ONCURATING.org

Spheres of Estrangement: Art, Politics, Curating

"Kim, the worker is now so separated from the product in their labor that it has become a mere abstract to them, or even worse: yet another product for them to desire"

With contributions
Joesphine Baker-Heaslip, Jonas Becker,
Franco 'Bifo' Beradi, Benjamin T. Busch,
Dan Bustillo, Lilian Cameron, Joey Cannizzaro,
Carson Chan, Jeni Fulton, Ken Gonzales-Day,
Matthew Hanson, Anke Hennig, Alistair Hudson,
Alison Hugill, Suzana Milevska, Jared Pappas Kelley,
Penny Rafferty, PUNK IS DADA, Claire Ruud,
Jack Schneider, Adrian Shaw, Paul Stewart,
Sam Thorne

Interviews conducted by
Alison Hugill, Penny Rafferty, Claire Ruud

Contents

Editorial
Matthew Hanson

We often have in mind the example that Brecht uses to describe the interval, the suspended time where in the middle of a play on stage the actors aren't playing – so they are no longer actors – and the spectators don't have anything to watch – so they are no longer spectators, it is a very beautiful picture of a moment of de-subjectivization, a small human strike.[1]

Originating in Viktor Shklovsky's analysis of Russian formalism, ostranenie describes the strategy of estrangement - the moment in an artwork that briefly overturns the sense that things have always been as they seem. The interval and it analogous terms - estrangement, alienation, defamiliarisation - became central tenants of Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht's literary partnership in their development of shock theory and epic theatre.

In the excerpt from 'Ready-Made Artist and Human Strike' Claire Fontaine contextualise Brecht's interval with an emancipatory potential. As it adjusts our perception of social relations, it makes possible a brief acknowledgment that 'the boss is not the boss'[2]. The implication is that such negation might inspire our resistance to, or withdrawal from given relations.

However beautiful the picture, the device has proven inadequate to the capital's indiscriminate power of recuperation. Today's estrangement is a fully incorporated component of the modern experience, a stimulant for 'surplus alienation', Anke Hennig concludes[3]. Therefore, this issue asks what artistic, architectural and curatorial approaches to estrangement offer current discourse in organisation, aesthetics and activism. The articles unpack estrangement for the political, social and cultural sprint of our time.

The publication is interspersed with artistic projects by Ken Gonzales-Day, Jack Schneider, and Josephine Baker-Heaslip. It was conceived during the Saas-Fee Summer Institute of Art, 2015, a programme developed by Warren Neidich and Barry Schwabsky. The 20 day intensive comprised lectures seminars and workshops with artists, curators and theoreticians developed around the theme of 'art and politics of estrangement in contemporary discourses from cognitive capitalism to ostranenie'. (http://saasfeesummerinstituteofart.com/.) The editors of this issue have aimed to elaborate and analyze contemporary understandings of estrangement in collaboration with select academics, artists, curators and architects.

Benjamin T. Busch, a graduate student in spatial strategies (Raumstrategien) at the Weissensee School of Art, has invited the contribution of Anke Hennig and organised an interview between Alison Hugill and Carson Chan. Hennig unpacks the etymology and mythology of estrangement, from the birth of Shklovsky's ostranenie, through to a proposed 'retro-vision' for 2016. Hugill and Chan discuss how curated architecture integrates, occupies, and transforms public infrastructure to re-examine the space of perception in our lived and built environment.

Paul Stewart, an artist, writer and curator and PhD candidate at the University of Teesside, presents an email exchange with Alistair Hudson, Jeni Fulton and Sam Thorne, addressing the recuperation of activism into art history and the gentrification of (art)-activist practices. Stewart has also organised 'Five Propositions' on the production of learning, pedagogical norms and participation strategies, offered by Suzana Milevska, Lilian Cameron, Adrian Shaw, and Jared Pappas-Kelley.

With Claire Ruud, Director of Convergent Programming at the MCA Chicago, and members of conceptual collectives Los Angeles College and The Best Friends Learning Gang, artist Jonas Becker discusses recent experiments in artist-initiated education and public engagement programming

In her essay Vampires: From Aesthetics to Ethics, 1922-Present, artist and writer Penny Rafferty maps the trend of horror genre films as an allegory for socio-political malaise. In discussion with Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, the two examine the movements and motivations of contemporary artists that operate between designer-entrepreneurs and potential insurgents.

Notes

1 Realism Working Group, Historical Fiction as Realism – Interview with Claire Fontaine https://realismworkinggroup.org/interview-with-claire-fontaine/
2 Claire Fontaine Ready-Made Artist and Human Strike: A few Clarifications, 2005; p13
3 Anke Henning, "Estrangement. A Retro-Vision for 2016" On Curating 31, 2016 p. 6

Editorial by
Matthew Hanson *is an independent curator based in Zürich. Recent exhibitions include The Buttocks of a Steelmill, Hohlstrasse 541, Zürich, i) duplex cling mob, Michael Lett, Auckland; Home is Where One Starts From, Yuill Crowley, Sydney and Heirs, 55 Sydenham Rd, Sydney. Matthew graduated with from the University of Auckland 2007 with a Bachelor of Arts majoring in political science and philosophy and is currently studying (MAS Curating) at Zürcher Hochschule der Künste.*

co editors
Jonas Becker *is an interdisciplinary visual artist whose photography and video installations explore how desire and belief are formed around specific sites and geography. Recent projects focus on the relationship between humans, technology, and the environment, questioning the concept of what is "natural". He is based in Los Angeles and has recently exhibited in solo shows at the Lancaster Museum of Art & History, the Craft & Folk Art Museum, and Shulamit Nazarian Gallery. His work has been featured in Art Ltd., Artillery, the Los Angeles Times and the Los Angeles Weekly.*

Benjamin T. Busch *was internationally trained as an architect at the University of Kansas, Potsdam University of Applied Sciences and the University of Stuttgart. He has lived and worked in Berlin since 2011, where he leads Studio Busch, a platform for spatial practice operating between the disciplines of photography and design. As a graduate student of Raumstrategien (spatial strategies) at Weissensee School of Art, he is currently researching critical modes of architectural production within the field of spatial practice. Treating*

architecture as a symptom of abstract processes, his artwork and writing investigate complex fields of relations within the built environment.

Penny Rafferty *is a writer and visual theorist based in Berlin. She is heavily involved with theartist collective group Omsk Social Club featuring PUNK IS DADA and pioneered the spectacle Ying Colosseum. She is working heavily with the concept of Cosmic Depression–The theory of depression caused by digital utopia (Paradise without Ecology).*

Paul Stewart *is an artist, curator and writer based in the UK, currently a PhD by practice researcher at the University of Teesside, focusing on the role of the gallery as a site for learning. His work has been shown recently as part of the Edinburgh Artist Moving Image Festival 2015, and at Bank Street Arts Gallery. Stewart was the curator of the 'Situation Unit' commission series at mima (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art), 2015. His next book chapter, Art and Commitment: Galleries Without Walls, will be published this year in a book collection on Adult Education by Sense Publishing.*

This Issue is dedicated to the memory of
our friend and colleague, Chandra Pok.

A dreaded sunny day
So I meet you at the cemetery gates
Keats and Yeats are on your side
While Wilde is on mine.
(The Smiths, Cemetery Gates)

Estrangement
A Retro-Vision for 2016
Anke Hennig

Estrangement, also known as defamiliarization, is a well-known concept first used in Russian Formalism[1]. After the revolution, Russian formalist theory flourished in close dialogue with Russian avant-garde art. There is a lot that could be said about the historical circumstances in which the term 'estrangement' was coined. I rely on the research of others who have described the contemporary social and political situation in great detail. Focusing here on a more abstract aspect, I would like to explore the temporality of estrangement and the temporality of theories in general; especially, what does temporality mean to art theory today, taking Russian Formalism as an example? In the 1920s, Russian Formalism was an innovative factor in art theory. Now imagine that we wish to say something today about Russian Formalist theory. How would we start? Would we say "Russian Formalism *was* a literary theory"? There is good reason to do so, since the avant-garde and revolutionary 1920s are long gone. However, I think we would rather be tempted to say, "Russian Formalism *is* a literary theory". If we decide on this expression, it also obliges us to think about the timeliness of theoretical work. Unless we intend to claim that theory has a metaphysical substance, we are forced to think about working on concepts today and also further developing the historical concept of estrangement that we inherited from the 1920s.

To make a temporal difference between the 1920s and today also implies that Russian Formalism was not always what it is now. This means that we cannot look back in a historical way and hope to find the meaning of estrangement in documents that were being circulated in the 1920s, or that it would help us to visit the archives to find repressed or censored positions. Furthermore, it implies that development took place after the actual work of the Formalists–via Czech and French structuralism, via neo-formalist readings in the U.S. in the 1950s. Finally, this temporal difference implies that 'estrangement' has changed due to the history and development of the concept itself. I have to mention that a changing concept gives shape to an irregular idea because a concept is supposed to provide a certain basis for naming objects that fall there under. A concept basically *is* this relation to objects that fall under it. As we will see by going through readings of estrangement during the last century, estrangement appears as a concept but does not behave exactly as a concept is expected to. In other words, although the readings tried to fix its content, it turned out to be difficult to pin down procedures and devices that fall under the concept of estrangement. Estrangement behaves more like temporal statements do. They are expressed in the form: A was/is S. What estrangement *was* differs from what it *is*. It is debatable if this difference can be brought back to metaphysical certainty by declaring that such statements, instead of stating a relation of concept and its objects, express a relation of a substance and its states. Estrangement, from this perspective, has more in common with Derrida's *différance* in that it infects metaphysics at its origins[2]. It seems difficult to bring it back to a stable difference; instead, it involves the reader in a process of differing.

But let us first have a look at estrangement in its historical context before returning to its temporal misbehaviour. The founding document of Russian Formalism most often cited is a text by Viktor Shklovsky from 1913, *The Resurrection of the Word*. It claims words had lost their impact on our experience. A certain perception of the world has ceased. Our perception of the world needs to be resurrected by a new form of art. As of about 1913, Russian Formalism was very close to avant-garde art, namely to Russian Futurism, and the art form favoured by Russian Formalism is the so-called *Zaum*, a trans-rational or supra-conscious language. What this means is mysterious, and Russian studies have been concerned with revealing the meaning to this very day. *Zaum* is a neologism. One can divide the word in the middle. ZA means 'beyond or behind' and UM means 'mind'. 'Trans-rational language' sometimes hints at Futurist poetry having no meaning or having a meaning beyond the rational. Another translation by the Formalist and later Structuralist Roman Jakobson–who translated *Zaum* as supra-conscious language–hints at something more. He points out the capacity of *Zaum* to change our world-view. *Zaum* is meant to change our state of mind, to make us think differently. When it puts into action language's influence on how we think and how we perceive the world, *Zaum* is in line with the Formalist idea that words have an impact on our experience.

I would like to name but two Futurists: Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh, who were the authors of the script for *Victory over the Sun*, a drama that you may know or have heard of. Kasimir Malevich did the set design for *Victory over the Sun,* released in late 1913. It marks the first appearance of so-called "suprematist" art, the preform of his famous black square. And Aleksei Kruchenykh was the author of the so-called *Sdvigologia russkogo sticha*, that is, the *Shifting Logics of Russian Poetry*. The Futurist poet was taking part in the theoretical work of Russian Formalism.

The next–I would say main–contribution or development in Russian Formalism took place from 1917, when the revolution began, until the early 1920s, when an actual discussion about Marxism occurred. In 1917 we find an anthology titled *Poetica* and a second one in 1919. In this context Viktor Shklovsky's most famous text, *Art as Device*, was published. This article describes what is most common and best known about Russian Formalism: that it is a theory that concentrates on the devices of art, seeing art as a device. I have a motto from this volume on my retro-formalist t-shirt: "Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact in itself is quite unimportant." Formalism focuses on the process of making art, and Formalism analyses the devices of making art. In this early period, Formalism was not so much interested in the product or in the artifact that results, but in the process of creation. In post-revolutionary times we find perhaps a context for this–where creating a new world and creating a new society was more important than producing objects.

When the revolution settles, Russian Formalism engages more and more with post-revolutionary politics, especially with left-wing politics, and joins up with so-called Productivism, a movement of the Russian avant-garde that denied any difference between art objects and other objects. Like Formalism, Productivism is more concerned with the ways of production; these were meant to be creative ways of production. The products and objects of the new socialist society were not meant to be different from art objects. Concerning Productivism, the socialist object is in its essence an art object, the result of a creative form of production. In sharing the Productivist platform, Formalism cares about the devices of creative production. One could illustrate this with a text by Osip Brik, which shares Produc-

tivist Formalist views and was written during the debates between Marxism and Formalism. Leon Trotsky took part in this debate with his book *Literature and Revolution*; Nikolai Bukharin also took part in this debate; and somehow Lenin is also involved in this debate *in absentia*. In 1924, the Formalists wrote a book about Lenin titled *The Rhetoric and Style of Lenin's Speech*. Here one also can see that Formalism deliberately denies a difference between objects and art objects. Lenin's speech is revolutionary speech and therefore both a process of creation and a product of creation.

What had already become important at that time, and more so in later Formalism, was a strict neglect of any content of art, especially of literature. This gesture came from Formalism's focus on literature, later also on film, in relation to Constructivist and Productivist art, for instance Rodchenko's art. Most of these texts were published in the context of *LEF*, the *Left Front of the Arts*, where a shift took place from the idea that art is to be thought of in terms of representation—and therefore has content or meaning—to the idea that what is important in art is the material formed. A piece of Constructivist art explores materials, whereas a Productivist object is located within material culture itself. The debate between Marxists and Formalists revolves mainly around this point. Marxism criticises Formalism for denying content in art. What is most often forgotten by the Marxists, or by the discussion in the 1920s, is that instead of concentrating on the content, Formalism concentrates on the material of art. So it becomes a theory not of understanding, but rather a theory of perception and consequently a theory of experience. Estrangement is meant to bring perception back to our experience. As you will remember, from Viktor Shklovsky's first text, the resurrection of the word is meant to reconnect us to the world.

The idea of 'estrangement' is present in Formalist texts from the early statements onwards, although it must be admitted that it is widely ignored in the 1920s— few quotes are to be found by authors other than Shklovsky himself. Even in the texts of the other Formalists will you rarely find 'estrangement' mentioned. Think of Yury Tynyanov, who wrote on prose and poetry and is the author of two major Formalist texts, *The Literary Fact* and *The Literary Evolution*. You will find no mention of estrangement in them. The same is true for Roman Jakobson, the linguist and later Structuralist, who does not really take up the concept of estrangement. Also Boris Eichenbaum, most famous for his 1927 text on the *Literary Everyday*, does not speak of estrangement. So although the concept is present in the 1920s, it is not explicitly developed but only implied.

Estrangement becomes much more important when it goes global. We find the first taking-up of this notion by Brecht in the late 1920s, in 1928 to be exact. And historically we can reconstruct that it came to Berlin via Sergei Tretyakov. With Tretyakov we touch upon the third connection between Formalism and the avant-garde that I would like to mention. After Futurism and Constructivism/Productivism within the Left Front of the Arts, Sergei Tretyakov's concept of 'factography' became a major touchstone. Tretyakov is the author of *The Biography of the Object* from 1927, founder of *Factography*, and co-editor of a book that was published in 1927, titled *Literature of Fact*. He was propagating a documentary, 'factographic' practice of literature that took the form of sketches, of industrial literature like film scripts, or of the press, as in writing for newspapers. Tretyakov travelled to Berlin in 1928, and a dialogue with Brecht is documented in a 'factographic' book he made, titled *Liudi Odnogo Kostra*, which means 'the people at one fire', which takes up all authors whose books were destroyed by the Nazis in the 1933 book burning in Berlin.

So, we know that the concept of estrangement is first taken up by Brecht and, remarkably, in this first translation of estrangement, in English it would sound like 'alienation', '*Entfremdung*'. The German term is peculiar because not only does it mean 'alienation,' it also means 'to get rid of alienation.' Simultaneously, it is translated in a second way as '*Verfremdung*', which then becomes the well-known Brechtian device in his theatrical practice. People familiar with Brecht's dramas may have heard of the directions he gave his actors. They were advised not to embody the dramatic role nor to stage fiction, but to break it, to take in the social material and the actual historical context, which for Brecht was class struggle. We should be careful not to misunderstand the aim of estrangement as being yet another form of representation. To take in the actual social and historical context was not to represent it. But why take in the contemporary if not for its content? The aim is to shift the relation of the audience towards their engagement in the contemporary world. The procedures of shifting are concrete, historically laden; they can be major or minor, singular or complex.

However the actual device appears, what seems to be clear is that it is a sort of negational device, negating something or removing something. It either takes something away (as in Brecht's fiction) or it negates something (embodiment of the role). It also associates negatively to norms or to canons. It functions as a de-canonisation, that is, a de-automatisation of perception. In the context of the post-revolutionary industrialisation of Russia, the dialectics of alienation through machinery seems most important. We can remember Marx's fragment on machines, where he states that, "The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself"[3]. And further, "In machinery, knowledge appears as alien"[4]. The coalition of Formalism and Productivism most likely rested on this sudden appearance of the machine as alienating consciousness and as being alien itself. In the German context of the accelerating financial crisis accompanied by the massive spectacle of the 'roaring twenties', the relation of the negative attachment to a background makes it difficult to state of what the device actually consists.

Another reason for the difficulty in finding out what estrangement actually means is the fact that the Russian word initially was a typo, and then there was also a second typo.

O _ stran _ enie

This is how you find the word in Russian today. By the time the Formalists used it, it did not exist in that form. There was a Russian word that had a 'T' in between the 'O' and the 'S'...

O t stran _ enie

The etymology of *otstranenie* then arises in the French reception of it: it means 'making something strange', which hints at the translation that we know as 'de-familiarization'. It comes from *strannyj*, 'strange,' however this word would require another 'N'...

O t stran n enie

The material body of the word does not allow for an unambiguous reading. The omission of two letters necessarily gives rise to interpretations. If we take a closer look at these interpretations, they reveal the strange temporal behaviour of 'estrangement' that I mentioned before. Our contemporary understanding of estrangement, or *ostranenie*, originates of course from the 1910s to the mid-1920s. But it also turns out to be a 1960s interpretation in connection with the French student movement, inspired by the Russian Revolution via Left theory in France. In

this context–often titled Freudo-Marxism–the idea of estrangement as de-familiar-isation is rooted.

It is worth mentioning that only in the 1960s does a difference become perceptible between what is called German Formalism (late 19th-century university philosophy) and what is sometimes called American Formalism, in particular associated with Clement Greenberg. My answer to the question of why estrange-ment becomes so important in the 1960s is rooted here. Estrangement distin-guishes Russian Formalism from the type of formalism that Clement Greenberg propagated. Where they share a concentration on artistic materials, Greenbergian Formalism thinks of an autopoiesis of art's material and a sort of teleological history of the arts toward a logic of their material. Meanwhile, Russian Formalism claims there is an estrangement involved on any level of the production of art, on the level of art's meaning, on the level of its form, and in the material production of art.

However, beside the appealing historical complexity, we have to ask our-selves, what are we doing with estrangement today? Is it still possible to use it as this critical device of negation, or is it maybe more interesting to follow up with the particular line of thought that connects estrangement to alienation? The fascina-tion with this line of thought is its inherent ambiguity. Estrangement is both an attempt to get rid of alienation and a strategy to profit from alienation. It expresses this very tension.

I would suggest that maybe it is a good time to find a new translation for *ostranenie,* which would not be estrangement, then, but would sound like *'surplus alienation'*. It could also take up the discussions of Formalism and Marxism in the 1920s in an imaginary post-capitalist situation that is not present today, now that the socialist experiments have failed. We live in the present moment; the socialist idea of a 'post-capitalist' future is past.

It seems we are returning to our initial question of whether it is proper to say 'Russian Formalism *is* a literary theory' instead of being obliged to say 'Russian Formalism *was* a literary theory'. In the same way, one could ask whether the utopian future of the avant-garde revolutionaries was abandoned, as Frankfurt School critical theory has it, or was realised, as their postmodern and contempo-rary adversaries have it. The question as to the past and the future having presence in the present is both epistemological and ontological. It is based on our under-standing of time.

This is the point I have reached with the Working Group on Retro-Formalism: to express these movements, it is impossible to claim that the present-ness of Russian Formalism is only connected with Russian revolutionary art. Somehow it seems also to be past. And how we relate to this past–not only in terms of historical theory but more so in relation to the revolutionary avant-garde and to all following vanguardisms in the art of the 20th century–today in the 21st century, where we seem to repeat these gestures. What are we actually doing with this repetition, since we know from Deleuze[5] that repetition produces difference? *Ostranenie* today could be understood as a device to approach alienation, to work on an alienated experience and to find out its possibilities and opportunities concerning a possible transformation of the contemporary world.

Since this is very much an ongoing project, I would like to conclude with a 'false end' in the manner of Viktor Shklovsky and his analyses of the estrangement

of a text's end in order to avoid illusionary closures. Last summer, in London, the group staged a re-enactment of the Marxism and Formalism debates of the 1920s at the Marxism in Culture seminar at UCL, in collaboration with the Institute for Modern and Contemporary Culture at the University of Westminster. Originally, the M&F confrontation had a political focus, whereas we focused on the historical and contemporary economics thereof. Furthermore, in lending symbolic capital to the Formalist theory by developing a Retro-Formalist position we simultaneously wanted to elaborate on how the use of time shaped the symbolic capital of Formalist theory. To include here a close reading of Leon Trotsky's chapter "The Formalist School of Poetry and Marxism" from his book *Literature and Revolution* brings us back to the context of a historical moment that I mentioned before. To elaborate on an alternative reading of that moment is to employ estrangement.

First I had the traditional picture in mind. Leon Trotsky had equated Formalism mostly to an idealist Formalism of Kantian type and had reduced it to two theses which said: 1) Formalism claims literature is pure form (without content); and 2) Formalism claims literature is independent as relates to the process of production and social historical development. Trotsky argues against both of these, saying firstly that form is not pure but expresses a social content and therefore it is, secondly, dependent. As I have briefly mentioned before, the Formalist defence went along the lines of saying that Trotsky had overlooked the fact that Formalism replaced the concept of form related to content by a concept of form related to material and therefore really was materialistic (whilst Trotsky's defence of "content" fell short by being not materialist but idealist). The second Formalist argument points towards Trotsky's ignorance concerning the concept of estrangement, which is why I include it here. It is central to the Formalist understanding of form, the environment in which art is perceived, and the involvement of art in the social process, which happens precisely via estrangement. Poetic language estranges social codes. It is not autonomous but self-conscious in the use of poetic devices and their power in shifting perceptual, experiential, and behavioural automatisms. It creates a poetonomous existence.

When re-reading Trotsky's chapter for the first time in fifteen years, I surprisingly ended up with a defence of Trotsky's view instead of preaching the historical victory of Formalism. As I have said, this late victory is obvious to me. And maybe this is the reason why I am more interested in the hidden agreement between Formalism and Marxism that has become visible only today, now that the socialist experiments have historically failed and the capitalist economy has become global. I want to base my interpretation on a thesis by Ève Chiapello and Luc Boltanski from their book *The Spirit of Capitalism*. They argue that since the second half of the last century, capital has followed an economy based on desire, which is first and foremost modelled by the arts. Trotsky's intuition as to the bourgeois character of the futurist avant-garde becomes relevant. Putting it in the terms of Chiapello and Boltanski one would say, "The modernist avant-garde had discovered an economy of desire that was translated into a post-modern aesthetics of capital".

The starting point in reading Trotsky, then, is his rendering of the "poetic" to a sublimation of an essentially capitalist desire:

> A new artistic form, taken in a large historic way, is born in reply to new needs. To take an example from intimate lyric poetry, one may say that between the physiology of sex and a poem about love there lies a complex system of psychological transmitting mechanisms in which there are individual, racial and social elements. The racial foundation, that is, the sexual basis of man, changes slowly. The social forms of love change more rapidly.

They affect the psychological superstructure of love, they produce new shadings and intonations, new spiritual demands, a need of a new vocabulary, and so they present new demands on poetry. The poet can find material for his art only in his social environment and transmits the new impulses of life through his own artistic consciousness. Language, changed and complicated by urban conditions, gives the poet a new verbal material, and suggests or facilitates new word combinations for the poetic formulation of new thoughts or of new feelings, which strive to break through the dark shell of the subconscious.[6]

Although Trotsky repeatedly addresses literature as constantly writing down subconscious desire by sublimating sex, I would now like to jump right to his conclusion. The "economy of forces" that Trotsky ascribes to the arts is not the economy of production or labour but the Freudian economy of the libido that gravitates to an equilibrium of libidinal forces, steadying the contradiction of sexual desire and repression, balancing pleasurable and destructive tendencies, and finally mediating between consciousness and subconsciousness.

Furthermore, the reference to Freud suggests itself because, as concerns Trotsky, there is a tendency towards the imaginary in modern fiction. He writes:

Artistic creation, of course, is not a raving, though it is also a deflection, a changing and a transformation of reality, in accordance with the peculiar laws of art. However fantastic art may be, it cannot have at its disposal any other material except that which is given to it by the world of three dimensions and by the narrower world of class society. Even when the artist creates heaven and hell, in his phantasmagorias he merely transforms the experience of his own life, almost to the point of his landlady's unpaid bill.[7]

This is a reference to August Strindberg's *Inferno*. Trotsky here hides and reveals an experience of literature that is troubled by one of the first present tense novels in literary history. What is at stake here is the fact that the present-tense novel is a literary phenomenon that has revealed more innovative potential for 21st-century literature than the futuristic avant-garde, which in comparison to Strindberg's prose look archaic today. So we are confronted with a situation where the constellation of "Innovators and Archaists" described by Yury Tynyanov has been turned upon its head.

I would like to use some observations on the history of the present-tense novel I made together with Armen Avanessian in our book[8] on the subject.

With Strindberg's *Inferno*, written in 1894-1897, we see the first case of a fictional pathography almost entirely written in the present tense. Only intermittently can a thin classical narrative framework be surmised. Strindberg knits a paranoid narrative that hints at an intrigue or a threat beyond the present of the instant.

It is no mere accident, for on certain days the cushion takes the shape of terrible monsters, such as Gothic dragons and serpents...[9]

So here we have the raving that Trotsky talks about. Strindberg produces a delirium in the style of an autobiography. I hope that you will follow me through a close reading before I return to Trotsky's idea that artistic creation, even when it seems to be raving, shifts our relation to reality and transforms it. Being exposed to

unsettling events implies a narrative double bind. Strindberg, the narrator, cannot narrate the conspiracy as (hi)story. He does not narrate the *story*; he is incessantly haunted by it.

> I am condemned to death! That is my firm conviction. By whom? By the Russians, the Pietists, Catholics, Jesuits, Theosophists? [...] At the moment that I write this, I do not know what was the real nature of the events of that July night when death threatened me, but I will not forget that lesson as long as I live. If the initiated believe that I was then exposed to a plot woven by human hands, let me tell them that I feel anger against no one, for I know now that another stronger hand, unknown to them, guided those hands against their will. On the other hand, if there was no plot, I must suppose that my own imagination conjured up these chastising spirits for my own punishment. We shall see in the sequel how far this supposition is probable.[10]

Strindberg is an adept autobiographer, highly skilled in meta-fictional deceptive manoeuvres. The alternative interpretations offered up to the reader in the short term cannot really be considered but are only introduced so that in the finale of the *Inferno* they can turn out to be undecidable. "I part from my friend–my executioner–without bitterness. He has only been the scourge in the hand of Providence"[11], as the last paragraph has it. Is it an intrigue or is it not an intrigue?

Such a literary device, operating with all permissible and impermissible deceptive manoeuvres, shows us how one can pay homage to the power of delusion without being committed to the clinic. In a counter attack, Strindberg's alter ego manages to denounce his doctor–who judges his fiction to be delusion–as a murderer.

> When my friend enters after a minute, it is I who am seized with compassion. He, the surgeon, who is accustomed to witness suffering without emotion, he, the advocate of deliberate murder, is an object of pity indeed. He is pale as death, trembles, stammers, and at the sight of the doctor standing behind me seems on the point of collapse, so that I feel more panic-struck than ever.[12]

All of a sudden, "Strindberg" has a second doctor, whose diagnosis counters that of the cold-blooded murderer. Although the way that the doctor looks at him over the shoulder might lead us to suspect that he originates in the imagination of someone writing, it is only the mention of the doctor's library and of "Strindberg's" scientific discovery that make it clear that he is "Strindberg's" invention. The fact that "Strindberg" again and again swaps the address between his friend the "physician" and his friend the "doctor" shows the two medical professionals to be doubles. Shortly before the entry of August 12, which marks the beginning of "Strindberg's" recovery, we read:

> If I take a book at haphazard out of the doctor's library, it always gives the explanation I was looking for. Thus I find in an old chemical treatise the secret of my process for making gold [...] An essay on matter which I have written and sent to a French review is immediately published. I show the article to the doctor, who betrays his annoyance, since he cannot deny the fact. Then I say to myself, "How can that man be my friend, who is vexed at my success?[13]

In terms of spitefulness, "Strindberg's" attack leaves nothing to be desired. He leaves the disavowed, broken-down physician, condemned to remain powerless against the literary fame of his patient, as a healthy man. As this competition between the (literary and medical) readings continues, he even manages to ensnare phenomenological psychoanalysis, namely in the person of Karl Jaspers. Strindberg's delusional manoeuvring deceives Jaspers by distracting him from the fictionality of the *Inferno*. In his manifesto of phenomenological psychoanalysis, entitled *Strindberg and Van Gogh*, Jaspers unfolds the (narrative) procedurality of madness/raving by showing how disturbances that successively settle in the world of perception fulfil an essential function in making it possible to recognise the processes of madness as such[14]. He pays special attention to a scene in Strindberg's *Inferno* in which the first-person narrator complains to the landlady of his hotel about three pianos that can be heard in the surrounding rooms.

To suspect a disturbance in perception here, as Karl Jaspers did, is certainly not entirely wrong. The overhasty assumption of an autobiographical reference, however, overlooks Strindberg's, or rather "Strindberg's" fictional calculus. It may be that Jaspers, against the background of classical narrated fiction, took it to be a symptom of a madman and as a factographic document. We, however, understand the fictional calculus in which the protagonist invents a story of three pianos for his landlady in order to prevent her from delivering a letter that he suspects contains a bill. Destitute, the hero seeks to dodge the economic realities of his existence. Delusion at this point lies less in the disturbance of perception than in the hubris of the calculation of reality[15] with which the first-person narrator computes the probability of the fiction: How many pianos do I have to set up so that no one will read the bill?

At this point I want to remind you of Trotsky's reading, who clearly refers to this point: "Even when the artist creates heaven and hell, in his phantasmagorias he merely transforms the experience of his own life, almost to the point of his landlady's unpaid bill"[16].

I would argue that in this point there is no disagreement between Formalism and Marxism. Poetic creation is not delirious but transforms the experience of one's own life. While there is no ontological difference between the materiality on which sensual experience is based and the materiality of language, the symbolic economies of poetic language and aesthetic experience are different. Poetic language shifts the reality of aesthetic experience. Although Trotsky is obviously wrong in assuming that poetic language expresses experience, he clearly has a grasp of the symbolic capital in Strindberg's work. The text is not only a flight into fantastic imagination, a phantasmagoria as Trotsky suggests; Strindberg's *Inferno* is meant not to be a document of insanity and hallucination, as the philosopher and psychoanalyst Karl Jaspers claimed, but a literary discovery of symbolic value and an economic speculation.

What we have here is a meta-fictional play, as Wolfgang Iser put it[17], that is, a forming of the imaginary in a literary fiction. Within literary history, Strindberg's text comes only slightly before the first interior monologues, Virginia Woolf, and the *stream of consciousness* prose of James Joyce, which absolve their authors–and the present tense of their texts–from the testimonial function of a medical report. Furthermore, in *Inferno* it is difficult to decide whether the *text* is less fictional than are the incredible perceptions that it (allegedly only) records. The manoeuvres with which Strindberg tasks his reader integrate him and expose him to the (hidden) hallucinations of the text. Hallucinations are originary images of the power of

imagination, and they become literary fictions as soon as it is possible to share them with others in linguistic communication. Viktor Shklovsky stated something similar when he was rating the prose of Andrej Bely over the Constructivist factography of Sergei Tretyakov. Bely was the most elaborate Russian writer of Russian modernist novels, which form–as in "Kotik Letaev"–an entire level of imaginary sensibility. And again, Formalist and Marxist arguments are based in the same intuition: that literature is not reportage–as Trotsky says–but transforms the reality of experience.

To come back to the present...

The type of novel to which Strindberg, Bely, Woolf, Joyce, Weiß, Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, Pynchon, Fichte, Brinkmann, and many others have contributed, is nothing other than the common form of the Contemporary Novel. Their devices are employed by China Mieville, David Peace, and David Cronenberg alike. Armen Avanessian and I have called it the Alter-modern Novel. However, what was called estrangement in modernism and the revolutionary avant-garde is no longer defamiliarisation. *Ostranenie* today reveals an economy based on imagination and desire that is replete with symbolic value and the forms of value that capital assumes. Estrangement results not in less alienation but in ever more alienation, in surplus alienation. Estrangement in 2016 describes the strangeness of this form of economics.

In a different context, I analysed the opportunities that criticism could offer and the traps it risks falling into. By taking a historical detour through the critiques of alienation that accompany the modern experience, something specific appeared: modern experience is alienated inasmuch as it has fully incorporated criticism. To be critical implies to be alienated to such an extent that alienation becomes acknowledged as a precondition for criticism. Perhaps one difference between the modern and the alter-modern experience consists in recognising that the modern nostalgia for the restoration of authentic experience as a result of critique, as for example György Lukács constantly argued, has lost its persuasiveness. This is not to say that the alter-modern experience celebrates a status quo of inauthenticity. It poses its own radical questions of inauthenticity by analysing alienation as an artificial experience to which critique is immanent. Estrangement makes use of alienation as an inherently critical experience. As an artistic strategy it suggests a politics of alienation.

Notes

1 Many thanks to Warren Neidich, who organised the Saas-Fee Summer Institute of Art in June 2015 around the concept of estrangement, which gave me the opportunity to develop this approach in a talk and a workshop together with students of the summer school.

2 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1998.

3 Karl Marx, "The Fragment on Machines from *The Grundrisse* (pp. 690-712)," p. 693. Accessed 13.12.2015. http://thenewobjectivity.com/pdf/marx.pdf.

4 Ibid., p. 695.

5 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, pp. 70-91.

6 Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, pp. 314-15. Translated by Rose Strunsky in 1925. Transcribed for the Leon Trotsky Internet Archive by N. Vaklovisky in June 2000 from an uncopyrighted 1957 Russell & Russell, New York

edition of "Literature and Revolution". HTML markup by David Walters in August 2000. Proofread and completed by Einde O'Callaghan in January 2007 using the 1991 RedWords (London) edition of "Literature and Revolution."
https://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/view-Book?id=8214053C3FCE8A0E82EEA8778DCEC024

7 Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 243.

8 Armen Avanessian and Anke Hennig, *Present Tense. A Poetics.*, Bloomsbury, New York and London, 2015, p. 180ff.

9 August Strindberg, *Inferno*, trans. Claud Field, Putnam, New York, 1913, p. 62. The composition and publication history of the *Inferno* is a complicated one. Originally written in French, it was first published in a Swedish translation (not checked by Strindberg), followed by a heavily edited French version. The second, corrected Swedish version is generally used as the basis for the translation cited here.

10 Ibid., 105.

11 Ibid., 134.

12 Ibid., 130.

13 Ibid., 132.

14 Karl Jaspers, *Strindberg and Van Gogh*, trans. Oskar Grunow and David Woloshin, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1982.

15 Simon Stuhler, *Phänomenologie des Lesens*,:Edition Kirchoff&Francke, Berlin, 2010, p. 35.

16 Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 243.

17 Strindberg is playing here with all the elements of agon/battle, aleia/chance, mimicry/deception and reversal, as well as ilinx/intoxication. Cf. Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1993.

Anke Hennig *is a theorist of literature and visual culture. Currently she teaches at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London. She is chairing the international research group* Retro-Formalism *(www.retroformalism.net) and is co-founder of the transnational research platform* Speculative Poetics *(www.Spekulative-Poetik.de). She holds a PhD from the Peter Szondi Institute of Comparative Literature at Free University Berlin and has been a Fulbright Fellow at New York University. She is the author of* Soviet Cinematic Dramaturgy *(in German, 2010) and, in cooperation with Armen Avanessian, co-author of* Present Tense. A Poetics *(2015, in Russian 2014, in German 2012) and of* Metanoia. Speculative Ontology of Language*.*

Society's Richer Yet She's Thin as a Rake.
A Discussion between Franco 'Bifo' Berardi and Penny Rafferty

The estimated end of resources on planet earth is set at 2050[1]. We walk or scan/flick through the devastation everyday–soaring rent prices, dilapidated buildings, underfunded schools, higher taxed resources, crippling debt, police violence, and privatised health-care. We have become alienated from the planet on which we live and set the task of martyrdom via a society from which we are estranged. Yet through the abrasive scars of capitalism we have entered into our most creative point of human history and "the artist" is everywhere. Throughout 2014, we saw the crowning ceremony of Anthropocene and the knighthood of Apple as the most profitable business on planet earth and the most sought after tool for the creative class[2]. It then comes as no ironic surprise that some of the most dynamic mass struggles today–such as anti-racism, climate change and intersectional feminism–are unfolding inside the sphere of art and coercing everyone into becoming an artist. Life seems at its most harrowing, or is it just inspiration? Speaking to Franco "Bifo" Berardi, we dissect "the artist" as a profession or insurgent.

Penny Rafferty: Why do you think people assume the position or title of an artist today?

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi: I have been obsessed and haunted by this question over the years. I have always been torn between two ideas of why people produce and create. One possibility is that they create for usefulness in a moral, historical, and social sense. The other is that art is totally useless and this is the richness of art. It's a superfluous activity and product by its very nature, which should not be seen as a luxury product, nor be handed to the lazy or the rich on a whim. Art itself is the divine purity of excess production.

PR: Taking the latter idea that art is the "divine purity of excess production"–how does the institution and the network fit in?

FB: I would say they are not so easily aligned. I have difficulty with the market and its relation to art. I don't refuse it as a writer. I publish; I could not live without selling books. My difficulty doesn't lie in the refusal of the market, but I'm tired of the market's impotence. Why only yesterday, Berlusconi's daughter (who is even worse than him) bought the second largest publishing house in Italy. *Mondadori* is the first. So now the book market in Italy is totally in the hands of Berlusconi.

Well, this means nothing day-to-day, but as a writer I have always thought of myself as a salaried worker. When I was twenty years old, I wrote porno-graphic novels. It was my first job, and I earned my living for years writing porn. It was in the period of rising feminism, and many of my closest friends were very active feminists. I wasn't embarrassed, per se, of the act, but it was a problem and, funnily enough, I was proud of it. I would say, when the metalworker works in the car factory nobody judges him for his ecological politics—he is paid for what he does. So I don't care about the porn industry—it's my job.

So you see being an artist means so many things; you can say it's salaried work or an attempt to become a rich capitalist. It can be either, or it's a way to do something that refuses the market and useful-ness, and you can also say it's a way to take part in the social rejection of capitalism.

Also the word art is almost embarrassing— what does it really mean?

PR: I think the word art has never meant so much. People are identifying more with art as it becomes blurred and skewed, resulting in the art world

itself expanding into the field of technology, science, and philosophy like never before. But perhaps this is exactly art, an ever-expanding field with no limits or horizons in a world where we are constantly given parameters–why not find solace in the life of an artist?

FB: Well, exactly, why do people choose not to be an engineer but to be an artist—when they spent the last years studying engineering? I studied aesthetic theory at university in 1968 with an Italian philosopher, Luciano Anceschi. He was the first person who introduced me to this question, what is art? I was a young activist, I wanted to study poetry and art, but the first thing I remember him saying is, "I will never tell you about art. As art is nothing, art is only what you decide is art. Nobody can doubt whatever is created with artistic intention." So there is a possibility of art in everything. For me it was the '60s, and it had a direct reference to the death of art, but I wanted to look at the essentiality of art in relation to social activism. In a sense, this has been my goal since the very beginning.

PR: And now?

FB: Well, in the last five years I have started to have the idea that the essential meaning of art is the reactivation of the erotic social body. The body is a crucial tool in art, dance, and politics.

When I took part in the movements of Occupy, I personally never understood it as a political movement. In politics the goal is power, and in Occupy there was no question of power, nobody craved it. Yes, it was against the global economic power, but something that size was never going to be conquered by this action. What was happening in Zuccotti Park and on the streets and the plazas was not politics as such, but a need to reactivate the erotic body of society away from stagnant financial abstraction. It's a new way to think about art. The physical presence of being with others, it's something we have lost.

PR: I can see the natural ability of art and activism acting as fission between people, space, and ideology, but this has a limited time frame for audience captivation. It only occurs in these moments of rupture when we give up work or deny our economic obligations for the greater good. Yet day-to-day, we are constantly moving against each other fighting for resources, space, capital; our consistent participation

in this neoliberal economy doesn't offer freedom from each other.

FB: Yes, day-to-day we are moving against one another; we are taught to think of one another as competitors, not as friends. But this is a new strategy in the workplace. Originally, workers worked in the factory, they lived in the same streets, and socialized together after the workday—living all their lives together with the same possibilities and naturally the same impossibilities. Now this is over; workers never meet in the same place twice, they are like crazy atoms going in different directions. They are part of the machine, and the precarious worker now sees the other as a danger to his or her own livelihood. This has deeply hindered the progress of the worker and has an increased effect on the worker's alienation from his peers, environment, and desires.

PR: So, actually the ego is the biggest survival strategy of the worker, and society pumps this "super-ego" out to us daily through our own media, culture, and fear. Take, for example, the re-appropriation of Charles Darwin's theory of "the survival of the fittest"–it is now a cocky catchphrase on Wall Street. The larger the ego, the more chance you will survive and conquer your peers, giving you freedom, wealth, and security.

FB: You are forced to. It's not moral, it's social, it's materialistic. You will be more successful the more you take on "culturally" the identity of the "ego". I don't think the people of today are more stupid than my generation. I think the cognitive worker knows more and is sharper than ever, and I don't think they are any more egotistical—they are in a position of war. When you are on the battlefield, you cannot choose to kill or not to kill, because if you choose not to kill you are killed. This is their reality.

PR: But then if you assert yourself into the position of the artist, you put yourself into the utmost position of precariousness.

FB: Yes, the condition of the artist is the most extreme manifestation of the precarious worker, and it's competiveness, but it's also freedom from slavery, from salaried work.

PR: I see the romanticization of the artist and yes, I think some people become artists to avoid capitalist slavery, but how does this fit into the idea of the erotic?

FB: Ahh, yes, well this is another problem. When I was here before (Berlin, Germany), in May 2011, I was speaking to someone who told me that 24% of young Germans wanted to be artists according to some newspaper. Naturally, they didn't know what being an artist is like; they may think it's like being Michael Jackson and being very rich, etc. But this statistic came true, the art academies are booming, and becoming an artist is sort of possible for all in the generation of the precarious worker. Essentially, this choice to become an artist is the choice to escape the boredom of work. This sentiment is strong in the self-perception of the artist. It has always been this way. It's the bohemian attitude.

PR: In my eyes, becoming an artist is to change the rules, to slow down or eradicate the goals set to us by society; when we should go to school, when we give birth, when to die, etc.—It's an act of rebellion.

FB: Yes, which is why being an artist is saying I don't want to be a slave, a slave of life, a slave of salaried work, but previously when I asked your opinion, you said you thought people wanted to be artists because they needed a new form of language?

PR: Yes, I did and I still believe that. The next generation has resigned themselves to a world that is centred entirely around lack: a lack of work, economy, and resources. You will constantly need or want something. People are resigned to this "indebted" life. So they escape and rewrite it with an online persona, a digital life, or a personally curated digital profile, freeing themselves from their physical bodies that are enslaved to the system. A virtual reincarnation of the so-called freed aesthetic self can take place online. I say aesthetic because we cannot do anything online without aesthetics, be it a moniker or a choice of emoji or profile picture. The masses are the creators once more, yet everyone creates their own singular systems of visual communication as an artist would.

FB: Which brings me back to art and action. In the 1960s, being an engaged artist had a special meaning. You could be whatever you wanted—rich, egotistical, power hungry, or elitist. You just had to say the working class will win, and Stalin is good, and capitalism is bad. I don't like engaged art, it can be fake. I don't like art that preaches. In my opinion, the task of the artist is now to revive the body as I saw in the action of Occupy. When I say body, I mean the social, political body and persons who are bodily. Do you remember the 2012 Biennale in Berlin, curated by Arthur Żmijewski? He brought the

Occupy movement into the museum; well, I find this art action hypocritical. I don't care for political progressive values in the museum. I prefer very much to dance in the streets. The place of the museum is a preconceived place where you know what you will find, but the streets can change your life.

PR: I have strong reservations about art and the political gesture in general. From community arts to rehashing "the protest" in the museum–but for me, I ask the question, why is this art? Why are we shying away from the term activism?

FB: Well, if your artwork is able to create a possibility of people being together, that is an artwork. Where you are physically means nothing; you could be on the Gaza Strip or just writing on the wall—it means nothing really. But if it has the chance to move people, then it could be art.

PR: This is true, but it is an active gesture. Why must we call it art? Surely, activism is a much purer form than art–take your Engaged Art as a case study.

FB: Because people aren't confident they need more than politics to identify themselves with, they need emotional discourse. If the intentions are to make people happy, then why not? Of course, it doesn't make them an artist but they are producing art. I think you are saying it's not enough for an artist to just have good intentions to produce good art, and I agree, but we must all try to reactivate the erotic body. What we must do in art now is to emancipate ourselves from the dictatorship of abstraction.

PR: I found Banksy's latest action interesting for this notion of emancipation in art, with his Dismaland theme park being dismantled and sent to "The Calais Jungle" with only this statement presented online as documentation: "All the timber and fixtures from Dismaland are being sent to the Jungle refugee camp near Calais to build shelters. No online tickets will be available."[3] This seems a purer act. He doesn't assume the position of the angelic artist on a theatrical stage.

FB: So this is Dada extremism at its finest. Only the gesture is important, not the documentation or grandeur.

Do you remember when we first started talking about this, why people wanted to be artists? I said, I thought that people were artists because they didn't want to be slaves, yes? You said, people wanted

to be artists because they needed to create their own language, which at the present moment has something to do with the digital language that is dominant in society. I think both of these are interesting points, but they are both talking about intentions of what can be implemented into a gesture. The trace of art is not problematic; art can be a spectacle but it can also be the re-activator of the social erotic body that can create a chain of reactions through society, and this latter idea is exactly what I expect from art. Art is the act of creation outside salaried work, and art creates singularities in space. But these are things that determine what an artist does, not what is art.

Notes

1 Mark Townsend and Jason Burke. 2002. "Earth will expire by 2050." *The Guardian*, July 7. Accessed online.

http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/jul/07/research.waste

2 Douglas A. McIntyre and Thomas C. Frohlich. 2015. *24/7 Wall St.*, October 27. "The 10 Most Profitable Companies in the World 2015." Accessed online.

http://247wallst.com/special-report/2015/10/27/the-most-profitable-companies-in-the-world/

3 Notification from Dismaland: http://dismaland.co.uk/.

Franco '*Bifo*' *Berardi is a contemporary writer, media theorist and media activist. He founded the magazine A/traverso (1975-1981) and was part of the staff of Radio Alice, the first free pirate radio station in Italy (1976-1978). Like other intellectuals involved in the political movement of Autonomia in Italy during the 1970s, he fled to Paris, where he worked with Félix Guattari in the field of schizoanalysis. He has been a contributor to the magazines Semiotexte (New York), Chimères (Paris), Metropoli (Rome) and Musica 80 (Milan) and Archipielago (Barcelona). Currently he is writing for the monthly LINUS (Milano).*

He has published Le ciel est enfin tombé sur la terre (Paris, 1978) Mutazione e Ciberpunk (Genoa, 1993), Cibernauti (Rome, 1994), Felix (Rome, 2001, London 2009), Generacion Postalfa (Buenos Aires 2007), Skizomedia (Roma, 2005), La fabrica de la infelicidad (Roma, 200, Madrid, 2004), and El sabio el guerrero el mercader (Aquarela, Madrid, 2006). In 2009, he published The Soul at Work (Semiotext(e), Los Angeles), After the Future (AK Press, Oakland, 2012), and The Uprising (Semiotexte, Los Angeles, 2012). He is teaching Media Theory at the Academy of Fine Arts in Milan, and has lectured in many universities around the globe.

In 2015 he published the book HEROES (Verso Futures, London) and AND – Phenomenology of the End (Semiotexte, Los Angeles).

Penny Rafferty is a writer and visual theorist based in Berlin. She is heavily involved with the artist collective group Omsk Social Club featuring PUNK IS DADA (2012) and pioneered the spectacle Ying Colosseum (2014). She is working intensively with the concept of Cosmic Depression–the theory of depression caused by digital utopia (Paradise without Ecology). www.punkisdada.com

Halfway
# Josephine Baker-Heaslip

WEATHER OBSERVATION

IT WAS THE CONSISTENCY BETWEEN US THAT CAUSED IT
IT WAS OUR NEGLIGENCE THAT SAW IT COMING
IT WAS OUR UNAWARENESS THAT WAS HELD ACCOUNTABLE
IT WAS OUR ADMISSIONS TO EACH OTHER THAT WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR
THE FIRST FLOOR FLOOD

I WAS SURE THAT YOU WERE NOT AT RISK
I WAS SURE THAT YOU WERE SAFE FROM HARM
WHEN I THOUGHT THAT MY PREDICTIONS COULD PREPARE YOU
WHEN I THOUGHT THAT MY SUPPOSITIONS COULD SHELTER YOU
FROM THE HEAT OF THE SUN

WE WERE PLANNING TO MEET HALFWAY
SO NEITHER OF US WOULD BE TO BLAME
THAT WE COULD ONLY GET THERE SEPARATELY
AND WE WOULD NEVER BE THERE EQUALLY
WHEN THE LIGHTNING STRUCK US DOWN

Josephine Baker-Heaslip *is an artist and a writer.*
Born in London in 1990, she is currently undertaking
a Postgraduate Diploma at the Royal Academy Schools, London.

next page:
International landscape, 2016,
Pencil on paper, ceramic tiles with
permanent marker, 85 x 61 cm
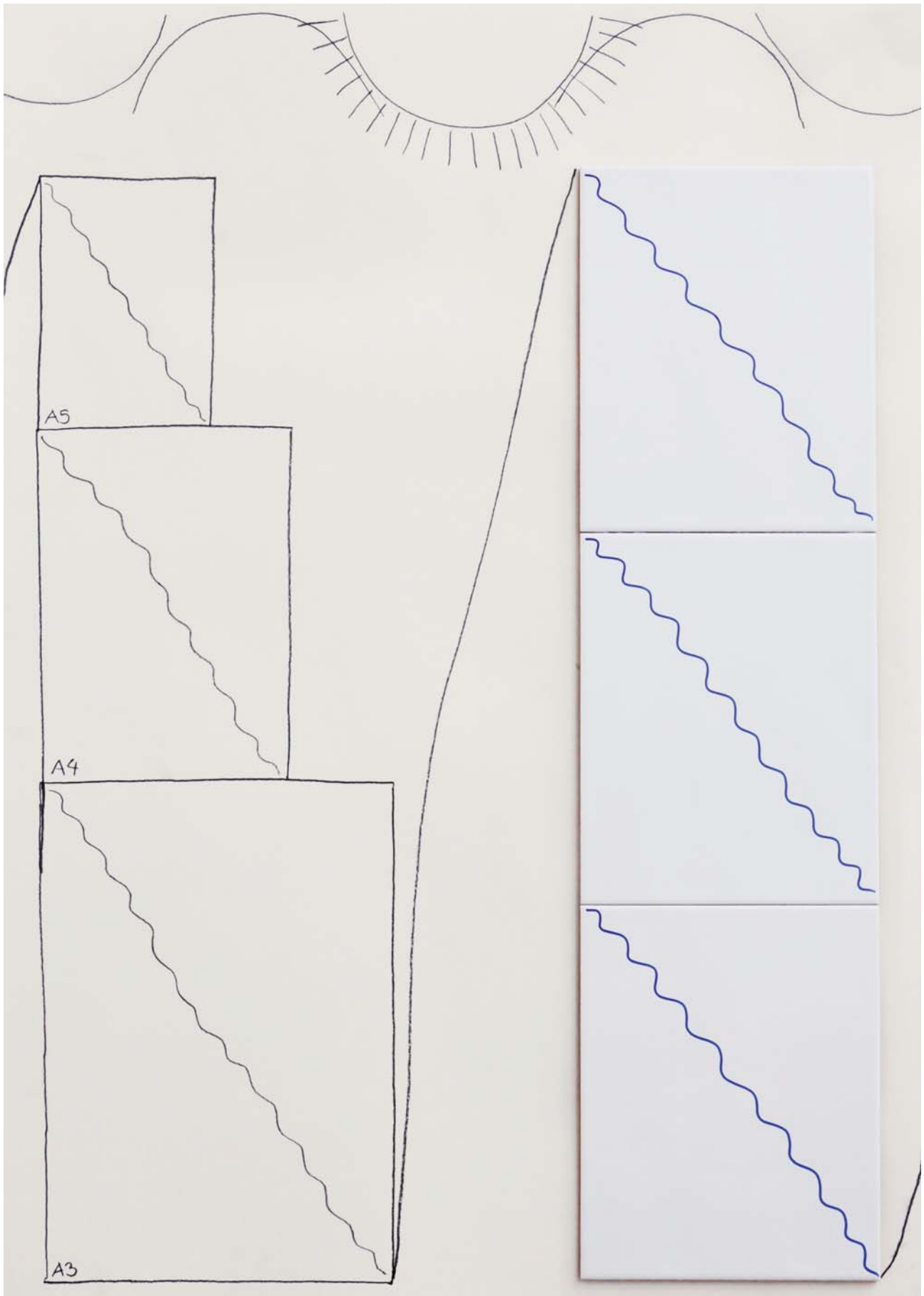
Like when the teacher leaves the classroom:
A conversation about artist-run programming within exhibitions
Jonas Becker, Dan Bustillo, Joey Cannizzaro, Claire Ruud

Museum programming is often explanatory—the goal is to impart a sense of knowing and understanding. Breaking this mold, institutions are increasingly experimenting with programs that create different kinds of access to the artwork on the walls. The goal of estrangement provides one interesting alternative—to reframe the act of perception, changing the experience from one of already knowing to one of perceiving anew. Rather than creating closure through explanation, programs that operate through estrangement open up new possibilities for radical meanings in artworks.

This conversation takes a collaboration between three artists—Jonas Becker, Dan Bustillo, and Joey Cannizzaro—as a starting place to consider the potential role of estrangement in museum programming. Their collaboration highlights critical questions: What kinds of relationships—other than interpretive—can we create between an artist program and an exhibition? What techniques can create a sense of critical distance from our own tendencies and assumptions in looking at an artwork?

The four of us first met just after sunrise in L.A. during a meeting of the Brutally Early Club, bonding over the challenges and possibilities of radical interdisciplinarity and collaboration. Jonas works in photography and video installation and often uses collectively sourced content in his work. Joey and Dan co-founded two para-institutional projects, Los Angeles College and The Best Friends Learning Gang.

Claire works at the MCA Chicago as Director of Convergent Programming. From our various positions, we discussed the relationship between social engagement projects and art objects in exhibitions, especially the ability each has to shift meaning in the other. When our ongoing conversation materialized in the form of collaborative programming around Jonas's recent exhibition *Westward Bound* at Lancaster MOAH, we got together at his East L.A. studio to discuss the result.

Claire Ruud (CR): The three of you worked together to produce two programs. Can you begin by describing the collaboration?

Jonas Becker (JB): The collaboration came out of a solo exhibition I had at the Lancaster Museum of Art and History (MOAH), where I was showing two video installations. I was interested in working with Los Angeles College (LAC) and The Best Friends Learning Gang (BFLG) to experiment with intersecting our very different modes of creating work. LAC serves as a para-institutional shell for a variety of pedagogical-learning projects, and BFLG uses the idea of the "amateur" to organize workshops. I asked them to collaborate with me to create programming based loosely around my show, but with the intention that the collaboration would be its own piece. To get started, we identified aspiration and immortality as two central themes from my installations to explore in the programmatic components.

Dan Bustillo (DB): So we organized these two events, a workshop with BFLG and a panel discussion hosted through LAC. They were very different, but both prompted an engagement with some of the themes teased out in Jonas's work. BFLG's "Amateur Hour: Immortality" took on an array of ways of thinking about immortality through embodied learning, from the process of mummification to rejuvenating homeopathic creams. We are always both hosts and participants in BFLG's "Amateur Hour" workshops. We don't actually teach anything; we announce the topic of the workshop (like Hypnosis! Immortality! Jailhouse Tattoos! or Becoming Famous!), and then learn along with everyone else.

Joey Cannizzaro (JC): BFLG workshops always feel like a cross between a class and a party. Like that moment in school when the teacher leaves the room and everyone goes crazy.

DB: Afterwards, LAC organized the panel "Tangents on Aspiration", in which we tried to arrive at some kind of tangential meaning-making by bringing in different folks who would address aspiration from vantage points that were both diverse and specific. One panelist gave an earnest motivational speech about applying aspirational thinking within our own lives, another talked about her personal experience with Jainism and some of its theological premises, questioning what aspiration even means in a context where withdrawal and absence are the primary values. The other panelists spoke to aspiration in sitcom set design, community organizing, and gold digging in early American Christianity.

JC: LAC itself is imaginary, but the things we do—and most of the people involved—are real. "Tangents on Aspiration" used a very familiar institutional form, the academic panel discussion, but defamiliarized the meaning of this form by filling it with unexpected content, not just from different disciplines,

but completely different frameworks of meaning and value.

JB: The programs were set up to get participants to question their structure. There is a little bit of this that comes from framing the programming as "artist-" or "institution-" led. For the most part, audiences walk into institutional programs expecting to take them at face value. Introducing the figure of the artist already primes at least some audiences to distance themselves from the program.

DB: In this instance, since we were doing the programming, we were in a sense the institution.

CR: LAC is not an institution in the sense that we normally experience institutions. It prioritizes promiscuity and fragmentation, but museums are more likely to prioritize focus and synchronization. LAC is able to reject the institutional responsibility to reach certain audiences, build long-term relationships, and define and measure impacts.

JC: Yes, LAC and BFLG address a troubling pattern: the obsessive desire to measure and control everything through standardization on all levels of society.

DB: In some way, I feel like when artists do the programming, there is an amount of luxury that comes with not having to think about the metrics. We can afford to be myopic in a good way because we don't have to think about measuring success. There's a certain amount of charm that the effectiveness of our tangential discourse relies on. In a sense, that's how we were approaching a lot of this, in a very sober but wild way. That's not always appealing to someone who's thinking of things in terms of responsibilities and metrics.

JB: Not only that, the goal of museum programming is often to elucidate the artwork. It is *about* the artist or artwork. It's *interpretive.* The programs we ran weren't interpretive at all. We created new work together at the intersection of our practices.

CR: So if the relationship was not interpretive, what was it? Can you be more specific about the interaction you wanted to create between the artworks and the programs?

DB: I think our intention was to arrive at a way of engaging ultimately with Jonas's work via estrangement. Both programs offered oblique yet relevant entry points to thinking about the work. So if our programming seemed to be off in connection to Jonas's show, or strenuously related at best, then that kind of enacts the first part of the estrangement process.

JC: Historically, estrangement was defined by Victor Shklovsky as a technique, and an aesthetic to a lesser extent. His estrangement was about the writer, the artist, making the experience of the thing less natural, and specifically more labored, as a way to allow the audience access to new ways of seeing and thinking. So everything we were ranting about in regard to the kaleidoscopic day that we had at the museum fits within the bounds of this technique.

JB: I think the potential for mutual estrangement between the installation and the programs arises out of their differences in production and reception. Temporally, we developed the works over different time spans. Also, the installations have an indefinite half-life, and the programs are ephemeral. Besides that, their systems of creating meaning are different–the videos create meaning in direct relationship to a singular viewer, while the programs create meaning collectively and contingently. These temporal and discursive differences become particularly interesting when the works are created in a closed circuit with each other, reframing each other as if in a mirror room, which in the end estranges us from the structure and content of both works.

CR: I experienced that when I saw the work at the opening, and then again as part of the programming. The layering distanced me from the content and form of both, creating space for new meanings. Can we talk about the specific strategies you guys used, or discovered, to create this defamiliarization within the programs?

JB: We designed the panel and workshop to be myopic in subject–in terms of aspiration or immortality–but promiscuous across modalities and language. The audience was constantly being interpolated through these different modes of address, so they had to continually renegotiate their position in relationship to both the programming and the installation.

DB: In terms of the panel, we talked a lot about crossbench praxis as a technique.

In *The Nightmare of Participation*, Markus Miessen proposes that in stepping outside of your field and putting one foot in someone else's field, you establish a place for this kind of crossbench practice to occur. It means that I am allowed to be the non-expert in someone else's field, and that becomes a point of convergence.

JC: As we experienced during "Tangents on Aspiration", this can be a useful approach to an abstract concept, estranging it by putting it through disciplinary transmutations.

Crossbench praxis also has a relationship to the "undisciplinary", another strategy that is part of the theoretical framework for BFLG's amateur hours. We always choose a topic we hardly know anything about and pretend to be taking a "how to" approach–which is partly what we do–but really we'll approach the topic from as many different angles as possible, encouraging everyone to grasp it in whatever way interests them rather than insisting that only one approach is "scholarly", is producing knowledge, and therefore valid.

DB: In this case, the fact that we are all collectively trying to learn how to do something we don't know how to do means that we all have to be ama-

teurs. So that initial distance of estrangement is already a prerequisite to our formula.

JB: I think the kind of estrangement we are talking about is specific to para-institutional artist projects whose medium is public engagement. Because these projects oscillate both inside and outside of institutional tropes, there is an inherent estrangement with both process and content–in this case, from both the process of interpreting the artwork, and its principal themes of aspiration and immortality.

CR: I think we should also address the fact that not everyone was estranged from the idea of aspiration or their approach to the work. At least one audience member was completely taken with the motivational speaker. She did not see the conflicting layers you set up, right? She saw a panel organized earnestly by an earnest institution. So, in terms of this goal of estrangement we've set up, it was variously successful. It may depend on the preparedness of the audience to be estranged. Maybe some of us are walking around with a massive sense of irony about our lives that not everyone shares?

JB: Right, I appreciate the critique of irony as a privileged position. But we can't make gross assumptions. There were other uninitiated audience members who it was clear came away totally seeing all the layers. We created this perpetual oscillation between the earnest and the ironic, the institution and para-institution, between different modalities and rubrics, which prevented a fixed position from the audience.

JC: Well yeah, and the rate at which we moved between topics amplifies the absurdity.

DB: Juxtaposing all these different modes of address allows a participant to be pretty suspicious of the currency of the institution, and understand the programming itself as a piece.

CR: I keep pushing on what was doing the work of estrangement, because I'm wondering whether institutions can (or do) create programs that do similar work. Museums use artists as their programmers, too, for example Pablo Helguera or Marc Bamuthi Joseph, who have robust artistic practices *before* they have institutional positions. Educators, too, think about creating space for criticality and different perspectives on the work.

DB: Yeah, if you look at the Hammer's *Made in L.A.* in 2012, you will see a number of collectives for whom programming was their practice. For example KCHUNG Radio, a decentralized, non-hierarchical radio network, was given a space in the museum lobby where they sub-programmed a number of shows during *Made in L.A.*, acting as a kind of Trojan horse to bring in so many other artists into the biennial, and change the context of the work in the exhibition.

JC: Or look at Machine Project's "field guides" to various institutional spaces, in which they more or less take over the campus of a place like LACMA and create a program that might otherwise not happen in those spaces, that intervenes in your experience of the artworks. Giving up a level of control to an outsider can be a way of creating space for the unpredictable within a system that demands consistency.

DB: Having an artist project that engages other artists through programming acts as a buffer between the institution and the artist, and consequently opens up many possibilities for estrangement to occur.

CR: I think we've hit upon a few of the things– the figure of the artist, the para-institution, the tangent, the rapid oscillation of mode of address, freedom from the goals of interpretation and impact–that really produced the estrangement, so that most of us walked away with a distance from our own aspirations, an awareness of the operations of aspiration within capitalism. I can think of other artist-run pedagogical projects that use similar strategies, but the call and response between *Westward Bound*, "Tangents on Aspiration," and "Amateur Hour: Immortality" offered particularly interesting possibilities for expanding the ways we look at art objects in institu-

tions. Working inside a museum, it made me want to bring social artworks into conversation with art objects more often.

Captions

1 Jonas Becker, *Almost Always*, 2013. Photograph by: Jeff Mclain. Courtesy of the artist.

2 Best Friends Learning Gang, Digital poster for "Amateur Hour: Hypnosis," 2014. Courtesy of the artists.

3 "Tangents on Aspiration" at MOAH Lancaster, 2015. Courtesy of the artists.

4 "Amateur Hour: Immortality" at MOAH Lancaster, 2015. Courtesy of the artists.

Jonas Becker *is an interdisciplinary visual artist whose photography and video installations explore how desire and belief are formed around specific sites and geography. Recent projects focus on the relationship between humans, technology, and the environment, questioning the concept of what is "natural". He is based in Los Angeles and has recently exhibited in solo shows at the Lancaster Museum of Art & History, the Craft & Folk Art Museum, and Shulamit Nazarian Gallery. His work has been featured in Art Ltd., Artillery, the Los Angeles Times and the Los Angeles Weekly.*

Dan Bustillo *is an organizer in* neverhitsend*, a host and member of* The Best Friends Learning Gang*, a facilitator of L.A.-based Crypto parties, and an advisor on the Financial Aid Department of the parafactual institution, Los Angeles College. Their practice is at once a collaborative, collective, and individual investigation of power dynamics. They are currently writing a letter and a book. Dan holds an A.A. from Miami Dade College, a B.A. from Hunter College, and an M.F.A. from the Art and Technology program at California Institute of the Arts.*

Joey Cannizzaro *is an undisciplinary artist, curator, and critic. Cannizzaro, along with Dan Bustillo, started The Best Friends Learning Gang, an experiment in disorderly, amateur education, as well as Los Angeles College, an imaginary college that supports areas of knowledge that are neglected by the academy. He is also a member of neverhitsend, a collective that performatively researches communications ideology, surveillance, and privacy. Cannizzaro's work has been seen at 356 Mission, Machine Project, Centre Pompidou, Flux Factory, Lancaster Museum of Art, 221a, ForYourArt, some times, and a lot of*

other places. He holds an MFA from California Institute of the Arts and is a professor at Los Angeles City College.

Claire Ruud *is Director of Convergent Programming at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. She has previously held positions as deputy director of the Santa Monica Museum of Art and associate director of Fluent~Collaborative in Austin, Texas. She holds an MA in contemporary art history from the University of Texas at Austin and an MBA from the Yale School of Management.*

Recuperation of Art and Activism.
An e-mail correspondence
Alistair Hudson, Jeni Fulton, Paul Stewart, Sam Thorne

The following is an email correspondence facilitated by Paul Stewart, artist and writer, in conversation with Alistair Hudson, Director at mima, and Sam Thorne, Director at Nottingham Contemporary. The contributors were chosen specifically based on both of their shifts from running art projects situated outside the institutional system in the UK–Griezdale Art Projects and Open School East respectively–and their transition to becoming directors at very mainstream institutions, specifically how this affects their politics and the work they do. Jeni Fulton, writer and editor based in Berlin, also shares with us her perspective on the limits of activism. Does this shift from outside to inside the institution suppress the intent of outside projects and their attempt at estranging from the institution?

Beginning of correspondence:
Monday, 2 November 2015, 18:03

From: Paul Stewart <_____>
To: Sam Thorne <_____>
Cc: Alistair Hudson <_____>

This correspondence will map our thoughts on the canonization or recuperation of art activism into art history and how this is translated in our biennials and exhibition programming. Is this recuperation an attempt to take ownership to avoid estranging forms of dissent emerging in the institutional structure?

My opening thoughts are:

I see a dilemma with the art and activism we are discussing due to the willingness of institutions and biennials to make space for this form of practice, since it is presenting their own critiques. Maybe it is a gentrification of art and activism. Perhaps we could see this as the Institution becoming 'transparent', but I feel that would be too generous ... Or maybe they have just institutionalised their own critique, and possibly this is the paradox of institutional critique, or the gentrification of art and activism. What are your thoughts? I always felt that art activism, as a form of estrangement, is the fact of no longer being on friendly terms with a group, in this case the neoliberal capitalism purporting the art world, but if it is recuperated, does this nullify the attempt to estrange?

From: Alistair Hudson <_____>
Date: Wednesday, 11 November 2015, 17:31
To: Paul Stewart <_____>
Cc: Sam Thorne <_____>

My first statement begins with this in mind: Could we distinguish (but not separate) Radical Performance and Radical Competence or Performative Activism and Competent Activism?

It's maybe worth trying to get away from an anxiety of being in or out, which I attribute to some kind of avant-garde hangover–something we cling onto like a piece of broken wreckage after the storm.

In a similar vein I often find activism, like radicalism, to be something we more often tend to act out, rather than apply, within the framework of art–being radical is one of the most conservative things in the socio-cultural sphere we art animals inhabit.

```
----------------------------------------------------------
```
From: Paul Stewart <_____>
To: Sam Thorne <_____>
Cc: Alistair Hudson <_____>
```
----------------------------------------------------------
```

Wreckage is a nice analogy, but I agree and disagree. I feel uncomfortable about competence, because I feel that becomes complacent and sits similar to a liberal agenda.

I would like to introduce The Silent University by the artist Ahmet Öğüt into the discussion, which could be described as an autonomous knowledge exchange platform by refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants held in galleries, such as Tate in 2012. This is an art project, a political action that gives identification to individuals who otherwise are ignored by liberal agendas inside the institution. I see The Silent University's format as resisting but possibly becoming blurred with the host institution's own mission. Sam, do you have any further thoughts on this?


```
----------------------------------------------------------
```
From: Sam Thorne <_____>
To: Paul Stewart <_____>
Cc: Alistair Hudson <_____>
```
----------------------------------------------------------
```

I do feel conflicted about what Paul describes as "the recuperation of art activism into art history". (I'm not so sure if it's recuperative—more like a first attempt at broadening the constrictive terms of the more conventional art-historical accounts of the 20th century.) Certainly, it's become increasingly familiar to see the work of collectives like, say, Group Material or Gran Fury shown alongside contemporaries from the other side of the tracks, such as Haim Steinbach or Jeff Koons. That's a function of the 1980s and even

the '90s coming to be historicized, in museum shows like *This Will Have Been* (2012) at the MCA Chicago or *NYC 1993* (2013) at the New Museum. I think there's some danger that strong graphics become too primary when they're exhibited, while some important conversations get sidelined.
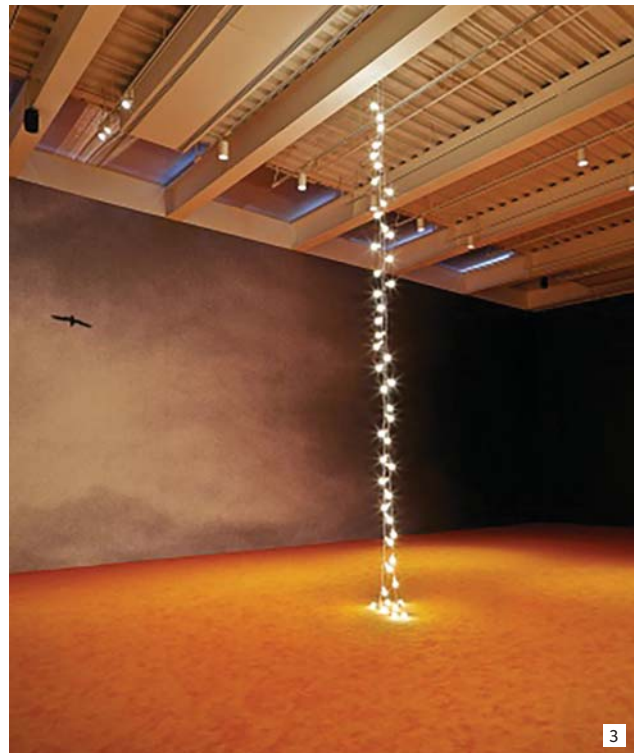
Alistair—your suggestion that activism is something that we (the art world, the institutions of art etc.) 'act out' feels convincing to me, and very familiar. This kind of performance of radical politics, lip-synched by tenured professors, *October* Marxists...

I'm less sure about 'competent' activism though. Paul worries that it's too complacent, but to me it feels a bit self-effacing or self-deprecating. You know, the anger of activism gets pulled into line by good behaviour, common decency, 'mere' competence...

aspects of what would have once been thought of as community or activist art. I spoke to Pablo Helguera about this recently, and he argued that:

Education and social work are deeply unsexy activities. They can be very cumbersome, annoying and thankless. You do these things because you are committed to ideals and projects that might supersede your own life span. The reward is in doing it, not receiving media attention or financial rewards. That's one of the realities of many artists' incursions into activism. If what motivates you is the art world being impressed with the adventures you were able to develop with your work, that's very different from inserting yourself into a social reality and trying to transform it. If you look at the history of activism, or artists who came to prominence in the '70s, it's a never-ending task.[1]

Paul–you also mentioned that you see The Silent University's format as resisting becoming blurred with the host institution's own mission. I'd agree, but I think that it managed to do this precisely because from the very beginning it sat 'between' institutions. That is, founded in 2012, it was like a collaboration between Tate and the Delfina Foundation. In the first year, Delfina hosted Ahmet, but then began to play more of an active role, hosting The Silent University's library, etc. Tate was only involved for the first year, and after that other organisations became involved, like The Showroom in London or the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford. Since then, it's moved on to very different institutions in Hamburg, Mülheim, Stockholm and Amman.

Paul–you mentioned the 'gentrification' of art and activism. Rick Lowe has said he worries that community art is being gentrified by social practice. It's telling that the term is used, because it suggests the anxiety that notionally politicized practices are not only pale imitations of the work of previous generations, but actually *gentrifying* actions. Probably not a coincidence that the title of *The New Yorker*'s profile of Theaster Gates was "The Real-Estate Artist". I can't help but think that artists like Gates– whose prominence is so important in terms of mobilizing funds, city support, etc.–are really removed from the more on-the-ground, long-term

The platform was shaped by Ahmet's visits to a number of community organisations around South London. He regarded this as his context, rather than, say, the learning spaces of Tate Modern. Education departments often pursue projects with a relatively short lifespan. Ahmet wanted to do something long-term that wasn't just a project or series of workshops, which is important. That's gestured to by his choice of title, 'university' rather than 'project'. He later found out that it's actually illegal to call some-thing a 'university' without authorisation. This is telling, because I know Ahmet is very interested in how an initiative can be unauthorised but legitimate. Rather than imitating mainstream education, he wanted to transform it on a small scale, using the facilities of existing institutions as progressive tools.

When I spoke to Ahmet about this earlier in the year, he asked, "How can we bring something like this *inside* the institution?"[2] I suppose I'm sceptical about what kind of longer-lasting impact or imprint the Silent University has on the institutions that have hosted it. Certainly I don't see it as having made any changes or transformations within Tate. I wonder if this was because it was commissioned by the Learning Research team, rather than by the exhibitions team?

There's an essay by Suhail Malik, titled "Educa-tions Sentimental and Unsentimental: Repositioning the Politics of Art and Education", where he talks about the potential of these kinds of projects to change institutions from within. He argues that the most visible artist-led education initiatives are more involved with "parasitizing other kinds of art institu-tions as expanded educational initiatives"[3]. Malick notes that biennials and publicly funded institutions "provide willing host sites for such educational endeavours, their ambitions chiming well with their aim to provide a public good through 'creative' activity, or the affirmation of creativity as public good"[4].

From: Paul Stewart <_____>
Date: Monday, 23 November 2015, 14:22
To: Sam Thorne <_____>
Cc: Alistair Hudson <_____>,
Jeni Fulton <_____>

Sam—with regard to The Silent University, you give great thought especially to how they actually don't seem to overlap with the overall museum agenda but are instead learning or sidelined activities. I think there is something in parasitizing, and maybe that is what a learning project offers, rather than an exhibition as you have stated, and I would agree that there needs to be a complete overlap of programming across learning and curating for such endeavours to even have the chance to shift agendas from within. I have cc'd Jeni Fulton, a writer and editor, as I think she has also a great perspective on this around ideas of symbolic gestures.

I think, though, that the performativity of such an activity could be a representation, or more, the simulation of change. Maybe it is through the simulation that it is possible to demonstrate how counter or opposing narratives can be formed. I agree in your point, Sam, about the scepticism of the project's longevity, as it is maybe something institu-tions need to consider about the embodiment of the aims of the project further than, say, hosting for a short-term commission. Furthermore, I think you hit the nail on the head with Malik, which is my exact scepticism of the current issues with the representa-tion of these practices at present–'creativity for public good'.

From: Jeni Fulton <_____>
To: Paul Stewart <_____>
Cc: Sam Thorne <_____>,
Alistair Hudson <_____>
Subject: Re: On the Limits of Activism

Hi all,
The recent political upheavals in Turkey have thrown the limits of artistic activism into sharp relief. The 2013 Gezi Park protest was driven in no small part by artists–a reminder that the most effective activist art takes place in public, where the bodies on the streets serve as physical disruption and symbols of protest. Confining activist art to the gallery or

museum renders it as a symbolic gesture, as other commentators in this essay have observed.

Recently, Ahmet Ögüt argued that "architects are the better activists". They are "aware of their own rights, and the collective rights to the cities we live in". The right to freedom of assembly is, after all, a universal human right, and by circumscribing public space, one automatically infringes on this. In Turkey, architects had a say in whether urban development projects would be approved–a strong indicator of their political influence, and, thus, power. This was removed following the 2013 protests–a typical reaction to ensure that dissident voices are silenced. Nevertheless, Ögüt's claim deserves further examination.

The debate over public space in Istanbul carried over to last year's biennial, Saltwater, which was curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. She included Armenian art and made numerous references to the Armenian genocide, but this was neither remarked upon nor censored. It was, after all, not 'public', but took place in privately owned spaces. "How can we then talk about the biennial as a public event where freedom of expression exists that is truly public?", Ögüt asked. Freedom of expression, of course, is a precursor to making political art, but in order for this art to have an impact, it needs to be visible in public, and perceived as political act. Else we risk 'activist' or 'political' art being reduced to Ai Weiwei's recent portrait of himself posed as the drowned Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi on a Greek beach, and a group of champagne-sipping patrons ignoring the real world implications entirely.

From: Paul Stewart <_____>
To: Jeni Fulton <_____>,
Alistair Hudson <_____>
Cc: Sam Thorne <_____>

Thank you Jeni,

You are right, we need to consider the implications of what is public and what is private, and how a gesture towards activism in private space does seem to only make those champagne-sipping patrons you mention feel better about themselves, rather than what this reaction has to the real world.

Alistair–I want to pick up on the 'performative radicalism' you mentioned at the beginning. I cannot help but think about Griselda Pollock, who stated: "[Performance] is more open, without an overwhelming history, without prescribed materials, or matters of content"[5]. Pollock is arguing against the ideas of a structure of sexism that perpetuated a gender

hierarchy, through omission and forgetfulness by institutions and the art world as a whole. I am trying to get at the importance of performance as a practice of radicalism, as a critique of a patriarchal canon, whether that is the practice of Marina Abramović, Andrea Fraser, Carolee Schneemann, the Gorilla Girls, or others. As well: David Wojnarowicz's text work *Untitled (One day this kid...)* from 1990, in relation to ACT-UP (the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power), about the persecution of homosexuality.
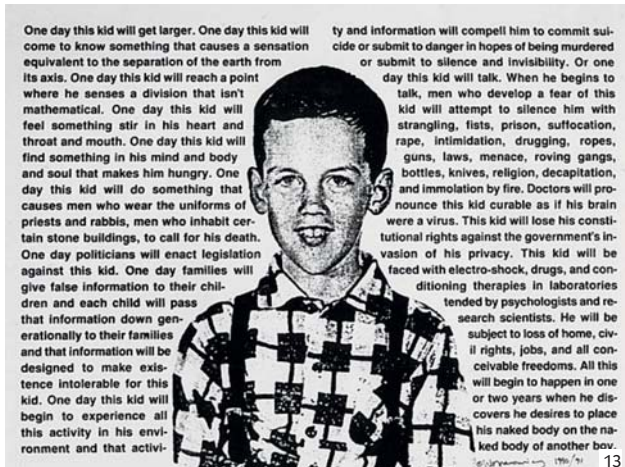
I think we should be mindful of our position and acknowledge the initial representation of performing radicalism and maybe its role to demonstrate what is often excluded. I know we are not specifically talking about this, but Jeni really highlights my issue with activism being canonized into art practice. The idea of art world elites watching a re-enactment of a real world horror to only then discuss its relationship as an artwork just gives me visions of using another's suffering for some need to make the work or institution feel worldly or, worse, wholesome.

I do not wish to go to far off-topics, but my issue with the idea of saying we 'perform radically' in the way you have described is that it is bound up in rhetoric and positions that need to be really interrogated. If we want to successfully offer this idea of 'competence activism,' which I would rather see as just activism...Maybe we should be discussing how the 'act' or 'object' is situated in terms of public/private that Jeni has brought to the fold?

From: Alistair Hudson <_____>
To: Sam Thorne <_____>
Cc: Paul Stewart <_____>

I think Pablo puts it rather well in the quote Sam has given, and it illustrates what I mean regarding the distinction between performance and competence–if we take competence to be the ability to do something successfully or efficiently–which, in the context of the traditions of community activity, actions or activism with specific groups, translates as doing something primarily for the benefit and effect of the user groups involved. The ambition here would be 'to get the job done' rather than create 'a project' to be viewed in a historical context or to do it with a high degree of aesthetic surplus (i.e. making a song and dance of it). Of course, there is not always a clear distinction between these polarities, and different projects sit at different points in a graded field between intrinsic and extrinsic, local and international narratives.

Many projects or actions only have the ambition to work within the tight parameters of a particular constituency, but often as part of that there is a need to act up to increase resources, maximise effect, or to fulfil a need to share the story with a wider community of interests. Here, we might

consider the need to raise awareness, to mobilise a population, and this often involves a degree of performativity, you could even say, to operate in the performative frame of the art world itself.

In this light, I am always hesitant to fall into the trap of saying whether something is art or not and more inclined to consider to what *degree* is something 'art', or what is its 'co-efficient of art'.

As we discuss the capture/recapture of activism into the art world, there is an equal and opposite force of capture of art by the world of activism. Here, for example, we might look at the Granby Four Streets CLT bringing in Assemble to assist in their campaign for ground-up regeneration in Toxteth. The point I'm trying to get across here is the highly complex ecology of interdependent relations that are in play when we analyse this–and the danger is that our art-historical bias has a habit of seeing all the world ultimately serving a universal art-historical narrative, which still privileges the idea of autonomous art and, to one degree or another, objecthood.

How endeavours such as the Silent University operate in relation to the 'Institution' as we know it depends greatly on whether we see our museums and galleries as autonomous zones or active players in society. The habit, of course, is the former, and in this scenario as Sam points out, these projects will always have a supplementary relationship to the main business of the day.

With Arte Útil and other related work around Usership culture, we have tried to be quite clear what the terms are–particularly through the *Criteria*–to

drive this home and break away from the mindset of an art world operating in a closed system. To my mind, there is no reason why the Institution cannot also operate in this way, but it will surely take a bold step for those in charge to test out these possibilities.

One of the dangers here is the continuing need for artists and art galleries to operate in an attention economy–to continue a need to produce art, make things visible, produce exhibitions, to generate knowledge within the conventions of museum and expert culture. In these conditions, there is an inevitable pull to perform radicalism, to simulate activism that comes primarily from a need to make art, to play the role of the radical institution, rather than allowing specific and timely demand for a project to initiate an activity.

This is something I've been wrestling with a lot–how to resist the impulse to create and maintain a planned 'artistic programme' and rather to operate in response to urgencies on the ground. It should also be said that, whether we like it or not, there are conventions in art activism that expect a particular kind of aesthetic and behaviour–actions that fall outside these parameters are often harder to assimilate into the canon. This does change over time, and we have seen an assimilation recently of projects once dismissed as too uncool to be part of a grand narrative being brought back 'into the fold'–for example, the recent discourse in Liverpool around The Blackie in the context of the Visible Art Award. However, is there still an expectation for community projects to perform a degree of art-world know-how before they can be accepted beyond their immediate conditions?

From: Paul Stewart <_____>
To: Sam Thorne <_____>
Cc: Alistair Hudson <_____>

I feel the term competence could be seen as slightly exclusionary, as I don't feel it acknowledges perspectives I mentioned earlier with Grizelda Pollock or the issues of representation. Picking up on the two definitions of the institution as either autonomous or active players as you position earlier, I think maybe it is more important for the institution to acknowledge its privilege to even choose between these two positions in the first instance.

I feel that art as an action is so important to social change. Maybe it's something that can facilitate a space to open up outside of the dominant liberal politics for different conversations and political ideologies of representation to emerge?
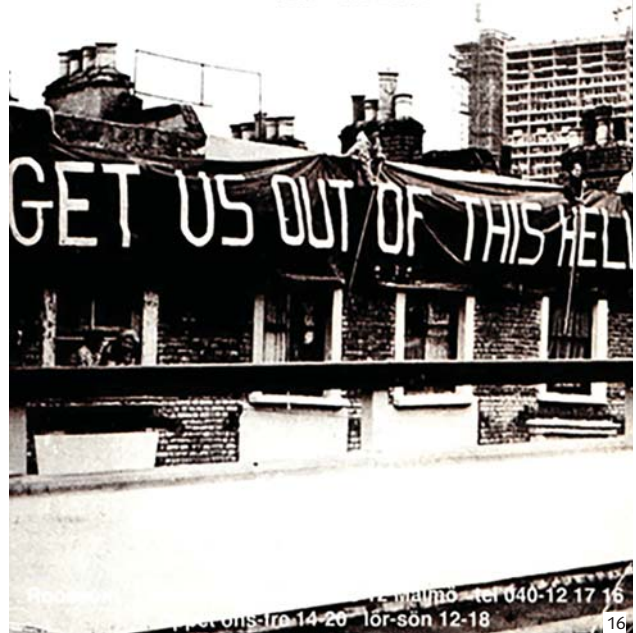

From: Sam Thorne <_____>
To: Paul Stewart <_____>
Cc: Alistair Hudson <_____>

Recently I've been going back over some of the conversations of just over a decade ago that emerged around what became known–somewhat uneasily–as new institutionalism. The question that was posed by these experiments with (mostly) mid-sized public art institutions was what might happen when curatorial thinking was directed to every aspect of an institution. Charles Esche, for example, defined his vision of Malmö's Rooseum in 2001 as part community centre, part laboratory, and part academy, with less need for the established showroom function. But funding cuts, governmental pressures, and closures meant that many of these 'new institutions' did indeed end up re-embracing their showroom function.

Over the last five or so years, it seems to me that all of us are saying that certain art institutions are trying to recalibrate again. Many institutions today are thinking about how–as Alistair suggests–activism, education, or civic action could be their *principal function* rather than some peripheral or short-term programme. But how does this get integrated with that 'showroom function'? What can we learn from what Paul calls the paradox of institutional critique, whereby critical practices become (in both senses) institutionalised?

There's gonna be some trouble, a whole house will need rebuilding
10.3 - 1.4 2001

GET US OUT OF THIS HELL

From: Alistair Hudson <_____>
To: Sam Thorne <_____>
Cc: Paul Stewart <_____>

It is possible to see institutional critique as just another manifestation of the 'showroom function,' and I must ultimately contest the conviction that art must be purely representational, a mirror of reality, and cannot ultimately operate beyond this. We must be really careful not to think that the neoliberal agenda has a monopoly on effecting change and equally that 'art practice' has a monopoly on high-lighting social issues. Many of the case studies 'Arte Útil' archives cannot be reduced to simply delivering a service but offer hybridisations and relationships in opposition to a dominant system. Art can only produce collective realisation when, through use, re-use, misuse and repurposing, it operates outside of confines of the consensus of an art world. Yet again, I would assert this is not the 'with us or without us' question that this debate has unfortunately been drawn into of late, and we should allow for a more

complex paradigm that accommodates the ecology within which we all operate. As such, the reflective role of art is not lost with the introduction of having a useful function, but rather it is embedded in a broader socio-cultural matrix.

From: Paul Stewart <_____>
To: Sam Thorne <_____>
Cc: Alistair Hudson <_____>

Alistair, I do feel you are right about institutional critique 101, but isn't that what we are trying to locate is a space to reclaim some level of agency to critique the dominant structures around us? Maybe we are trying to find how to critique the institution of institutional critique without getting lost in hyperbole and rhetoric? Also I feel this conversation has so far avoided the 'with us or without us' issue you pose, but focused around ideas of recuperation, voice, ownership and the ability to critique. Maybe we should be listening to the questions, 'What about us?' or 'What about something else?' Might those be excluded from the broader socio-cultural matrix you mention? These aspects relate, I think, to what Sam is talking about with a new Institutionalism, but correct me if I am wrong. Is the ambition of some aspects of art practice to open up a space for consideration in which these things might take place?

In reflection, I would say the role of the institution is to be critiqued continuously as to make sure that what might have become invisible to our already predefined subjectivities is not excluded or sidelined, as we have seen throughout art history. What is haunting from this conversation is Jeni's imagery of 'activist' art being reduced to Ai Weiwei's work posing as Alan Kurdi, and a group of champagne-sipping patrons watching on.

That is what concerns me about the institution's/art world's current take on art and activism as a genre of art. Maybe we just need to estrange from this and look for something else?

End of correspondence:
Tuesday, 9 February 2016, 12:32

Captions
1 Image of "The Silent University Archive" at Tate Modern, 21.11.2012. Tate Gallery, 2012.

2 Lorraine O'Grady, Art Is... , "This Will Have Been: This Will Have Been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s" Installation view; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2012.
3 Gran Fury: Read My Lips "Welcome to America," left, a billboard sponsored by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1989, waspart of the show about the art collective Gran Fury, at New York University's 80WSE gallery, 2012.
4 Jeff Koons, Play-Doh, Polychromed aluminum; 120 × 108 × 108 in. (304.8 × 274.3 × 274.3 cm). Bill Bell Collection, 1994–2014. © Jeff Koons
5 Haim Steinbach, Untitled (locks, friar, sister) sculpture, Wood, metal, plastic and lacquer, displayed: 860 x 840 x 410 mm 1987. © Haim Steinbach
6 "NYC 1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star," Exhibition view: New Museum. Photo: Benoit Pailley, 2013.
7 Theaster Gates surrounded by some of the reclaimed raw material of his trade. The Guardian, Photograph: Sara Pooley, 2014.
8 Silent University Identification Cards "Former West: Document, Constellations Prospects at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2013.
 9 A Turkish art group preforms in support of protesters at Taksim Square Uriel Sinai/Getty Images, 2013.
10 Ai Wei Wei Recreating the image of the drowned toddler Alan Kurdi, 2015 Image shared via Twitter by David Beard, Screenshot, 2016.
11 The original image that Ai Weiwei referenced of Alan Kurdi, 2015.
12 Carolee Schneemann, "'Interior Scroll" Photo by Anthony McCall, 1975.
13 David Wojnarowicz (1954 – 1992), Untitled (One Day This Kid...), 1990.
14 A Showroom for Granby Workshop by Assemble, Tate Britain, Turner Prize Image by Keith Hunter, 2015.
15 Museum of Arte Útil, 2013–2014 Installation view: Van Abbemuseum, Photo: Peter Cox, 2013, © Tania Bruguera.
16 Exhibition poster of "There is gonna be some trouble, a whole house will need rebuilding" at Rooseum, Malmö, 10.3-1.4.2001. Design by Andreas Nordström, 2001.

Notes
1 Sam Thorne in conversation with Pablo Helguera, 2015.
2 Sam Thorne in conversation with Ahmet Ögüt, 2015.
3 Suhail Malik, 2011. "Educations Sentimental

and Unsentimental: Repositioning the Politics of Art and Education." http://www.bard.edu/ccs/redhook/educations-sentimental-and-unsentimental-repositioning-the-politics-of-art-and-education/. Red Hook Journal. Accessed: 11.01.2015.

    4 Ibid.

    5 Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-85,* Pandora, London, 1987, p. 45.

Alistair Hudson is the Director of Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art. Hudson's mission for mima is to be a Useful Museum, as an institution dedicated to the promotion of art as a tool for education and social change. Former Deputy Director of Grizedale Arts in the Lake District, which gained critical acclaim for its radical approaches to working with artists and communities that were based on the idea that art should be useful and not just an object of contemplation. He is co-director of the Asociación de Arte Útil with Tania Bruguera and a jury member for the 2015 Turner Prize.

Jeni Fulton is a writer and editor based in Berlin. She will receive her PhD from Humboldt University, Berlin, in 2016, and is art/commissioning editor for Sleek Magazine. She contributes to Spike Art Quarterly and frieze.com, among others.

Paul Stewart is an artist, curator, and writer based in the UK, currently a PhD-by-practice researcher funded by IDCA (Institute for Design Culture and Arts), focusing on the role of the gallery as a site for learning. His work has been shown recently as part of the Edinburgh Artist Moving Image Festival 2015, and at Bank Street Arts Gallery. Stewart was the curator of the 'Situation Unit' commission series at mima (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art) in 2015. His next book chapter, "Art and Commitment: Galleries Without Walls", will be published this year in a book collection on Adult Education by Sense Publishing.

Sam Thorne is director of Nottingham Contemporary, a contributing editor and columnist at Frieze magazine, and a co-founder of Open School East. His book, School: Conversations on Art and Self-Organised Education, will be published this year by Sternberg Press.

Ken Gonzalez-Day

Three Graces, Los Angeles, CA, 2015.
Lightjet print, 22 x 38 in.
Courtesy the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

Past Present, 2015.
Lightjet print, 22 x 30 in.
Courtesy the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

Untitled (Henry Weekes, *Bust of an African Woman [based on a photographic image of Mary Seacole];* and Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, *Bust of Mme. Adélaïde Julie Mirleau de Neuville, née Garnier d'Isle,* The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA), 2011. Courtesy the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

*   Ken Gonzales-Day is a Los Angeles-based artist whose interdisciplinary practice considers the historical construction of race and the limits of representational systems ranging from the lynching photograph to the museum display. "The Searching for California Hang Trees" series offered a critical look at the lack of documentation of lynching sites, while the "Erased Lynching" series sought to address the larger erasure of Asians, blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans from the history of lynching. The "Profiled" series looked even further back into history to consider how the sculptural depiction of race, and its display, contributed to racial formation today.*

Propositions: Estrangement through Art, Learning and Curatorial Frameworks
Lilian Cameron, Suzana Milevska, Jared Pappas-Kelley, Adrian Shaw, Paul Stewart
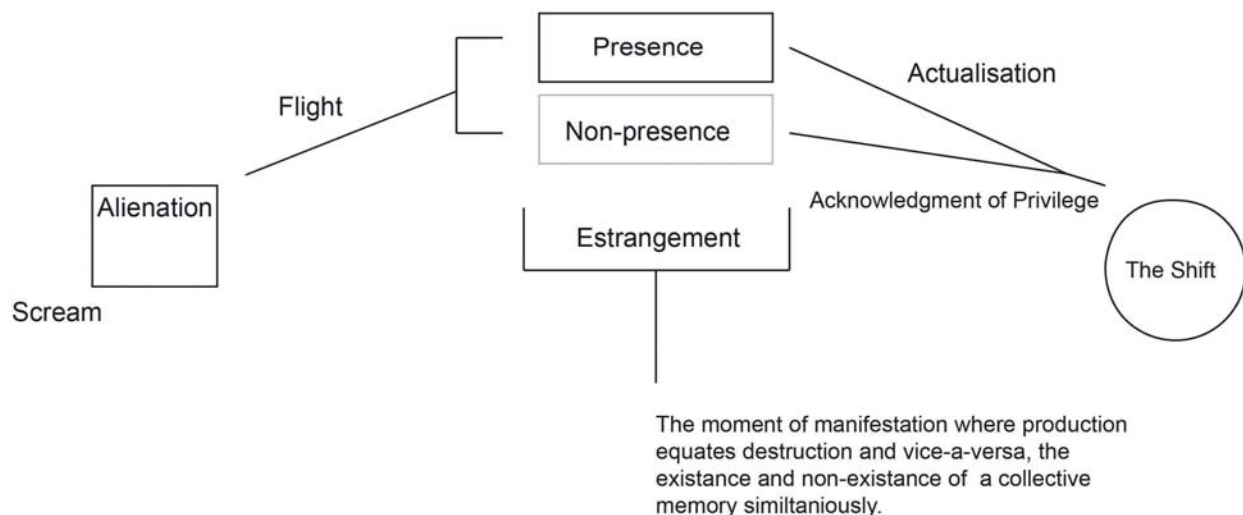
fig. 1: Paul Stewart, *Scream to Shift,* 2015.

The rationale of these propositions is to explore the role of the artist in relation to applying estrangement to different practices and environments in an arts context. Some of the propositions focus on the production of learning environments as artistic practices relative to curatorial programming; others look to the position of cause and effect and to ideas of over-identification.

The responses are anecdotal and in a variety of formats: theoretical, poetic, and reflective. Practitioners, artists, and curators were asked to create short propositions to the loose idea of applying estrangement into their own work context after being presented with the diagram above (fig. 1). Each takes a different stance or starting position to question if estrangement is able to work in his or her own practice or how it might work in practice towards a larger idea.

Creation of work as an instrument of change.
Paul Stewart

Talking of Aesthetics

Aesthetics is **"a hamster in its wheel."**

It is the constant repetition and reproduction of the same act, never learning from the same mistake until replete. Over and over and over and over and over and over again, repeating the same actions until the wheel breaks. Making the intellectualised unintelligible.

But broken wheels can be sexy.

Talking of doing

How do we speak of thinking politically about how we respond to criticism and to praise? We talk about the process of doing in terms of the precarious artist, and, looking towards a commitment of practice to disfigure the status quo, we produce our own negativity as we entrap ourselves in our own doing.

Design creates depoliticised design.

Does that even matter?

If the answers is "no," move on.

Talking of collective

Rethink how we work collectively: Are we supposed to work? We usually think about collaboration as a process of compromise and negotiation. But what does it really mean?

No compromise, no middle ground.

Aesthetics is sexy.

Aesthetics is a cage without borders.

Long Live Aesthetics.

Uta Barth's Distrust of Narrative Cause /
Effect and Agnes Martin's Surrendered Perfection
Jared Pappas-Kelley

Lately I have been enamoured with artist writings, and the notion of the artist as thinker and theorist amid a sort of intimate estrangement or derailment that takes place. In some cases these types of writings only obscure an artist's work, but at their best, they give voice to individuals occupying and making sense of their world.

***

Writing is most alive when directly engaged in the experience–as a cartography of an encounter or inner space. In an interview, photographer Uta Barth was asked why narrative annoyed her. Barth's response captures a lot of what I have been thinking:

> Narrative holds out for a certain inevitability, it places deep faith in cause and effect. Narrative is about reconstructing a chain of meaningful events based on a known outcome. I'm curious about visual art that's about the visual. *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees* is the title of Robert Irwin's biography. Originally, it was a line in a Zen text. Narrative in art makes

us think about all sorts of interesting things, but it derails the engagement with a visual experience.[1]

However, how does this translate over to writing, which is essentially narrative? I am interested in this engagement as an enlivening experience that allows the text to break down this ordering of cause and effect. As a writer I have been obsessing about narrative, and how it can often feel stagy and forced. It cuts away appendages for the sake of logic and stacking a synthetic sense of cause and effect. Plotting. Without meaning to, writing tends to become more linear/narrative than necessary. This might give the work a thrust, but I am also interested in going back and re-developing the more non-linear feel of writing centred in engagement–like now that I ate my vegetables, it's time for pudding.

***

Agnes Martin's *Writings* read like art-torah, striving towards an inner perfection and finding a place of honesty in one's efforts. Through these collected texts, Martin parallels her painting–lines in grids with subtle colour–attempting to illuminate her process while offering advice for young artists. Her ideas are profound; yet they resonate with the daily-ness of life as she seeks an underlying awareness of perfection. I find myself wishing I had some sort of Agnes Martin microchip installed in my head (keeping these ways of thinking at the forefront of my thoughts about art and writing)–with her foregrounding of the engagement with perception and a falling away of false expectations. She is wise in exactly the way I am not.

At the centre of her ideas are notions of Truth and Perfection. Both concepts were historically at the centre of art, but nowadays seem sidelined as old-fashioned or outdated, or maybe just too big. Art has become mired in a network of contingency, but Martin's ideas elucidate a path of engagement–hinting at universal guiding truths that acknowledge the uniqueness of experience and individual consciousness. She warns that other "people's lives will look better to us than our own, more interesting and more rewarding"[2], but that this leads away from the truth of our own work. "To correct this state of mind you must say to yourself: I want to live a true life"[3]. I often get caught in a process of disappearance where experiencing gets lost in the concept of how things ought to be, and it is here that Martin reminds that one must always return to a singular engagement with what is at hand.

At work in Martin's writings on art is a notion that our world is an approximation of an idealized perfection. At its heart is the idea that creating art is a process of translating ideas from our minds into an imperfect world that mirrors this model. Here the task is to break the mirror in order to remove the gap between the idea and what we experience. Martin states that happiness is found in the brief instances when one becomes aware of this perfection, moments of insight. It comes through courting inspiration in our work, but our vocation is in the striving to perceive.

We must surrender the idea that this perfection that we see in the mind or before our eyes is obtainable or attainable. It is really far from us. We are no more capable of having it than the infant who tries to eat it. But our happiness lies in our moments of awareness of it[4].

Perceiving for Martin is of the utmost importance, and in this perceiving one must be vigilant in the truthfulness of how one sees. Engaged in the moment and open to inspiration, this is not an intellectual pursuit, but one of seeing.

Thinking; we consider that which we perceived. It is a secondary experience. Thinking compares everything that we have perceived with everything that we are perceiving at the moment[5].

As someone who is frequently accused of thinking too much and over-thinking, Martin's ideas are a useful balm. I need more engagement in the process of perceiving the clarity in the work I create, while cutting loose intellectual prattle and constant second-guessing. I am enamoured with her assertion that all true art needs to fail in order to succeed, because through this collapse, honest work emerges. Illustrating the tug of fear and pride on the validity of creating, Martin leaves us with this image:

> For those who are visual minded I will say: there seems to be a fine ship at anchor. Fear is the anchor, convention is the chain, ghosts stalk the decks, the sails are filled with Pride and the ship does now move.[6]

Turner's corpse lies on a chaise-longue green
Adrian Shaw

Turner's corpse lies on a chaise-longue green. His death mask face hangs open in front of his last painting. His hands can no longer draw or paint. His fingers are soft and limp. Are we there? Present? Who is present? Who was present at the moment of death? The paint dries. Curating is silly. Every little girl loves a story. And I mentioned to him that "Curating is so over!" Be yet more modern! More mobile! More fluid! Etc, yep![7] How do you consume this moment? Let us wrap it up a series of infinitely thin moments. Thin delicate memories. Let's draw the fire, draw the memories up and in a flash, devour and consume! Turner's death mask is hiding in the Tate archive. A copy of John Keats' face hides at Keats House, at 10 Keats Grove. Sit with the corpse for a while. Sit in the archive with the death mask, mouth open for the world, for history. What are you learning? Between the body and Turner's last painting, moisture lightly evaporating in the September sun. Learning with art is at certain times also quite silly. Go and learn with a lamppost. A rock. A corpse. Climb into a bucket full of pungent bile. Swim around. Swim around. Around and around, like a good little frog until it solidifies and forms a little mountain of red crystal. Jump onto the bile island and leap out into the world and go tell the world. Go tell it on a mountain. Between the damp white paint drying on the front step, between the t-shirt hanging on the washing line drying in the last gasp of summer wind. Between the drying slither of bird shit and next door's cat. Between the apple tree and the gently pulsating breeze-soaked net curtain. Between all these and the corpse. Turner's canvas flapping in the Margate wind. What are you learning? Curating supposedly incarnating modernity. In a series of little anecdotes. Oh, I am so honoured to have your knowledge bestowed upon me, into me, washing all over me soft and gentle like a Timotei waterfall. I've never felt so alive! A static camera frames and streams this tableau live. I lean in to be in shot. I wave. Then I walk away and fall into the abyss.

Please rate your quality of estrangement
Lilian Cameron

Estrangement happens regularly in the gallery and museum, and it is a key part of many a visitor's experience, yet it is curiously absent from the lexicons at hand in these places, particularly in learning and public programmes.

Commonly, the aim is to offer enjoyment, to welcome in, and for the visitor to leave with a sense of positivity or fulfilment that compels them to return and, above all, to participate again. Visitors are asked not only, "Did you enjoy your visit today?" **but also** "Will you wish to take part again?" **and** "Are you satisfied with what it offered you?"

In such contexts, estrangement feels remote and far removed, but it is an experience we would do well to listen better to audiences, and not only because it is everyday and commonplace. In estrangement, we experience ourselves as separate, and there is a possibility for independence and critique in such experi-ence–for the knowledge of a perspective outside a framework. A perceived negativity about the word might be the hinge-point to something positive: an experience of difference or otherness in an environment, the realisation of a personal, subjective critique.

There are different kinds of estrangement in the museum and gallery: gut-instinct dislike, physical discomfort, offence or outrage, and a speculative sense of outsiderness or disregard. Each has a varied impetus and comes from a distinct place, with the potential to open onto forms of differentiation, some of which may be more familiar than others.

How might recognising or allowing space for estrangement look in practice, in a context of learning or curatorial programming? Recently, learning has occupied a certain edge in listening closely to audiences and reflecting critically on this practice, but is increasingly beholden to temporary or external funding that seeks–practitioners fear–particular outcomes and evaluations, as well as benefac-tors who don't necessarily see virtue in estrangement.

Curating has at times remained free of this responsibility, particularly in the more elitist contexts, and this a freedom [that] populist sites might wrestle back for themselves and make a part of their lexicons, but on their own terms.

What if galleries and museums were **to create space for estrangement** by listening to it when asked, or by recognising its value, from a distance? What if we were to advocate for a radical unknowing of participant experience, allowing it room to breathe in the gallery and museum?

"Infelicitous" Participatory Art Speech Acts and the Educational Turn: The failed promises and hopes of participatory arts for democratisation of society on the neoliberal stage
Suzana Milevska

I want to point to certain paradoxes within the so-called "participatory shift" in the arts and its promises for democratisation of society. The promise of "enhanced participation" often creates new hierarchies and differentiations of audiences, and political correctness—as one of the promised principles of such practices—can result in de-motivating effects among artists who belong neither to the activist circles nor to the underprivileged or minority groups[8]. This ironically induces a vicious circle that recuperates and perpetuates the elitist and commercial art system that is initially the main target of participatory art.

The fulfilment of a promise was dubbed a "felicitous act" by J. L. Austin. According to Austin, the difference between what one says and what one does depends on the context and circumstances, and subsequently the context can substantially affect the fulfilment of the promise[9]. Participatory art practices cannot fulfil the promises for democracy and emancipation, since from the outset they are linked to the contemporary neoliberal social contexts in which they operate. Therefore, I'd rather locate the main reason behind the failure of such a systemic "mission impossible" in the inner contradiction of contemporary democratic societies than in the structure of such art projects.

Participatory art projects appear to establish a new and more productive context for such estrangements and open up new potentialities for a bigger societal impact of contemporary art practices in general. On the other hand, it became obvious that by organizing participatory art projects, art institutions often compensate for the lack of establishing and developing a profound and long-term relation with their audiences (only turned into numbers and statistics for further grant applications for funding). Through such a subtle transfer of their programming and societal responsibilities to the artists they instrumentalise, participatory art acts as a kind of "liability reserve" in relation to their societal role.

Participatory art practices often bring the artists to civil society-related activism and collaboration in solidarity with existing and newly established activist organisations in order to overcome the paradox of democracy in neoliberal times[10].

However, authors such as Jodi Dean and Slavoj Žižek have already pointed out the fundamental contradictions between democracy and stamping neoliberal societal developments. For example, Dean argued that while the left attempts to develop and defend a collective vision of equality and solidarity, the ascendance of "communicative capitalism", the consumerism-driven gridlocks, the privileging of the self over group interests, and the embrace of the language of victimization constantly undermine such attempts[11]. Slavoj Žižek went so far as to announce the split between the two: "The eternal marriage between capitalism and democracy has ended"[12].

Participatory art projects aiming towards democratization could be linked to the older philosophical progressivist assumptions proposed by John Dewey, mainly in the realm of the critique of education as a social change instrument[13]. The "participatory turn" and the "educational turn" are often interlinked through

artistic and curatorial contemporary art projects that engage with critical education and pedagogy, mostly based on the ideas of the alternative and critical pedagogy of Ivan Ilich, Paulo Freire, Peter McLaren, and Jacques Rancière, but yet they happen within established institutional "walls."

Most of these projects are welcomed by society as a preferred mild social critique, which eventually recuperates the critiqued institutions, since most likely it perpetuates the status quo rather than focusing on delivering a more direct political critique of social inequality and injustice.

To conclude, the paradigm shift from objects to subjects in participatory art cannot be discussed apart from the general societal context and without taking into consideration its pedagogical effect on all involved parties (governmental policies, economic changes, institutional interdependence of cultural policy, decision-makers of real politics, local governance deliberation, etc.). Nevertheless the wider socio-political and economical context in which art is produced and practiced inevitably over-writes the ambitious goals of participatory art. This calls for further critical distinctions between participatory art projects depending on the different concrete historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts where they promise the change towards democratization and induce a certain hope, and for a discussion how different participatory artists have positioned themselves in societal and political contexts.

Notes

1 Lee, P.M., Higgs, M., and Gilbert-Rolfe, J., *Uta Barth*, Phaidon, London; New York, 2004.

2 Martin, A. & Schwarz, D., *Agnes Martin: Writings,* Hatje Cantz; Art Books International [distributor], Ostfildern-Ruit; Portchester, 2005. p. 113.

3 Ibid., p. 113.

4 Ibid., p. 69.

5 Ibid., p.74.

6 Ibid., p. 89.

7 Châtelet, Gilles, *To Live and Think Like Pigs: The Incitement of Envy and Boredom in Market Democracies*, Trans. by Robin Mackay, Urbanomics, 2014.

8 Thomas Nagel, *The Mortal Questions,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1979, pp. 91-105.

9 John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Ed. by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà. 2nd Ed.,

Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1975, p. 100.

10 Paul Clements, "The Recuperation of Participatory Art Practices," *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, No. 30.1, 2011, pp.18-30.

11 See: Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics,* Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., 2009.

12 Nicolas Dutent, 2013. "The eternal marriage between capitalism and democracy has ended," Interview with Slavoj Žižek, Trans. by Harry Cross, *L'Humanité* (English edition), 2 September. Accessed 02.04.15. http://www.humaniteinenglish.com/spip.php?article2332.

13 John Dewey, "Education and Social Change," in F. Schultz, *SOURCES, Notable Selections in Education*, 3rd ed.)*,* McGraw-Hill Dushkin, New York, 2001, pp. 333–341.

Lilian Cameron *is a writer and researcher in the arts who is currently based in the UK.*

Suzana Milevska *is an art historian and theorist of visual art and culture. Her research and curatorial projects focus on postcolonial critique of hegemonic power regimes of representation and various institutional policies and representations of marginalized communities in postsocialist transitional societies, feminist, participatory art practices, and artists with a Roma background. In 2004 Milevska was a Fulbright Senior Research Scholar at Library of Congress. She holds a Ph.D. in Visual Cultures from Goldsmiths College London. She was the first Endowed Professor for History of Central and South European Art Histories at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and a visiting professor at the Visual Culture Unit of the Technical University Vienna (2013-2015). In 2015, she curated the symposium and edited the reader On Productive Shame, Reconciliation and Agency (Sternberg Press, in print) that offers a postcolonial analysis of the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and race. In 2012, Milevska was awarded the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory.*

Jared Pappas-Kelley *is a curator, researcher, and visual artist based in the UK. Much of his current work focuses on ideas of an instability in the art object and the intersection between practice and theory—examining art as a method for understanding an object's coming together through its undoing. His forthcoming book, Solvent Form, examines art in relation to destruction and looks at the warehouse fire at Momart in 2004 and works indirectly destroyed by art thief Stéphane Breitwieser.*

Adrian Shaw *is an artist, curator, and producer based in London.*

Paul Stewart *is an artist, curator and writer based in the UK, currently a PhD by practice researcher funded by IDCA (Institute for Design Culture and Arts), focusing on the role of the gallery as a site for learning. His work has been shown recently as part of the Edinburgh Artist Moving Image Festival 2015, and at Bank Street Arts Gallery. Stewart was the curator of the 'Situation Unit' commission series at mima (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art), 2015. His next book chapter, Art and Commitment: Galleries Without Walls, will be published this year in a book collection on Adult Education by Sense Publishing.*

Curating Architecture: The Architecture of Estrangement
Alison Hugill in conversation with Carson Chan

The term 'architecture' has become ambiguous, producing a defamiliarizing effect when strategically used out of context. While generally referring to any complex structure, the term 'architecture' has come to represent, among other things, the conceptual framework and logical organization of systems. Thus the phrase "curating architecture" gains nuance—it signifies the act of curating architecture (buildings) as subject matter and, simultaneously, the structural process of curating itself.

Is a synthesis between these two interpretations possible, or does the phrase "curating architecture" depend on its defamiliarizing effect? Originating from the term *ostranenie*, coined by Viktor Shklovsky in his essay "Art as Device", defamiliarization refers to the artistic production of information that imparts the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. If applied successfully, defamiliarization prolongs the active process of perception, enabling critical thought. The link between defamiliarization and architecture is precisely the temporality of perception, whether in built space or in the virtual forms of infrastructure space.

In this conversation, Alison Hugill discusses curating architecture with Carson Chan, an architecture writer and curator who co-curated the 4th Marrakech Biennale 2012, acted as Executive Curator of the Biennial of the Americas 2013, and co-organised the conference "Exhibiting Architecture. A Paradox?" at Yale School of Architecture in 2013. Hugill's line of questioning draws from her research on Marxist-feminist politics and aesthetic theories of community, communication, and communism. She has also curated several architecture exhibitions in Norway and Germany.
Benjamin T. Busch

Alison Hugill: The issue at hand is 'defamiliarization' and the potential poetics of exhibiting architecture, a staple of the 'everyday' taken out of context. How does the exhibition of architecture, both as the form and the content, provoke estrangement? With reference to your curatorial experience, is that effect better achieved in public space or in a traditional gallery or exhibition space?

Carson Chan: Well, as you said, the act of removing architecture from the everyday world and placing it on display produces a new set of demands and aesthetics for the architectural object. Factual communicability is privileged over the immersive experience, and architecture is presented as a set of instances—shown through models, drawings, photographs—rather than a process. Exhibited through representation, the architectural work more easily assumes the mantle of single authorship, where in situ, the same thought is almost impossible. In this sense, estrangement is built into the exhibition of architecture. Exhibitions make the places, structures, and durations we generally ignore into objects of scrutiny. To flip your question on its side, I see curating architecture or architecture exhibition-making becoming 'familiarized', insofar that it is now commonly seen as something that anyone with knowledge or interest in architecture can do. This is not the case. Curating is a separate discipline. Within the architecture world, to curate an exhibition is unfortunately not seen as a specialized skill the same way that making a building is.

AH: When did these questions begin for you?

CC: At PROGRAM, the interdisciplinary exhibition space I opened in 2006 in Berlin with Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga, we wanted to question

the conventions of architecture exhibitions by borrowing the display techniques of other fields. We asked artists, musicians, dancers, and writers to make architecture exhibitions in their own way. In doing this we were trying to bypass both the impulse to simply put small buildings inside a gallery space, and the convention of exhibiting architecture by proxy, through representation. Could other disciplines show us new, direct ways to access architectural ideas?

For the Biennial of the Americas in Denver, I had the opportunity to engage the physical city as an exhibition. I have always been impressed by architecture exhibitions like the Weissenhof Siedlungen in Stuttgart (1927), or Hansa Viertel in Berlin (1957)—entire neighbourhoods of fully functioning buildings. The 2013 edition of the biennial was called *Draft Urbanism*, referring both to the idea that cities are never complete—that they are always a draft version of a changing ideal—as well as to Denver's historically rooted beer culture. Like the German examples, I too wanted to turn downtown Denver into a giant exhibition. We exhibited art on all the downtown billboards, and videos on public LED screens, and we exhibited museum labels on several buildings that were pertinent to the exhibition's theme. We saw that just by putting a label on a building, we were able to transform something that people generally walk past into an object on display. Estrangement, paradoxically, allows us to become familiarized with the already familiar.

AH: You mention the idea of single authorship, which gets built into exhibitions of architecture that are conveyed through representation (models/photographs/renders). Is this kind of estrangement, or alienation, of the various forms of labour that go into the making of architectural works an issue that informs your approach to exhibition-making?

CC: Well, to clarify, though the persistent myth of the single author in architecture has over-privileged the architect's biography in architectural discourse, the identity of the architect or the firm is still important as it lends a measure of accountability to the designs. No matter the profession, authorial ownership of work does ensure a level of quality. In any case, I see myself as an author of exhibitions, but like architecture, exhibitions are always co-produced by the visitor or user.

AH: A recent proliferation of architecture collectives and non-hierarchical or bottom-up working configurations has put emphasis on the community (loosely defined) as agents in a given project's design. I often wonder about the emancipatory potential of these kinds of socially engaged works or, more importantly, the politics they aim to articulate and what their effects might be beyond the installation of the work. For example, how those relationships are maintained outside of the budget of the work and the presence of the artist/architect/collective who initiates it.

CC: Elín Hansdóttir's *Mud Brick Spiral* (2012), commissioned for the Marrakech Biennale, exemplifies for me the co-constitutive nature of both exhibitions and architecture. At the time, Elín was an artist-in-resident at Dar Al-Ma'mûn, an art foundation founded by and located within a luxury resort on the outskirts of Marrakech. Elín made a large-scale sculpture—or architectural folly, depending on how you to see it—the plan of which was a spiral. The whole thing was made by hand out of mud bricks. She formed a small team of helpers from the village named Tassoultante next to her residency. It was located on an empty plot of land in Tassoultante next to the boundary walls of the resort. Before long, the villagers began to develop a sense of ownership for it. Children would come every day to watch the construction. Others would make food for the team. To allow Elín quick access to the construction site, the directors of Dar Al-Ma'mûn made a door between the resort and the village, which has introduced a new spatial relationship between the two communities. In this way, the installation contributed to the spatial configuration of both the residency and the village beyond the bounds of its physical form. Dar Al-Ma'mûn subsequently allowed villagers to access their collection of books. The villagers also began to hold town meetings next to Elín's installation. Apparently, they never had these meetings before, as if one unusual form of communication (the installation) justified another (the town meeting). Clearly, any

new structure introduced to Tassoultante would have produced some kind of social change, no matter how slight that change may be. This change is nevertheless the result of a discursive system including the biennial institution, its funding, the history of the location, the various audience groups, the artists, as well as the curators. I think it's much more interesting to think of the artwork, the architectural object, or the exhibited object as a discourse network rather than as a discrete thing.

AH: As you mentioned, we often see architectural exhibitions presented through photography, video, sculpture, and quantitative research. What contemporary possibilities do you see for exhibiting architecture in its own medium, beyond commercial instances?

CC: So many of these conventions of exhibiting architecture come from academic and commercial practices. The Beaux Arts system mandated that plans, sections, and elevations be exhibited for review. The presentation board was developed through corporate demands. Not to discount these traditions, but I don't think we have really investigated the possibilities of how architecture can be exhibited. Part of the way forward includes a redefinition of what architecture is, and that perhaps it should be understood more as an umbrella term that includes buildings, rather than its synonym. I see architecture as a spatial practice of many intersecting considerations. It makes social, political, economic, environmental, technical, and informational forces manifest. How these things become singularly manifest does not necessarily take the form of a building. However this takes shape will suggest different modes of presentation.

AH: In your 2010 *Domus* article, "Exhibiting Architecture: show, don't tell", you write that one of the aims of architectural curators is "to cultivate an audience with the spatial sensitivity to engage with the built environment in a conscious and potentially more responsible way". What are some of the challenges and solutions to society's overall obliviousness towards architecture as an art form? What do you mean by 'responsible'?

CC: I think this question is particularly poignant as we continue to degrade our environment. That we don't regard our buildings and cities with particular care is connected to the difficulty of getting people to care about the unnecessary degradation of our resources, not to mention the non-human natural world in general. Part of the problem is that the scale and complexity of a biome, a city, or even a building is too vast to communicate in a succinct way. These things are also not discrete objects, but part of larger networks of influence. We're good at thinking about a sculpture, a song, or a book. For me, there's something accommodating with projects that imagine a city as an object, even just as a heuristic method. O.M. Unger's "Green Archipelago" project (1977), which basically imagined West Berlin as an exhibition—buildings became artworks, and the encircling Berlin Wall became gallery walls—is one such example. The photograph of the Earth from the moon similarly forced us to see the world as a discrete object. Spaceship Earth is a capsule, and this forces us to reconsider the way we use what we have. Through analogy, something complex, immense, and unwieldy is able to enter more easily into discourse. Being sensitive to our built environment could make us more acute to the effects we have on the greater world.

AH: You say that you find the idea of using a neighbourhood or section of a city as an exhibition space, with 1:1 buildings as the objects of exhibition,

accommodating. There seems to have been a strong tradition of this kind of exhibition in Germany, particularly the Modernist examples you've cited. Can you talk about how this idea has translated, for you, into contemporary projects (Draft Urbanism, Aurora?) and whether the effect is still relevant in a digital age?

CC: Seeing the city explicitly as an exhibition has its dangers. Built during the Cold War, the Hansa Viertel was organized by the West German government to show off Western design and ideals to the East. Even back then, there was a sense that the built world has a parallel existence in various media like newspapers, magazines, and now the Internet. Buildings are being built, and cities are being designed as much for how they serve a function as how they appear in photographs.

AH: Do you think this kind of citywide exhibition is still relevant in the digital age?

CC: Because buildings have such symbolic and representational significance, I think it's particularly important in the digital age to engage the public with the physicality of the lived world. This is an issue I have elaborated on in the past, particularly in my essay called "Measure of an Exhibition: Space, Not Art, is the Curator's Primary Material" (*Fillip 13*, 2011). As with Denver, a similar strategy was employed for my exhibition at Aurora Dallas 2015. My exhibition was called *Second Hand Emotions*. It was comprised of the blocks containing the Meyer Symphony Hall, and the Cathedral Shrine of the Virgin in Guadalupe, which houses the second biggest Catholic congregation in the United States. As the title of the show suggests, I'm interested in the vicarious experiences of the digital age we so often accept as first-hand experiences. We've grown accustomed to distance and representation. Often times we say we've "seen" artworks or buildings when we've in fact seen images of them online. Aurora is a biennial exhibition that has been attracting more than 50,000 visitors in one night, and I was attracted to the idea of making an exhibition in which the physical presence of a large audience was guaranteed. I saw it as an opportunity to try to engage the public's attention in a way that would hopefully make them think about the spaces they inhabit.

AH: Our potential global reach is huge these days. How can architecture, as a predictably physical manifestation, stubbornly located in a specific spatial

or geographical context, compete with art forms that adapt easily to the ephemerality of online networks?

CC: I've been very interested in Arseny Avraamov's *Simfonia gudkov* (1917)—a symphony played by navy ship horns, sirens, car horns, train whistles, factory sirens, artillery guns, and so on. By scoring each urban "instrument", it transformed the city from a place of sound to a place of sonic discourse, of music. I was thinking of this piece when I invited Dan Bodan, a Berlin-based Canadian musician, to compose a new piece for the Guadalupe Cathedral's bell tower. The bell, or carillon, is both a maker of urban sounds and a musical instrument, and I liked that Dan would be composing a piece that would be heard throughout downtown Dallas without ever having been there. In this case, the people of Dallas would be given a direct experience of a work made by someone who only has an indirect experience of it. For the same exhibition, I also projected Niko Princen's *In the Event of Fire* (2011) on the north wall of I.M. Pei's Meyerson Symphony Hall. Niko's piece allows visitors to blow out a candle in Amsterdam by blowing into a microphone in Dallas. Connected through Skype, the sound of blowing into a mic is played on bass speakers positioned next to a candle in Amsterdam, and enough pressure is created to blow out a candle. There is a slight lag between when you blow into the mic and when the candle is extinguished, and it's a really entertaining demonstration of how we have forgotten about the physical distances in our lived world, distances that contain much poetry and insight yet to mine. I also enjoyed that this work was projected onto a symphony hall, an architectural type that relies on our demand for first-hand, direct experiences for its existence.

AH: You have written about the importance of "context-sensitivity"–how did you address this concern at the Marrakech Biennial in particular, but also in the American context of Draft Urbanism in Denver?

CC: Maria Lind's concept of "context sensitivity", which I saw as an extension of the way Miwon Kwon understood "site specificity", was a strategy framing the way contemporary art and architecture was presented in Marrakech. Fundamentally, we sought to structure the exhibition in Marrakech through our imagined visitor's eyes. Marrakech didn't have any public venues for people to see contemporary art. This was the initial challenge, but it was also not necessarily a hindrance. Instead of relying on preexisting knowledge about art or explanations through wall text, I privileged large installations that provided physical, immersive experiences, shifting the locus of meaning from the artists' intention to the viewer's experience. In Denver, the architectural installations began by identifying a problem of their respective sites. Working the Denver Downtown Partnership—an organization of business owners in the downtown area—various urban concerns were highlighted, and each invited architect was asked to respond on-site through their interventions. Pezo von Ellrichshausen drew attention to the way Speer Boulevard, an eight-lane street, cuts through downtown fragmenting the area's civic and social unity; June14 Meyer-Grohbrügge & Chermayeff made butterfly pavilions to introduce a foreign species to downtown ecology by way of commenting on the perception of the homeless as non-native to the area; Alex Schweder made a temporary mobile hotel room in one of downtown Denver's many parking lots to give visitors a glimpse of what further development might look like; and plan:b arquitectos created shading structures for Skyline Park to promote public use as they did in their hometown Medellín. Skyline Park, problematically, has very few trees, and without shade, under direct light, people don't congregate. In all these cases, the conditions addressed are well known to people living in Denver, but it takes some added effort to draw out the key narratives of the everyday, architectural conditions surrounding us. Exhibiting architecture has the potential, and perhaps the responsibility, of bringing to the fore the salient subtexts that are so easily ignored in day-to-day living.

Captions
1 Barkow Leibinger, *Loom-Hyperbolic*, 2014. Photograph by: Johannes Foerster.
2 Elín Hansdóttir, *Mud Brick Spiral*, 2012. Photograph by the artist.
3 Pezo von Ellrichshausen, *Mine Pavilion*, 2013. Photograph by: Christobal Palma.
4 Niko Princen, *In the Event of Fire*, 2011. Photograph by: Josh Blaylock, 2015.

Benjamin T. Busch *was internationally trained as an architect at the University of Kansas, Potsdam University of Applied Sciences and the University of Stuttgart. He has lived and worked in Berlin since 2011, where he leads Studio Busch, a platform for spatial practice operating between the disciplines of photography and design. As a graduate student of Raumstrategien (spatial strategies) at Weissensee School of Art, he is currently researching critical modes of architectural production within the field of spatial practice. Treating architecture as a symptom of abstract processes, his artwork and writing investigate complex fields of relations within the built environment.*

Carson Chan *is an architecture curator and writer. He is co-founder of PROGRAM, a project space for art and architecture that hosted exhibitions, workshops, talks, and a residency in Berlin between 2006 and 2012. He co-Curated the 4th Marrakech Biennale in 2012, and in 2013, he was Executive Curator of the Biennial of the Americas in Denver. His writing appears regularly in Texte zur Kunst, Art Papers, Frieze, and Kaleidoscope, where he is Contributing Editor, and 032c, where he is Editor-at-Large. He is currently pursuing a PhD in architecture at Princeton University.*

Alison Hugill *has a Master's in Art Theory from Goldsmiths College, University of London (2011). Her research focuses on marxist-feminist politics and aesthetic theories of community, communication and communism. Alison is Managing Editor of Berlin Art Link magazine, and a freelance writer and curator based in Berlin. www. alisonhugill.com.*

Call of Cthulhu
Jack Schneider

When I was twelve, my friend Matt and I had an extended intermittent debate on the plausibility of the following scenario:

You come across an object that is a colour you've never seen before. Not just some nuanced colour between our familiar red, green and blue. But a radically new colour. Like a fourth primary. What happens?

My thought was that you would be so confounded–your once relatively stable image of the universe so fundamentally shaken–that you would die from a cerebral aneurysm or shock.

Matt argued that such a scenario would not be possible in the first place, as we're only capable of perceiving a select range of colours. Specifically the range of the electromagnetic spectrum between approximately 390 nanometers and 700 nanometers that we call visible light. There are no additional colours, because we do not possess the hardware to perceive them.

Matt's approach to the scenario corresponds with a correlationist worldview wherein the human experience is tied to reality in such a way that neither could exist without the other. My naive and speculative approach could not stand against this argument, so I conceded.

Revisiting this question now, I have a couple additional challenges. Who was the subject of the scenario? At the time, we assumed it was human. The outcome of the scenario was then necessarily tied to the capacity of human perception. But today, as our bodies become more transparent–as technology probes deeper–new possibilities are imaginable wherein techno-bio interfaces extend our perceptual capacity.

But even in this supposed solution, the existence of something is subordinate to our ability to perceive it. Thus the more important question becomes: what is disqualified from existence when we cast humanity in the lead role?

Jack Schneider (b. 1991) is an artist and designer living in Chicago, Illinois. His recent solo shows include Call of Cthulhu at Born Nude and INTO: through Amur Initiatives Media. His work has also been included in recent group exhibitions at Lodos, Alcatraz Chicago, Sullivan Galleries, and the Institute of Contemporary Art Singapore. He received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago along with the James Ray Nelson Fellowship Award. His work investigates the effects of anthropogenic thought, systems, and processes on other species and the environment. Forthcoming exhibitions include a curatorial project with and about dogs.

Vampires from Aesthetics to Ethics–1922 to the Present
Penny Rafferty and PUNK IS DADA

In modern times, we are not suffering from alienation with the undead but a provocative over-identification. Society is re-writing the horror genre; now the Vampires, Vrykolakas and Chupacabra act as our evolutionary saviours, rescuing us from that uncertain and timely existence known as life. Life today is less than a desirable product much less sacred; harried, in a perpetual state of anxiety, and ruled by the capitalist mobocracy we call the Market. Life is somewhat inconvenient to most that walk the planet. Boris Groys recently said, during a 2015 lecture entitled *Becoming Cosmic*[1], "that today the question of what happens to the soul/spirit is no longer of our concern, now the question is what happens to the corpse?" He is not the only one speaking of corpses and politics. Mark Fisher's text, "How to kill a zombie: strategizing the end of neoliberalism"[2], written in 2008, is still relevant today; as he so poetically cites, "Neoliberalism now shambles on as a zombie–but as the aficionados of zombie films are well aware, it is sometimes harder to kill a zombie than a living person." And in the words of all those teenage aficionados: "true dat".

The Zombies, however, are always the ungodly masses, the working classes blundering on, lugging their own rotten bodies around–thoughtlessly and without grace. With only one goal: to eat and devour anything living, be it rat or human. Quite the opposite depiction of our modern-day Vampires, in which Vampires are no longer the pale, sickly, half-rotten counterparts of humanity they once were, looking back at *Nosferatu the Vampire* from the 1922 adaptation of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*–with his oversized ears, fangs, and vintage smock, he would never have walked amongst the living undetected. Even less likely is the living lusting after him almost to the point of irritation, like the Vampire Eric Northman from the HBO series *True Blood*, who has women and men alike offering themselves up to him on a nightly basis at his club "Fangtasia", something between a sex club and a social centre for humans and vampires to interact consensually.

Science and the Undead
In the last twenty years, post-humanist ideas and technology have played a strong role in the shift away from the more traditional morals and beliefs of Christianity. This used to be at the forefront of the Western world, making room for science as the great purifier and allowing for the erotic fixation of the immortal soul. Many also fear humanity is nearing extinction from climate change; if we found a way in which we didn't need sunlight, clean water, and oxygen to survive, we would be independent of the planet and its systems. We could therefore accomplish immortality like our heroic Vampires. However, this is unlike Zombies, who work on the basic principle of *bite = infection = death = reanimation.* When all the living flesh is consumed, the Zombies rot away, as in the hit cult series *The Walking Dead* (2010–present). With no life to leech off of, they have no power–they become extinct. This would solve the problem of the "Neoliberal Zombie" from Fisher's theory. If we starve them of human flesh, they will rot away for eternity. Fisher states that after a Zombie Invasion, it's crucial to rethink solidarity and not

consign ourselves to the "atomized individual". Interestingly, he uses the templates of postmodernist culture to build successful heterogeneous interest groups. With an overall unity in diversity, resources and desires similarly to the clans of the Modern Vampire. He states the new world is more than a logistical problem of resources and power–it is a philosophical one.

The Environment and The Cosmic

Humans have proved themselves to be a force of nature in the last decade with the coining of a new geological epoch know commonly as the Anthropocene, contrary to the previous popular belief that we are the most "natural" living entities on earth. We have created new lands and terrains such as The Pacific Trash Vortex[3]. Spanning thousands of kilometres from the West Coast of North America to Japan, the collection is mostly waste and plastic debris spiralling into makeshift islands. Yet, we are never shown this seemingly mythical, small country bobbing along with dead sea life trailing behind its man-made arse. It is there if we choose to believe in the scientific studies, or not, if we listen to the "climate change deniers", who argue it is a fictitious representation from the left wing to stop the growth of industry. This also mimics the horror story of *The Blob* (1958), a strange horrific life form that consumes everything in its path.

We also often hear of the human ability to conjure up and summon terrorists across the globe via Internet chat rooms into our capital cities of the West. Naomi Klein, the leading figure in the climate change campaign after her book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. The Climate*, had an interesting prophecy after the horrific attacks in Paris on November 13th. Klein commented that climate change was one of the key drivers of the civil war in Syria, fuelling conflict, mass migration, and the ever-growing radical group known as ISIS. It is also a result of our ever-changing atmosphere. Klein rejects François Hollande's claims about choosing between fighting terrorism and acting on climate change[4]. He disallowed demonstrations that were linked to the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris as an act of safety for the people of the city. Klein scoffed at his definition of security, instead asserting that putting climate action at the very centre of that agenda would be the only way to guarantee the safety of humanity, as there is no possibility for human security in a world that is heading towards an increase of three degrees Celsius. This would be the death sentence of everything we now know as human.

What we know as Human is also something constantly in flux with the environment; we are not what we once were. For many modern day Vampires, the choice of synthetic blood over real human blood is to combat the legitimate fear of being poisoned by the ever-increasing amount of synthetic estrogens, hormones, and chemicals put into human blood from birth–from shampoos to pesticides to birth control pills–and that is just from living a relatively "normal life". However, the human body cell structure is made up of 90% bacteria, fungi, and dormant cells, leaving only 10% that can be dubbed as human, which also brings us down a little from our golden creation[5].

Politics and the Inhuman

When Western politics are faced with the inhuman world of the occult and ancient religions, we hear of acts from radical sub-factions and their ability to turn people, even our own citizens (Jihadi John, the British Islamic militant fighter or the White Widow, aka Samantha Lewthwaite). The Golden Dawn and ISIS's need for possession and control of people with which to harvest power only allows the growth of these sects, which are represented in our mainstream media as inhuman.

2

The latest *Star Wars: Episode VII* is another example of this mainstream fight between the good vs. evil representation of the guerrilla fighter over the decades. It has been the most expensive: a staggering €160–185 million has been spent on production. The film tells the story of a young man who sees Darth Vader as a martyr, and idolizing Vader he fights the state for Vader's freedom. Quite unlike the early films from the 1970s in which the retired Jedis recruit, Luke Skywalker, is trained in secret to fight against the dark imperialist capitalist figure, the then Darth Vader. The Star Wars franchise seems to reflect our position of what we concede as evil and threatening. This has changed drastically from the 1970s' optimism of society to today's threat of the lone wolf who acts out of the passion of belief, bringing anarchy and terror to the global citizen.

Save Us from the Dread of Life

We no longer crave the supernatural as "the other" like society did in the aftermath of World War II. Filmmakers in the US, Europe, and Japan produced films that Susan Sontag termed "popular mythology for the contemporary negative imagination about the impersonal"[6], which imaginatively addressed post-Auschwitz/post-Hiroshima guilt and anxiety with horror and fantasy so far removed from the viewers' real lives that it acted as entertainment.

Dehumanization as strength is a common theme in the fantasy and horror genres, but it is becoming an increasingly central theme to the young adult dystopian novels and films that are coming out, such as *True Blood, Twilight, Hunger Games, Star Wars*, etc. In all of these, the main characters have to give up their bodies to the supernatural host, but in turn they can conquer and control their newfound strengths. The loss of the human body seems key, perhaps mirroring the despair or loss of humanity to these young viewers, but actually you see their humanity is not lost–just transferred to another being. Does this mirror our need and want for evolution of the human body?

The horror spectator is now entering a new phase in the genre post-*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; it is no longer the fear of death that entertains us but the thought of expelling the dread of life. The populace seeks a world of eternity in their deepest fantasies, not needing to rush from the school to the church to the maternity ward to the grave. We want leisure, nihilism, and above all safety from each other and from our own impending doom. In times of crisis, we think of our own mortality; thanatophobia, or death anxiety, is nullified when we see ourselves stronger than life. Western civilization is faced daily with acts that hinder our survival: raising rent prices, unemployment, GM food, and overcrowding. These may be a far cry from werewolves, zombies, and witches, yet just as deadly as we are placed in feuds between neoliberal lords, extremist "knights", and the ever-growing state magisterium.

Perhaps we can renegotiate these fantasies rather than develop them into a fascist posthuman regime for all. I propose we learn something more, from the league of Vampires we seek on a Friday night after a long eight-hour shift and a TV dinner. Today's Vampires are their own masters, with exception to their makers whom they are fiercely loyal–family must come first. Also, as stated, many choose to drink synthetic and donated ethical blood, fearing contamination or poison by the degradation of the environment not so far removed from "Vitality Air"[7] (a Canadian company that sells bottled air to the Chinese elite during smog outbreaks in capital cities). Rather than the traditional Vampires who catch their prey in the wake of fear and terror, now they visit bars like "Fangtasia" where willing donors allow them to feed. In mutual fits of sexual ecstasy for both parties, the Vampire is

careful not to allow the human to die in the process of feeding on them, allowing for recovery and the ability to harvest from them again–a sustainable food plan. The other interesting part about modern Vampire life is that they don't seem to engage in menial labour/work; they are writers, philosophers, and musicians pondering the meaning of life. Could the world of the Vampire make room for a post-work economy? Humans have such a short time on this earth, why are we so interested in racing to the finish line, tired, hungry, and exhausted? It is hard to find a Vampire who is fed up with living, depressed at the very thought of continuing his or her life eternally. Nor do we ever hear of racism, sexism, or homophobia in the Vampire world. In fact, in *True Blood* most of the oldest Vampires choose life-long same-sex partners, albeit in a polygamous way.

In both Christianity and Judaism, the belief in the resurrection of the undead en masse on "The Day of Judgment" is the moment of forgiveness when all the sins of the world are washed away and life will begin anew. This is now the time for human self-mastery rather than post-humanist conquests. Can we overthrow the Neoliberalism Zombie in wake for an autonomous mortal life with as much to offer as eternity could? To do this, we must recognise the inherent violence in both heaven and hell, literally and metaphysically. By harnessing the cosmic as a creative force, we can be liberated. Certainly rethinking the values and needs of today's humans is a start; there is a need for micro-units that act out of desire and horizontal unity for the alien, the fluid, and the non-human, and only then will we welcome the "true death".

Notes

1 Boris Groys, "Becoming Cosmic", November 18, 2014, ZFL, Berlin. http://www.zfl-berlin.org/zfl-in-bild-und-ton-detail/items/vortragsvideo-boris-groys-new-york-karlsruhe-becoming-cosmic.html

2 Mark Fisher, "How to kill a zombie: strategizing the end of neoliberalism," *Open Democracy*, July 18, 2013. https://www.opendemocracy.net/mark-fisher/how-to-kill-zombie-strategizing-end-of-neoliberalism

3 Greenpeace.org, "The Trash Vortex". http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/campaigns/oceans/fit-for-the-future/pollution/trash-vortex/

4 "Naomi Klein on Paris Summit: Leaders' Inaction on Climate Crisis is 'Violence' Against the Planet." *Democracy Now!*, November 18, 2015. http://www.democracynow.org/2015/11/30/naomi_klein_on_paris_summit_leaders

5 "Microbes in the human body." The Marshall Protocol Knowledge Base, 2015. http://mpkb.org/home/pathogenesis/microbiota

6 Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," *Commentary* 40, October 1965. https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-imagination-of-disaster/

7 Vitality Air, promotional website for canned air. http://vitalityair.com/

Aesthetics Throughout the Ages

Vampires

Son of Dracula 1943

Dracula 1931

Nosferatu 1922

Blood of Dracula 1957

The brides of Dracula 1960

Playboy shoot 1979

Lair Of The White Worm 1988

Queen of the Damned 2002

William the Bloody

True Blood 2014
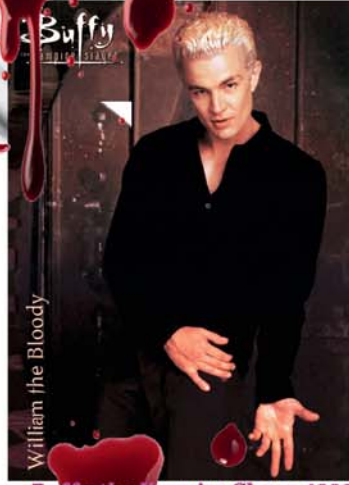
Buffy the Vampire Slayer 1990

twilight

Twilight Series 2008

  Penny Rafferty *is a writer and visual theorist based in Berlin. She is heavily involved with the artist collective group Omsk Social Club featuring PUNK IS DADA and pioneered the spectacle Ying Colosseum. She is working intensively with the concept of Cosmic Depression–the theory of depression caused by digital utopia (Paradise without Ecology).*

  PUNK IS DADA *is "futuristically political", [i.e. unrealistically] proposing the contents and makings as a form of post-political entertainment. The content examines other virtual egos and experiences, allowing the works to become a dematerialized hybrid of modern day culture.*
  Yet she declares herself an untrend; PUNK IS DADA assumes the visage of poverty in her anti-nostalgic dystopia; she is industrial by nature and de-gendered by style.

"Zen, Speed, Organic: 3 lifestyle diets."
www.punkisdada.com