that are becoming ever more hidden in machine learning.

What *Terram in Aspectu* exposes is that machine learning has the ability to generate new knowledge at the interplay between randomness and order. Reasoning in the ecology of technology and society, as Parisi puts, is "an incomplete affair [...] open to the revision of its initial conditions, and thus the transformation of truths and finality."[29] Therefore, macro and micro exhibition structures should allow for randomness and an opening up of their intrinsic complexity. Further, overdetermination, prescribed interpretation, and assumption limit the agency of *thinking uncertainty*. What does this look like? How is this enacted? Consider instilling a pedagogy—that is not exhibition-specific—based on the exploration of complex architectures (algorithmic, institutional, and physical) in general. This is a scaffold that fosters conjecture and questioning in the present.[30] This is a stewarding of uncertainty.

Terram in Aspectu *was exhibited in Liliana Farber's solo exhibition,* Proximal, Distal, Adrift *at 1708 Gallery in Richmond, Virginia, curated by Park C. Myers.*

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1 Armen Avanessian and Suhail Malik, eds., *The Time Complex: Post-Contemporary* (Miami, FL: [NAME] Publications, 2016). See also the Welcome Letter to the 9th Berlin Biennale: DIS, "The Present in Drag," Berlin Biennale 9 (9th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2016), http://bb9.berlinbiennale.de/the-present-in-drag-2/.
2 "Tesla Cybertruck Unveiling Event: Watch the $39,900 Bulletproof Truck's Full Reveal Presentation," YouTube video, 22:16, posted by "TopSpeed" November 21, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9P_1_oLGREM.
3 It is important to understand that my stance is not one that states a hierarchy between human and non-human cognition–as if to challenge anthropocentrism means the distinct removal of human thought. Rather, I am referring to, as the editors of this issue reference, the co-existence of human and non-human objects.
4 The phrase "post-truth" here is used in its most common understanding, though noted later with a more speculative definition.
5 James P. Crutchfield, "Cultures of Change: Social Atoms and Electronic Lives," in *Cultures of Change: Social Atoms and Electronic Lives*, eds. Cinta Massip, Josep Perello, and Gennaro Ascione (Barcelona: Actar, 2009), 4, http://csc.ucdavis.edu/~cmg/papers/FOCS.pdf.

6 N. Katherine Hayles, "Cognitive Assemblages: Technical Agency and Human Interactions," in *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 115-141.

7 By "linearity of this assumptive and prescribed interpretive thinking," I mean a seemingly reliable and complicit ratio of information and reception regarding a singular experience of an exhibition or work. A critique of the interpretative moment has previously been made by Suhail Malik in "Reason to Destroy Contemporary Art," in *Realism Materialism Art*, eds. Christophe Cox, Jenny Jaskey, Suhail Malik (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 185-191.

8 This is succinctly summed up in the Glass Bead Editorial for their issue *Logic Gate, The Politics of the Artifactual Mind*: "This data-driven engineering, of affects as much as information, targets users through a constrained picture of their cognitive capacities that (apparently for their own safety) corrals them into a local enclave in which they find themselves individually trapped, paradoxically by their own connectivity…This personalized incapacitation is exactly why we must reclaim impersonal reason: to extricate ourselves from such locally circumscribed horizons, and to gain the power to collectively act on global problems. This is by no means to diminish the importance of local struggles and identity politics, it is precisely because of the aggravated nature of these problems that we need to identify with the collective power of reason." Fabien Giraud et al., "Logic Gate, The Politics of the Artifactual Mind," Glass Bead (CNAP – Centre National des Arts Plastiques, 2017), https://www.glass-bead.org/article/logic-gate-politics-artifactual-mind/?lang=enview.

9 Liliana Farber (2019).

10 The notion of a post-truth era can maybe carry an erroneous definition as something that is a register of time. The post-truth condition could be understood not just as a contemporary phase that is concomitant with social and political media, but rather as an immanent cognitive state of determining truth. That is, truth can reasonably only be registered retrospectively. The following quotes elucidate this:

1. Karen Hao quoting Greg Brockman, "The first thing to figure out, he says, is what AGI will even look like. Only then will it be time to 'make sure that we are understanding the ramifications.'" Karen Hao, "The Messy, Secretive Reality behind OpenAI's Bid to Save the World," *MIT Technology Review*, February 17, 2020, https://www.technologyreview.com/s/615181/ai-openai-moonshot-elon-musk-sam-altman-greg-brockman-messy-secretive-reality/.

2. "No a priori decision, and thus no finite sets of rule can be used to determine the state of things before things can run their course." Luciana Parisi, "Instrumental Reason, Algorithmic Capitalism, and the Incomputable," in *Alleys of Your Mind: Augmented Intelligence and Its Traumas*, ed. Matteo Pasquinelli (Lüneburg: Meson Press, Hybrid Publishing Lab, Centre for Digital Cultures, Leuphana University of Lüneburg, 2015), 132.

11 Éric Guérin et al., "Interactive Example-Based Terrain Authoring with Conditional Generative Adversarial Networks," *ACM Transactions on Graphics* 36, no. 6 (2017): 1-13, https://doi.org/10.1145/3130800.3130804.

12 Martin Giles, "The GANfather: The Man Who's given Machines the Gift of Imagination," *MIT Technology Review*, February 21, 2018, https://www.technologyreview.com/s/610253/the-ganfather-the-man-whos-given-machines-the-gift-of-imagination/.

13 Luciana Parisi, "Automated Thinking and the Limits of Reason," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 471-481, https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616655765.

14 Mehdi Mirza and Simon Osindero, "Conditional Generative Adversarial Nets," November 6, 2014. https://arxiv.org/pdf/1411.1784.pdf.

15 James P. Crutchfield, "Between Order and Chaos," *Nature Physics* 8, no. 1 (2011): 17-24, https://doi.org/10.1038/nphys2190.

16 Louise Amoore, "Doubt and the Algorithm: On the Partial Accounts of Machine Learning," *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 6 (2019): 150-151, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276419851846.

17 Liliana Farber, "Terram in Aspectu," Liliana Farber, n.d., https://www.lilianafarber.com/terram-in-aspectu.

18 Conversation with Liliana Farber on February 26, 2020.

19 N. Katherine Hayles, "Cognitive Assemblages: Technical Agency and Human Interactions," in *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious*, 115-141.

20 Wenzhong Shi et al., "Challenges and Prospects of Uncertainties in Spatial Big Data Analytics," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 108, no. 6 (2018): 1513-1520, https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2017.1421898.

21 Ibid., 1514.

22 James Bridle, "State to Stateless Machines: A Trajectory," ed. Janez Janša, *PostScript UM* 33 (2019): 9, https://aksioma.org/James-Bridle-State-to-Stateless.

23 Benjamin H. Bratton, "Outing Artificial Intelligence: Reckoning with Turing Tests," in *Alleys of Your Mind*, 69-80.

24 Sead Turčalo and Ado Kulović, "Contemporary Geopolitics and Digital Representations of Space," *Croatian International Relations Review* 24, no. 81 (January 2018): 7-22, https://doi.org/10.2478/cirr-2018-0001.

25 Bridle, "State to Stateless Machines," 10.

26 Matteo Pasquinelli, "Machines That Morph Logic: Neural Networks and the Distorted Automation of Intelligence as Statistical Inference," *Logic Gate: the Politics of the Artifactual Mind* 1 (2017), https://www.glass-bead.org/article/machines-that-morph-logic/?lang=enview.

27 Luciana Parisi, "Critical Computation: Digital Automata and General Artificial Thinking," *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 2 (2019): 114, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418818889.

28 Amoore, "Doubt and the Algorithm," 150.

29 Luciana Parisi, "Instrumental Reason, Algorithmic Capitalism, and the Incomputable," in *Alleys of Your Mind*, 135.

30 The conclusion of this text is for further publication on the institutional and pedagogical implantation of scaffolding: the final note here is credited to specific aspects of learning theorized by Reza Negarestani.

Park C. Myers is the Royall Family Curator at 1708 in Richmond, VA. He has organized exhibitions and facilitated projects at Knockdown Center, NY; Actual Size, LA; Komplot, Brussels; the Judd Foundation; the Hessel Museum of Art; and the Copenhagen Art Festival. Publications include *OnCurating*, *The Cure* (Komplot), and *Dear Helen* (CCS Bard). He is a co-founder of the online journal *aCCeSsions*. With Xavi Acarín, Myers established XP, a dialogical exhibitions platform. His research aims to develop new curatorial and institutional strategies informed by the study of complex adaptive systems and attendant shifts in infrastructure and architecture. Myers holds a BFA from Maryland Institute College of Art, an MA from CCS Bard, and was an adjunct professor at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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