Editorial

Of Regret and Other Back Pages

This third and final installment of Manifesta Journal, guest-edited in collaboration with Rasha Salti, concludes the red thread on “the politics of time”. Woven around the theme of “regret” and its many semantic and lexical connotations—remorse, redemption, bereavement, cooptation, subjective versus institutional memorialization(s) and nostalgia, to name a few—the issue takes up and further develops some of the pivotal themes that have been touched upon in the previous two issues.

Regret raises powerful questions as regards the relationship to time and contingency; the retrospective gaze at and the evaluation of past experience; the ambivalence of hesitation and the burden of shame. Yet—regret is fickle. It has a perniciously double life. For one, the formulaic “we regret to inform you…” is (sadly) all too familiar to anyone who has applied for a job, grant or award. It is also a familiar motif in the unguarded conversations between amiable curators with enough trust and affinity to disclose “insider” stories or lament their disappointing experiences. However, regret rarely, if ever, seems to appear in public and formal realms, let alone in the framework of intellectual, critical or theoretical meditations on the profession. Obviously, self-critique is central to curatorial and artistic practice, but because the system in which practitioners operate and in which their labor is commoditized is so cruel, restless and flimsy, self-critique is precariously private, marginalized and under-valued. Is it almost as understated and pervasive as a… taboo?

The public life of a curator (as well as that of an artist) can easily be described as being intensely “social”, in a myriad of ways. It involves a high degree of interactivity with all sorts of practitioners from very different fields—people who produce ideas and knowledge, and, on a more superficial level, people who attend a significant number of social events. What is not as obvious, however, is how, paradoxically, the life of an arts practitioner can actually be profoundly solitary. For example: independent curators journey from one project to the next, or juggle several at once; they travel from one city to the next, switching from one culture, language, set of codes, social mores, and dynamics to another. The situation is hardly less complicated for institutional curators. Pushing the argument further, the pace at which curators are generally expected to produce exhibitions, and the material and immaterial paradigms by which their labor is evaluated (or “valued”), are embedded in a merciless logic of cognitive capitalist production. Moreover, the virtue of the curator’s position as mediator between the institution(s), groups of artists, artworks, audience members, critics, wider socio-economic contexts and political stakes, only deepens this sense of solitariness. Regret, or at least our approach to the notion in Manifesta Journal #16, comes from that space of solitary reflection, sensibility and feeling.

Just recall a few quotidian moments: the silent, meditative, “empty” time whilst waiting to board a plane or ride a train; or better yet, whilst waiting...
after being interrogated by an immigration officer (who vigilantly guards the borders of a G8 country on high alert because its unemployed youth are protesting new economic austerity measures), and explaining to no avail what it means to be a curator... These are by no means moments of truth, they are not pregnant with epiphanies; they are simply unguarded moments when the sordidness of life unravels in one’s mind and weaves unpredictable narrative threads. In these moments, regret often creeps in, sometimes like a taunting demon, and sometimes like a wise, but melancholic and retrospective reckoning. Regret is not remorse because it does not bear the cross of responsibility, but it certainly dwells in the same neighborhood. Neatly is it entirely about redemption, nor is it entirely about nostalgia: it is not exactly melancholic, not quite a kind of mourning, and not altogether memorializing. It travels between these notions. It is our hope that this issue of Manifesta Journal will inspire a vivid discussion of the rich evocative significations of regret that weave themselves in and around curatorial practices.

We inaugurate this issue with eloquent mourning and hauntings: Leezah Ahmady’s compelling eulogy to the late artist Rustam Khalfim preempts the guileless gesture of the art establishment’s self-congratulating and posthumous ‘discovery’ of artists kept away from visibility during their lifetime. We conjure up ghosts of pasts yet unsettled with Françoise Vergès’s The Slave at the Louvre that unveils the (mis)representations of slavery in the very bosom of the renowned museum as well as the constitution of Europe’s modernity. Khaled Fahmy’s The Essence of Alexandria, the conclusion to his masterful deconstruction of nostalgia for the city’s colonial cosmopolitanism (whose first part featured in Manifesta Journal #14), and Mustapha Benfodil’s gut-wrenching The Shuhada of the Past Fifty Years, a scathing reconsideration of Algeria’s fifty years of independence.

With Mnemosyne 42, Georges Didi-Huberman revisits Aby Warburg’s notion of art history as a ‘ghost story for adults’, by curating an iconographic montage of classical and contemporary representations of lament from the wide repository of art and cinema. Mnemosyne 42 enacts an open-ended writing of history that reclaims the political agency of grief and grievance. Meanwhile, Ariella Azoulay’s generously annotated photo album, When the Body Politic Ceases to Be an Idea is a passionate call to reconsider the (regrettably) oft-ignored experientialist knowledge of insurgent bodies. In turn, politics of listening are likewise investigated by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, whose Aural Contract Audio Archive displays the distorted embodiment of law through transformed voices taken from famous recordings of trial hearings. It travels between these notions. It is our hope that this issue of Manifesta Journal will inspire a vivid discussion of the rich evocative significations of regret that weave themselves in and around curatorial practices.

Remains of what can never be again: in Maja Petrović-Šteger and Hito Steyerl’s exchange over The Form of Remains, which drafts—and incarnates—a meditation, at once poetic and penetrating, on the stories contained in the remains of ‘posthumous’ bodies, especially those of victims of war, and how we apprehend them; Marc Nichanian’s The Image and the Survivor boldly explores what remains after the death of the witness and how artists have represented survivors; and Gal Kim and Robert Burghardt’s Yugoslavian Partisan Memorials parses an unlikely, captivating (hi)story of Yugoslavia from the trail of World War II memorials that snake their way through the posthumous territory of the once-federal republic. In collaboration with Robert Burghardt, Kim reveals the mechanisms of the co-optation of these monuments that arises if it means to be a curator... These are by no means moments of truth, they are not pregnant with epiphanies; they are simply unguarded moments when the sordidness of life unravels in one’s mind and weaves unpredictable narrative threads. In these moments, regret often creeps in, sometimes like a taunting demon, and sometimes like a wise, but melancholic and retrospective reckoning. Regret is not remorse because it does not bear the cross of responsibility, but it certainly dwells in the same neighborhood. Neatly is it entirely about redemption, nor is it entirely about nostalgia: it is not exactly melancholic, not quite a kind of mourning, and not altogether memorializing. It travels between these notions. It is our hope that this issue of Manifesta Journal will inspire a vivid discussion of the rich evocative significations of regret that weave themselves in and around curatorial practices.
Dear Rustam Khalfin,

I have been irritable about your having left recently without any utterance anywhere of your passing. How can you, the proclaimed founding father, protagonist, leader, teacher, and prophet of contemporary art, just die, with only the skipping of a few dozen-heart beats that knew and loved you?

Leeza Ahmady

You were neither mentioned in the papers, nor in the Sunday columns, nor even amidst the massive abyss of the World Wide Web! I imagined paying for an e-flux ad to announce your death, but I was broke and the idea seemed disproportionate to the kind of loss that I felt your passing was to your community and to generations of artists. Many months later, I found only an old, recycled article about your life and work in Universes in Universe, which made me even sadder.

Please know that art history is profoundly limited and ludicrously slow to awaken. For sure you will be auction material someday, perhaps just as soon as clever dealers organize luxurious tours for collectors to traverse the region where you once lived. For now though, you have many spiritual brothers whose limelight you might share. At least that is not a shame. Your twin brother Beuys, for example, might have already met up with you by now.

I wanted to write you because when we first met I did not speak Russian. Refusing to learn it, I was unwilling to sacrifice my already rusty half-dozen tongues that I had picked up along my traversal of immigration routes to America. By the 1880s my Tajik-Uzbek grandparents had probably forgotten to speak Kazakh. You seemed to have never learned Dari from yours. This is perhaps because you were not Uzbek, though you were born in Tashkent. I remember how we sat at the base of a tree in front of Soros Center for Contemporary Art (SCCAA) in Almaty. I was thrilled to be on the grounds of what was in the 1990s a sacred site for contemporary artists. Unfortunately, SCCA died even before you did. Shut down for lack of funds—or was it poor luck with leadership? Anyway, during that meeting you opted not to speak. You simply made gestures and stared at me in English.

So I came to know your work by listening to others discuss its novelty.

During my last visit to your two-room studio apartment your health had taken a turn for the worse. Your art works were scattered in museum storage rooms and defunct galleries, already the fodder for vicious friend and family disputes. So we spoke through images. With my newly purchased digital camera, I photographed the mostly crumbling remains of your old printed matter. Invitations, documentations of performances, installations and other paraphernalia; translating analog photographs of scenes I had missed by only a decade, my mind conscious of captivated audiences. Their presence still resonated through your messy albums. We drank tea. You shrugged your shoulders, and humbly smiled with glee. I decided you might perhaps be the greatest Sufi-Fluxus wonderer on earth. I plan to explain this sometime, but not just yet; I am still coming to terms with your being elsewhere.
Above and beyond regrets and claims, I have wanted to share some of the images stored in my hard drive, in commemoration not unlike other memorials to unforgettable artists. In the process, I hope that others may also have the opportunity to decipher the significance of these titillating moments in art and performance, in yet another corner of the world, in an altogether different timeline in history.

Yours truly,
Leeza Ahmady.

Rustam Khalfin was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 1949 and passed away in Almaty, Kazakhstan in 2008. In 1972 he graduated from the Architectural Institute in Moscow, after which he settled in Almaty where he spent the rest of his career. During that time he became a follower of Vladimir Sterligov, the last survivor of the Russian historical avant-garde. Soon after, he started an artist group with his wife Lida Blinova and other like-minded artists who began organizing underground shows in apartments and basements in Almaty. Khalfin is now considered to be the father of contemporary art in Kazakhstan, having played an integral role in training young artists and intellectuals. A prolific painter, Khalfin’s practice progressed through media to encompass sculpture, installation, performance, photography, and video. Khalfin’s work has been widely exhibited throughout the countries of the former USSR in addition to many cities in Europe of late, including the Venice Biennale 2005.
The Blind Dates Project departs from the premise that the Empire’s abrupt rupture and its violent reformulation into nation-states have their lingering effects on life to this day. At stake, it seems, was an exploration of “what remains” in the aftermath of a traumatic event; understood here as a breakup that leaves behind nothing but dispersed and ill-fitting fragments. The modus operandi of this exploration consisted in the construction of “pairs,” to initiate or provoke improbable encounters, and to inscribe the “remains” by way of collective work. All this involved a considerable risk, namely, to see the expectations of the audience. That is in fact what happened. We live in a “before” is aleatory or requires a work of interpretation.

The Image and the Survivor

From November 2010 to January 2011, the Pratt Museum in New York hosted Blind Dates: New Encounters from the Edges of a Former Empire. The curators of the exhibit were Defne Ayas and Neery Melkonian, who described their project in the following terms: “The Blind Dates Project departs from the premise that the Empire’s abrupt rupture and its violent reformulation into nation-states have their lingering effects on life to this day. At stake, it seems, was an exploration of “what remains” in the aftermath of a traumatic event; understood here as a breakup that leaves behind nothing but dispersed and ill-fitting fragments. The modus operandi of this exploration consisted in the construction of “pairs,” to initiate or provoke improbable encounters, and to inscribe the “remains” by way of collective work. All this involved a considerable risk, namely, to see the expectations of the audience. That is in fact what happened. We live in a “before” is aleatory or requires a work of interpretation.

In order to avoid these ambiguities and these approximations (and the usual trickery that risk renders “survive” with “survival,” and forbids himself the thought that the survival in question could have anything to do with the figure of the post-catastrophe survivor. One shall therefore never read, from Derrida’s texts to their discretion. He himself theorized this in the French title of the essay that Derrida devotes to Blanchot was “Survivre.” The English title: “Living On.” One must read with caution the English translations of Derrida’s essays and books. Here, for instance, the translator never renders “survivre” with “survival,” and forbids himself the thought that the survival in question could have anything to do with the figure of the post-catastrophe survivor. One shall therefore never read, from Derrida’s English pen, this simple sentence: Survival is denial. To my knowledge, Derrida himself did not intervene in the decisions of his translators. He abandoned his texts to their discretion. He himself theorized this in the lower section of “Living On,” in the form of a challenge to the translator. Finally, there is a third reason; equally crucial. A phenomenology of survival truly requires a phenomenology of the image, which never fails to present itself under the form of an analysis of the “mortuary resemblance,” the resemblance of cadavers.

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3. Aram Jibilian was interested in the ghost of Arshile Gorky. Back in 2003, he had read an article in the New York Times, “which revolves around Gorky’s history at the Glass House, his home in Sherman, Connecticut... The current owner and resident of the home, Martha Clarke, discussed how the ghost of Gorky continues to live with her.” Gorky took his own life close to this house on July 22, 1948. Here is what Jibilian had to say about it: “When I, my collaborator, Aaron Mattocks, and the curators of this project met Ms. Clarke, she again recounted numerous stories of when she and [her] guests were visited by his ghost. These stories serve as the point of departure for my proposed series of photographs for Blind Dates. Playing with the idea of Gorky having lived his life in an in-between state of exile, I seek to capture what his current in-between state might be.” Jibilian thus made use of a self-portrait of Gorky as a teenager (itself painted from an old photograph that the artist had kept). He made a mask and staged Gorky or his ghost. What I draw from this is that this ghost cannot come to inscribe itself directly onto a photographic print. Fabulous, non-sense, it has to be translated or transformed into something else. What is known is not exactly a literal before, though. The matter was exploded over the course of centuries in Western Christianity, in the unexpected form of the achronic trope. The image was equivalent to a denial. The survivor was already denying himself in the image, all the way to his terrible and majestic entry onto the horizon of our own gaze, in the aftermath of the holocaustic events of the twentieth century. On the other hand, in a much more modest and insignificant fashion, theModern

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this as well: thanks to the artist, the ghost can now show itself in image. Without mask, no image. It is as if the ontological status of the ghost were the same as that of the mask. No more, nor less. A presence-absence suspended between two worlds, covering no more than the absence of what is supposed to be covered.

We are lost. We are now incapable of distinguishing between the ghost, the mask, and the image. Our astonishment knows however no bounds when we perceive that this figure, this self-portrait painted by Gorky on the basis of his own photographic likeness, was in fact a death mask. Aram Jibilian has done nothing else, therefore, than to render this fact visible. The Space of the mask. No more, nor less. A presence-absence image. The lamp was still burning when the envoy of King Abgar, who was also a painter, so goes the rumor (but perhaps he was already a photographer). This envoy brought to Edessa a portrait of Christ, according to the tale in the version attributed to Constantine Porphyrogenitus. The image was hidden in a niche in Edessa, with a lit lamp in front of it. It was discovered again a few centuries later. The lamp was still burning, and, an effect of the light, the figure was carried over onto the brick that closed the niche. This new rendering of the image made without human hand, the Byzantine called the keramion. In it, Michaud finds the conceptual origin of photography. As to Maurice Blanchot’s reflections on the image, they appear first at the opening of The Space of Literature... 1

Thus, in this tongue that “no one speaks,” language is its own image. It is spoken on the ground of absence, and located beyond its use value. It survives itself, in short, as a living language, or as already dead. As “its own image,” language, in literature, is a survivor. From the beginning, therefore, and without firing a shot, Blanchot establishes a faultless relation between image and survival, between the image and the survivor, the image and translation in a language as if it were dead (which constitutes therefore the exact opposite of the example we encountered earlier). Yet something is obviously missing here for this relation to be fully comprehensible. That is why Blanchot returns to this question at the end of his book, in an Appendix where he immediately proposes the following parallel between the image and the “cadaver” (or “the remains”). “At first sight, the image does not resemble a cadaver, but it could be that the strangeness of a cadaver is also the strangeness of the image...” (419). And why is this the case? The explanation comes slowly. When the remains is withdrawn from us, Blanchot says, “at this moment, when the presence of the cadaver before us is the presence of the unknown, it is also now that the lamented dead begins to resemble himself...” (420). There, that is the mortuary resemblance, which Blanchot calls here “the resemblance of cadavers.” Further on, one can also read these extraordinary lines with regard to the remains: “If we look at him again, this splendid being who radiates beauty: he is, I can see, perfectly like himself; he resembles himself. The cadaver is its own image” (422).

In actuality, Blanchot transposes, in the form of a phenomenological description, a reality that he had explored a few years earlier in his novel Death Sentence. This novel presents itself as a double narrative. The first narrative tells the story of a woman who wakes up from death only to die again. She thus finds herself for a few hours in the uncertain and undefined space between life and death, neither dead nor alive. She is a survivor. In the same part of the tale, the narrator, at the office of the doctor who must pronounce death, sees a photograph in which two faces are superimposed, that of Christ and that of a young woman, whom we suppose is, to Blanchot’s mind, a young woman, a survivor. In the same part of the tale, the narrator, at the office of the doctor who must pronounce death, sees a photograph in which two faces are superimposed, that of Christ and that of a young woman, whom we suppose is, to Blanchot’s mind, a young woman, a survivor. In the same part of the tale, the narrator, at the office of the doctor who must pronounce death, sees a photograph in which two faces are superimposed, that of Christ and that of a young woman, whom we suppose is, to Blanchot’s mind, a young woman, a survivor.
saw two images superimposed on one another: of the Turin Sudario, a photograph in which he wall of his office there was an excellent photograph even magnificent in its strangely proud ex features of a woman’s face extremely beautiful, of fact I distinctly saw, behind the figure of Christ, one of Christ and one of Ve...
“Slavery here is a ghost, both the past and a living presence; and the problem of historical representation is how to represent that ghost, something that is and yet is not”, wrote the Haitian postcolonial thinker Michel-Ralph Trouillot.1 What can be said for the pictorial representation of this spectre? How did French artists from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries represent the slave? In particular, how were they represented between the trade’s beginnings up to the definitive abolition of slavery in the French colonies in 1848? These questions were already at the heart of the proposition made by the Committee for the Memory of Slavery (of which I am a member, www.comphe.fr) in 20042 to the museums of France: to make an inventory of the figure of the slave in painting and decorative arts. This inventory has yet to be finalized but the question of the representation of the figure of the slave has remained, for me, a recurrent one.

At a meeting with Okwui Enwezor, curator of the 2012 Triennale exhibition3 in Paris, I suggested organizing a programme of guided tours in the Louvre museum entitled, “The Slave at the Louvre”. The aim was to revisit the collections in the Louvre in search of the figure of the slave. The main focus of the visits was to review the collections of the Louvre, a museum opened in 1793 by the Revolution, and whose collections end at 1848 (with later works having been transferred to the Musée d’Orsay). The germinal work by Fred Wilson entitled Mining the Museum (1992), in which he revisited the Baltimore Historical Society’s collection in light of the history of slavery in that city was an important reference. The Louvre agreed to and actively supported the program.

Filling in an absence or imposing the presence of the slave was not my intention, even though a great part of the riches of Europe and America were built upon its work; riches that have even been partly displayed in the Louvre. The goal was not to seek this kind of reparation but rather to come to an understanding of the necessary absence of this figure, or to identify why the figure could be expressed in a distorted way. It was less about pointing out that something was missing than it was about examining what had permitted a lack or a marginalisation of such a central figure in the emergence of European modernity.

The role of slavery in human history and of colonial slavery in the making of the modern world, and its recurrence despite technological and humanitarian progress should already concern us. The figure of the slave remains so deeply evocative that it is often invoked to describe any situation in which the dignity and the integrity of a person are violated. All this draws out a cartography of an economic, cultural and socially predatory system.

Critical and analytical work on the representation of the slave during the French colonial period has yet to be done. Nothing yet in France measures up to Marcus Wood’s innovative study, who in 2000 opened up a critical field with Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865, and then took it further in Slavery, Empathy and Pornography (2003), and The Horrible Gift of Freedom: Atlantic Slavery and the Representations of Slavery (2010). For Wood, the most pertinent artistic representation of the slave and of slavery is that which explores the catastrophe without closing its history, and which reminds us of the difficulty or impossibility of seeing what the living experience of the slave truly is. For him, the paintings by Turner have come the closest to this goal. Blind Memory is not a “blind” memory, but a memory “blinded” by the light projected by slavery on the society that practices it, by its pornography, its violence, and its will and capacity to mask such violence.

In France, the shift between analysis of representations of the “Black Man” and the “Slave” tends to repeat what colonial slavery has constructed: an equivalence between the two figures—yet two figures between which I believe it is important to mark.

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2 This committee of twelve people was set up according to Article Four of the Taubira Law of 21 May 2001, recognizing the slave trade to be a “crime against humanity” www.cpmhe.fr
a distinction. When did the slave become “black”? When did freedom become “white” and servitude “black”? Otherwise, this absence of analysis allows, without any critical distance, the endless reproduction of paintings such as François Auguste Biard’s Abolition of Slavery, 27 April 1848. The sentimentality and its prefiguration of the civilizing mission do not appear to cause any problems even among postcolonial critics, for whom they have become iconic. Yet, the painting transforms abolition into a gift; it masks the bitterness of the slave’s struggles, and the difficult and long battle that the abolitionists underwent. It shows a “white” man carrying a French flag, bringing freedom to their black slaves. A black woman on her knees kisses the feet of two white women, and two black men embrace each other, brandishing their broken chains. The entire iconography of the colonial doctrine of abolitionism is there, obliterating any radical dimension. Why, at the very moment of its accomplishment, was the slave’s freedom so often represented by a “white” man or a “white” woman? What inspired the iconic graphic use of the image of the tied-up and kneeling slave during the abolitionist period—on both sides of the Atlantic? Why was freedom always shown as having been a gift given to the “Blacks” by the “Whites”?

Sought in the aforementioned visits was not literally the figure of the slave. One could thus stop in front of the painting, Six Shells on a Shell4 to signal the presence of a cowrie shell, which was emblematic of the slave trade on the African coasts where it was used as currency for exchange (millions of cowries were transported from the Indian Ocean across the continent to West Africa). Indeed, looking at paintings of coffee cups, of tables, of teapots, and sugar bowls would likely achieve similar ends. The arts of living and of household consumption were profoundly affected by the arrival of sugar, coffee, tobacco, and chocolate in Europe in the eighteenth century. Though their conditions of production had to remain invisible, the figure of the “Negro” was prevalent in the decorative arts (visible on crockery, snuffboxes, tables, vases, and the like). Colonial slavery lasted several centuries in the long history of French colonisation. The closed-chaptered approach (for which generalizing labels such as “Antiquity”, “The Middle Ages”, “Royalty”, “The Revolution”) masks a cartography that extended far beyond European borders and brought new tastes, new manners and non-European people to France. The narrow cartography of French history (or the “Hexagon” or the binary couple “France / Colonial”) heavily obscures the ways in which French identity, the Nation, the economy and the State were affected by colonization. The shifts, the echoes, the displacements, and the accidents of history are all marginalized therein.

Colonial slavery was a matrix for experimenting disciplinary and punitive techniques, states of exception, laws that were not those of mainland France, and the principle of universality, all of which led to the construction of anti-Black racism. The figure of the slave haunts the figure of the free and the citizen. Servitude and revolt, the denial of equality and its affirmation, are brought together there. The history of modern colonisation is thereby enlightened in a way that does not allow apologetic discourses. If colonial memories are often fragmented, however, their history is sometimes shared. Thus, must we be reminded that the colonisation of Algeria started eighteen years before the abolition of slavery, and that in 1848 the same government that later abolished slavery declared that Algeria was to be divided into the French departments?

Revisiting the complex artistic terrain of fragmented memories and crossed histories opens up new debates on representation, absence and presence.

The Visits

The idea behind the guided visits was as follows: An inventory of the paintings or objects exhibited in the galleries and that made reference to slavery was sent to people that I had invited: Shuck One, the graphic artist; Leonora Miano, the writer; Carpanin Marimoutou, the poet and professor of literature; Isaac Julien, the visual artist; and Maryse Condé, the writer. Each person chose one of the inventoried objects. On the day of the tour, the visitors were welcomed by three people: Laurella Rinçon, a Conservateur du patrimoine; by one of my guests; and by me. I introduced the visit, first explaining the role and the place of colonial slavery in the culture and history of European society and the importance of its heritage for the contemporary world. Laurella Rinçon presented the artists, and the invited guest was given carte blanche to speak either about the place of slavery in his or her own work, or about anything that the painting or the object brought up in his or her mind.5

4 Adriaen S. Coorte, 1696, Hollande, Richelieu wing, Second floor, Section 33 bis, 15cm/20cm.

5 Following its success, the program will continue in 2013. For the dates and times of the special guided visits, feel free to visit the Louvre’s website: www.louvre.fr
Alexandria: A Cosmopolitan City?

Recently published critical studies have highlighted the serious fault lines in the discourse on Alexandria’s cosmopolitanism.1 Mabro, for example, has closely studied the different Egyptian censuses from the late 1840s to the 1960s, in order to come up with a precise composition of Alexandrian society in its cosmopolitan age. Finding that even though the foreign community in Alexandria was sometimes very large, he stresses that it never exceeded a quarter of the population, and that “the Egyptian population constituted a significant majority, with a ratio of at least three Egyptians to one foreigner.”

In an earlier study and in a similar attempt to revisit the notion of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism, I pointed out the necessarily elitist and exclusionary components assumed in that discourse. Using police records of the city, a source hitherto rarely used, I attempted to draw a picture of quotidian life in late nineteenth century Alexandria, and argued that the Alexandria archive: An Olfactory Tale of an “Arab” City

One of the smells that may have struck one’s nose during a key moment in the history of the modern city is that of gunpowder and smoke. On July 11, 1882, the British fleet started pounding Alexandria. Not only was the port under attack, but also the downtown area, and specifically, the Place des Consuls, which was the showpiece of the modern city that was meant to exhibit the multilethnic nature of the city. Fires broke out everywhere, and in spite of Forster’s insistence that it was mostly looting that led to the destruction of the city’s main square and the surrounding areas,3 there is little doubt that the smoke bellowing out of the city that day was the result of ten

impressive details of daily life that this archival source provides can go a long way towards providing a historically accurate account of what it meant to live in such a multilingual, multicultural milieu.4 One of the most original contributions to the critique of the discourse of cosmopolitan Alexandria is that which Halim provided in his study: “The Alexandria Archive.” In response to Forster’s categorical claims about the spiritual decline during the thousand-year-long Arab period, Halim creates in cosmopolitan Alexandria is something that ideas and intellectual trends were exchanged and/or created in cosmopolitan Alexandria is something that the cultural mix and excitement of Cairo in the 1920s and 1930s was cosmopolitan in a much more profound sense than the celebrated European-Levantine milieu of Alexandria.4

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been engaged with the new revolutionary regime in country and to thereby convince the British, who had intention was to show Egypt to be an unstable, radical several movie theatres in Cairo and Alexandria. The United States Information Service library in Cairo, and to attack several targets in Cairo and Alexandria—the conducted by Muslims or Arabs, as Beinin rightly points it turned out was part of a Jewish Egyptian espionage looking man running out of the movie theatre in fire—pedestrians in Shāri' Fu’ād saw a young European—before the 6:30 p.m. screening of Cinema Rio when another crucial moment of Egypt’s history. This time and Durrell).10

of cosmopolitanism’s key figures (most notably Forster of this Egyptian novelist, translator and literary critic, ways. The Alexandria that comes across in the texts materiality of the city is marginalized in the discourse of cosmopolitanism, and of months later led to a seventy-year long occupation of parturition”, passing through his room where he “listen[ed] to the heavy tone of [Justine’s] scent,” and ending in his desperate attempt to remember the name of Justine’s perfume,12 al-Kharrat’s mix of smells, memories and loss ring less judgmental, more generous. Indeed.

The smell of smoke hovered over Alexandria during another crucial moment of Egypt’s history. This time it was in 1954, during a hot July, and was specifically before the 6:30 p.m. screening of Cinema Rio when pedestrians in Shāri’ Fu’ād saw a young European-looking man running out of the movie theatre in fire—laden clothes. The man was Philip Natanson, who as he turned out was part of a Jewish Egyptian espionage network that the Israeli intelligence had formed three years earlier with the intention of launching a sabotage campaign (what would currently be called terrorism if conducted by Muslims or Arabs, as Benin rightly points out). The campaign, called ‘Operation Susannah’, aimed to attack several targets in Cairo and Alexandria—the main Alexandria post office, the Cairo train station, the United States Information Service library in Cairo, and several movie theatres in Cairo and Alexandria. The intention was to show Egypt to be an unstable, radical country and to thereby convince the British, who had been engaged with the new revolutionary regime in Egypt, not to withdraw their troops from the Suez Canal region. The campaign failed miserably, however, and Natanson’s attempt to blow up Cinema Rio ended in disaster (both for him and for his fellow terrorists) when the explosive device he had planned to leave in the Cinema caught fire in his pocket.12 Again, the smell of smoke reminds us of the imperial context that shaped life in modern Alexandria, a context that is presently missing from much of the scholarship on the city’s tradition of cosmopolitanism.

The Smell of a Quotidian Cosmopolitanism

In contrast to the highly sanitized way in which the materiality of the city is marginalized in the discourse of cosmopolitanism, Edwar al-Kharrat’s texts embraces and celebrates this materiality in refreshing ways. The Alexandria that comes across in the texts of this Egyptian novelist, translator and literary critic, furthermore, is a city whose cosmopolitanism has a place for the Arab, the Muslim and the Egyptian components that have hitherto been denied recognition in the ‘Alexandria that we have lost’.

In his Alexandrian texts (Rama and the Dragon and his autobiographical novels The Way of the Eagle, City of Saffron and Girls of Alexandria) al-Kharrat does not provide a coherent guide to the city of his childhood and youth. Given al-Kharrat’s “morbid flinching from nostalgia’s indiscretions”,12 the smells in his oeuvre are never employed in a Proustian manner to refer to the essence of a lost city. Instead, they constantly draw our attention to streets, pavements, and alleyways of the material city. In contrast, to Durrell’s oft-quoted scene which ends with the famous words, “Alexandria: The Capital of Memory,” and which is followed by a section where we retrace the footsteps of the protagonist down the narrow streets that are “soft now of rain but not wet,” and that were lined with brothels whose prostitutes “like the true inhabitants of Alexandria, were offering the deep forgetfulness of parturition”, passing through his room where he “listen[ed] to the heavy tone of [Justine’s] scent,” and ending in his desperate attempt to remember the name of Justine’s perfume,12 al-Kharrat’s mix of smells, memories and loss ring less judgmental, more generous. Indeed.

I boarded the Mex tram, the one open on both sides. The agony of love, of jealousy, of humiliation gnawed at me. It had the pungent, putrid smell of the tanneries that was suffocating me. I was not sure she would come. By now I was almost sure she would not come. I stood under the old grey stone wall of the fort, not knowing precisely what was happening to me. I was out of the house high to my left, buttressing against an always imminent collapse. It was almost as though I could not see the vendors and fishermen squatting behind baskets and hammars laden with sardines and mullet and blue-fish and prawns and crabs. I stood my way, careful not to step on the meager bodies of discarded fish, flattened, bloody protrusions marking the heads and bellies.

Everything seemed hostile and yet very intimate…

The scent of the sea and of fresh raw fish permeated the slightly muddy alleys. The puddles of rainwater from yesterday’s storm still sparkled of moist earth, wafted to me.” (20)

What is remarkable about this and other passages in al-Kharrat’s texts is the manner in which the odors of the city, even if they are putrid and suffocating, even if they are of discarded fish and puddles of rainwater, conjure a celebration of the city, rather than a feeling of disgust, amazement or disillusionment. In fact, his constant references to smells express not only a celebration of the city and its exuberant vibrancy but a joyful embrace of life itself, and a childhood wonder at its mysteries and secrets. The smells wafting out of al-Kharrat’s Alexandria are full of life and fertility, evocative of pleasure and desire, suggestive of dampness and the sea. In contrast to the smells encountered by Keeley which were “cut only sporadically by a pinch of sea-salt, and which were(s) of a refuse not ripe enough to pass for garbage and a urine a bit too spotty for official concern,”15 in City of Saffron16 al-Kharrat constantly refers to “the breeze warm and cool by turns on my face, bringing the salt smell of the sea’ (42); to the ‘damp smell from the salt-marsh (and how it) still comes from over the railway-line wall’ (15); to the ‘smell of charcoal and flatsom, faint and slightly dry [coming] from the direction of the harbor, borne by the moisture of the air’ (24) And in contrast to Haag, who describes Alexandria on the eve of Durrell’s second visit as ‘spiritless, its harbor a mere cemetery’ and whose ‘palatial villas overgrown with bougainvilleas… abandoned or confiscated or left to rot by their impoverished owner, their rusting gates opening into wild and unkempt gardens,” al-Kharrat describes houses that were “like palaces, their iron, fences overhung with the thick branches of trees. The penetrating scent of native Jassamine, and the smell of moist earth, wafted to me.” (20)


10 See Durrell, Justine, Alexandria Quartet, 152–155.


15 Keeley, Cairo’s Alexandria, 4.

Above all, it is the scenes and smells of communal life and of an inter-ethnic mix that is most remarkable in al-Kharrat’s œuvre. In *City of Saffron* he describes how his Coptic mother and her Muslim neighbor, Sitt Wahiba, shared the task of washing the stairs of the building they shared:

On the day when the stairs were washed my mother filled the pail at the bathroom tap, carried it out to the landing and poured it out. The water cascaded down the steps, making a magnificent slapping, echoing noise. Then she squatted on her haunches and wiped each stair with a piece of sacking, step by step, until she reached Sitt Wahiba’s door. The latter would be waiting: ‘Watch over a bit—may no evil eye of mine harm you!’ And she would bend down and lift the hem of her house-galabiya to reveal her plump dark thighs, looking at me bashfully as she did so—which I found strange—and finish wiping down to the bottom step. (8)

This tolerance and amicable co-existence that al-Kharrat describes in the city of his youth were not restricted to relations between Egyptian Copts and Muslims, but included relations between Egyptians and foreigners. In *City of Saffron*, al-Kharrat relates many episodes in which foreigners and Egyptians interacted amicably in Alexandria and the few European characters that are introduced in the novel appear in very positive light. Even Allied soldiers who found themselves in the city during WWII are not criticized by the narrator for their drunken, rowdy behavior; rather, he sympathizes with their ordeal describing their orgies as being the result of ‘despair, defeat and death.’ (25)

What we see in al-Kharrat’s texts are signs of a different cosmopolitanism, one which is not confined to members of the elite, or to Western-educated classes. Rather, his is a more quotidian cosmopolitanism that is inspired by local, popular practices of tolerance and openness to others. In this open tolerant city, religious festivals become occasions for communal celebration and mutual exchange of practices among neighbors and friends across the religious divide. Al-Kharrat describes in some detail the preparations that his narrator’s mother undertook for the feast of the Archangel Mikhail and the rituals associated with it. These started with the purchase of special oil from the neighboring oil press:

> What he has printed on them in Coptic, and foliate crosses. Every year my mother arranged the pastries [...] and sent some of these pastries, on big, flat white-china plates decorated with blue flowers, to all her neighbors and beloved women friends—Umm Mahmud and Umm Hasan and Umm Toto, and my maternal aunt Hanna and my maternal aunt Labiba. The Muslims among her neighbors and bosom-friends would return the compliment at Ashura with special Ashura dishes; and at Ramadan, they sent round jugs of khushaf. We exchanged plates of ka’k and biscuits and ghurrayiba and crisp milk crackers, at the feast of Easter and Adha and Christmas and Fitr plates covered with ironed tea-towels, checked or white. (86–87)

Throughout al-Kharrat’s œuvre, we witness—and smell—a cosmopolitanism that is more inclusive and more tolerant than that of an elite. Westernized class which has been celebrated by scholars of cosmopolitan Alexandria. Throughout there is the extended invitation to experience another Alexandria, an Alexandria which is a smooth boulder in the [heart of the deluge], where the valley slides slope down, green with lily-of-the-valley and elderflower; where the land is saffron, fertile and living; and where on high a black dove flutters, its wings spread out to infinity, beating in my heart for ever. (106)
The Shuhada
of the Past Fifty Years

The Blood of the Martyrs Will Not Stop

‘A million and a half million martyrs’. Ever since I was a child, that’s what I have heard. It is a figure of myths and legends. For a long time it was lodged in my mind and in the minds of thirty-six million Algerians. It refers, of course, to the death toll of the War of Independence (1954–1962). It is one of our founding myths, us Algerians. It follows us everywhere we go. When I travel to any other Arab country, as soon as I say that I am Algerian, someone is always there to remark, ‘Ah! al-Djazaïr, balad al milionne chahid.’ (Ah, Algeria, the land of a million martyrs!) It is a sort of brand we cannot shake, not even fifty years after independence. I admit I was astonished when I learned that this total was based more on legend than on fact and that historians (Benjamin Stora and Mohammed Harbi, to name two), actually estimate the toll to be around 400,000 deaths—most of them civilian. I admit that I was a little sad. It was as if you had discovered, at age forty, that your father was not really your father. I learned late in life, very late, that this story of a million and a half martyrs was rooted in one of President Ahmed Ben Bella’s impassioned speeches. Addressing a highly charged crowd during the summer of 1962, he threw out this number on the fly. One of the key phrases in our national story was thus etched into marble.

Beyond these guesses and exaggerations about the death toll are the so-called laurels of post-colonial martyrdom, which in hindsight are striking. This bloodshed continued to torment the majority of the country even after the ceasefire, as if my people needed to offer up every one of the supposed one and a half million bodies to some vicious deity in order to reach nirvana. Algerians, rise up!

In this account, I want to trace, in broad strokes, the story of the river of blood that will not let. The post-1962 martyrs, the shuhada, were just so many offerings to this cannibalistic monster, an Algerivore that is never sated. A demon-god that I imagine takes the physical form of the Maqam Eshahid; literally, “the shrine of the martyrs,” a giant concrete beast looming over Algiers. This beast devours a hundred men for lunch and as many for dinner. It wolfs down thousands of legs, hearts, kidneys, and other throbbing organs before puking them all up again into the Bay of Algiers.

“Seven Years is Enough!”

Emerging at last from colonial domination, this parched earth, hacked and furrowed by the claws of conquerors, called out to be watered with fresh blood. Not watered gently, as one would a garden, but violently; brutally. The liberators had hardly put down their guns before the country plunged into civil war. It was the crisis of the summer of 1962, as the news referred to the fierce rivalries among the factions of the FLN. Indeed, a muffled war was about to break out between the political and the military wings of the ruling party. It would pit the followers of Colonel Boumediène, operating out of Morocco, against the Provisional Government (GPRA), based in Tunis. Ben Bella, hoisted onto Boumediène’s tanks, entered Algiers triumphantly on August 3, 1962, leaving behind him a trail thick with the blood of 3,000 bodies. People filled the roads chanting, “Sabâa snine

SPECULATION

Mustapha Benfodil

Portrait of Ramdhane Mekhaznia, a twenty-two year old biologist who immolated himself on August 16, 2011. He was the only member of his family to have earned a diploma. He lived in El Ouenza, a small Algerian mining town that borders Tunisia.

1 A ceasefire between France and the FLN was established on March 19, 1962, the day after the Evian Accords were signed.
2 Shuhada, plural of shahid, Arabic for “martyr.”
3 Front de Libération Nationale (National Liberation Front), the legendary revolutionary party that led the battle against colonialism.
4 A nickname for Mohamed Boukharouba. He was the chief of staff and figurehead of the so-called Border Army (Armées des Frontières).
Some heads of the Revolution proved themselves to be troublesome even in death. This was notably the case with Colonel Amirouche, nicknamed the ‘Lion of Djurdjura’, who was killed near Boussaâda by the Special Forces on March 29, 1959. Of course, it wasn’t just the French who the valiant Amirouche troubled—he clearly worried his brothers in arms, too. The most tragic part of this affair is that Amirouche Aït Hamouda never even had the right to a burial. As soon as the country was liberated, Amirouche’s remains were thrown into the basement at the headquarters of the national police force in the hills above Algiers. It was a way of erasing all trace of him; razing his legacy. His remains were not dug up until 1984. He had to wait twenty years to claim the right to a monument in Martyrs Square, the renowned cemetery of revolutionary heroes. This is precisely our relationship to our martyrs; we honor them selectively, and this praise is always strongly dependent on power struggles within the nationalist movement.

For civilians, the violence did not stop in 1962—far from it. The protests of October 1988 left 500 dead. Activists called the victims ‘martyrs of democracy.’ Then came the war in the 1990s, bringing funeral after funeral to the streets of the country. The first martyr of the new Algerian war was President Mohamed Boudiaf. He was considered to be the father of the FLN, a revolutionary from the start, and his assassination was seen as a sort of patricide. Barely six months after his inauguration, Boudiaf was shot on June 29, 1992 while giving a speech at a cultural center in Annaba. The event was broadcast live on television. This dramatic end ushered in a new war, and its own harvest of casualties. The numbers are shocking. Some say there were between 100,000 and 200,000 deaths. No one has the list. No one has the names. And no government agency has ever been made to turn over an official report on the casualties.

Heroes without a grave

Some heads of the Revolution proved themselves to be troublesome even in death. This was notably the case with Colonel Amirouche, nicknamed the ‘Lion of Djurdjura’, who was killed near Boussaâda by French paratroopers on March 29, 1959. Of course, it wasn’t just the French whom the valiant Amirouche troubled—he clearly worried his brothers in arms, too.

Remembrance is forbidden

April 15, 1999: Abdelaziz Bouteflika was ‘elected’ president, roadmap in hand: an amnesty project to be carried out immediately. September 28, 1999: a referendum is held regarding the Civil Concord and the fate of the Islamic Salvation Army’s military branch of the Islamic Salvation Front. This act pardoned the minor offenses of Islamist prisoners. September 29, 2005: the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation was also adopted via referendum. This meant total amnesty for the worst

5 In Algeria, this term is used in reference to the War of Independence (1954–1962).
6 At a farm in Tetouan on December 26, 1957, he was strangled in cold blood by Abdelhafidh Boussouf, the head of the FLN’s secret service, the precursor organization to the political police.
7 Armée Islamique du Salut (AIS).
8 Front Islamique du Salut (FIS).

A child in the Hai Edhalma neighborhood, who totes the Algerian flag on his jacket. What does the future hold?
Some people requested that a reconciliation was only death. According to a report from the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights, after which the Islamic Front for Salvation had been robbed of their rightful electoral victory. This did not go over well with the population. In the cities and towns where the so-called penitents had reintegrated into civil society, life became agonizing, especially for the families of the dead. Penitent (repentant): another word that was in vogue. A new class of citizens who were going to invest in the public sphere, improve their communities. A perfect example of this situation was the case of Mohamed Gharbi, a former mujahidin6 from the eastern Algerian village of Souk Ahras who picked up a gun in order to defend himself and his family after repeated threats and taunts from Ali Merad, a repentant former Islamist leader. One day, Gharbi refused to endure the affronts any longer and shot him point blank. He was sentenced to death in February 2001 for killing the penitent. His case—which brings into sharp focus all the absurdities and the folly of the amnesty law, the official decree for total absolution—sparked a substantial popular rally.

Our very own Boutef7 shouldered the mantel of full-fledged president to underpin the institutions of this country’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, to weaken the state, to damage the agents who have served with dignity, or to tarnish the image of Algeria on the world stage will be punished with three to five years in prison and a fine of 250,000 to 500,000 dinars.8

It was not just the families of the disappeared who were outraged by this text. The families of the dead also considered that this total absolution of crimes attributed to Islamist activists constituted an attack on the memory of their loved ones. To top it all off, the leaders never descended from the djebel (or mountain) not once, to express even a sliver of regret or sorrow for the actions. For them, the violence that had been a justified jihad, after which the Islamic Front for Salvation had been robbed of their rightful electoral victory. Some people requested that a reconciliation process based on the South African model, under the aegis of Nelson Mandela, be implemented, including a committee on truth and justice, where the main players—that is, the Islamists and agents of the state—would admit to their crimes, allowing for a cathartic processing of trauma. The regime wanted to move quickly and bury the dead without delay, however, to keep the war going. This did not go over well with the population. In the cities and towns where the so-called penitents had reintegrated into civil society, life became agonizing, especially for the families of the dead. Penitent (repentant): another word that was in vogue. A new class of citizens who were going to invest in the public sphere, improve their communities. A perfect example of this situation was the case of Mohamed Gharbi, a former mujahidin from the eastern Algerian village of Souk Ahras who picked up a gun in order to defend himself and his family after repeated threats and taunts from Ali Merad, a repentant former Islamist leader. One day, Gharbi refused to endure the affronts any longer and shot him point blank. He was sentenced to death in February 2001 for killing the penitent. His case—which brings into sharp focus all the absurdities and the folly of the amnesty law, the official decree for total absolution—sparked a substantial popular rally.

The War of Monuments

When speaking of the current Arab insurrections, everybody asks me, “And you? When will your revolution come?” I regret that when the October 1988 uprising broke out, over twenty years before the ones in Tunisia and Egypt, there was no al-Jazeera and there was no Facebook to give it the attention and support it deserved. It is worthwhile to emphasize that at no point when Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire and the people of Tunisia rose up, a series of unprecedented riots erupted across Algeria. Numerous protests followed, demanding change hic et nunc (here and now). I participated in many of these demonstrations, and despising strong mobilization of elites and supporters of democracy, the movement never quite caught on at the popular level. People told us they were sick of the violence. “Barkana dem’i” they said. (“Enough blood already!”) Yet, the fact remains that Algerians continue to die, disgracefully sacrificed at the altar of oppression and injustice. Every day brings new offerings to the Maqam Eshhad (Monument of the Martyrs). Every day, groups of harragas (“burners”, or undocumented immigrants to Europe) throw themselves into the sea, illegal migrants trying to reach Europe on makeshift boats. Kamel Belabed, father of a harraga whom he hasn’t heard anything from since 2007, declared to me in words full of truth: “The harragas are neither harereared nor suicidal. They are a political movement.” Another growing phenomenon that has emerged as a form of citizen resistance by contradiction is self-immolation. Not a day passes in which a citizen, a man or a woman, does not drench herself in gasoline and set herself on fire. Sometimes, she sets fire to her children, too. A full fifty years after independence, and the number of self-immolations is soaring. This is a scathing critique of Bouteflika and his cronies. How many times have I heard this phrase—how many times from former guerilla fighters themselves? “Mazal maddinache l’istiqlal.” (or, “We have not yet gained independence.”) Where does the blood run from now? As the death toll escalates, Algerians just don’t know where to stop. Martyrs supplant martyrs. Walking around Algiers, I am often struck by the succession of monuments to the dead. Each new war produces its own set of martyrs. I note with a certain shudder, however, that at a certain point, the Algerians stopped erecting new commemorative monuments. For them, the violence had already begun, such that the massacres of Bentalha, Rais, and Had Echkalla, which claimed fifty victims, are not marked by any monument, not even a cardboard sign. Nothing. It is as if only a pack of wild dogs had been killed there. I do not know what could stop the bleeding and heal our hearts. I do not know how to hasten the clotting of the blood of history. Yet I am just dim enough to believe that mourning can begin when the terms of the autopsy are agreed upon. The language of the autopsy, the autopsy that reveals the true cause of death and that allows us to move on to other

Algerians, rise up again! Finish the job. Strike one more time and seize this damn independence!

Mustapha Benfodil, author, artist, and journalist

9 Ligue algérienne de défense des droits de l’homme (LADDH).
10 Presidential decree regarding the implementation of the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, article 46.
11 An FLN guerilla fighter during the War of Independence.
12 Boutef is a nickname for sitting president Abdelaziz Bouteflika.
In the exchange that follows, artists Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz along with queer theorist Ann Cvetkovich reflect on the intersections between their recent projects. They have taken feeling and politics as a point of departure, in addition to the relation between past and present, and the productive value of negative affects. Here, they reflect on the category of regret (the focus of this Manifesta Journal special issue), and its implications for their work on toxicity, feeling bad, the politics of passivity, and feelings of ambivalence.

Regret

(Ann Cvetkovich)

In my collaborative work with Public Feelings groups, we often start with what seem like minor key words or feelings, such as depression (the subject of my new book), respite, or impasse, in order to explore their genealogies, social meanings, and affective resonances. Sometimes the work is associative, and even tangential or impressionistic connections can be productive. Although I haven’t done much thinking about it, “regret” is a suggestive category for this kind of investigation, especially since it is another form of “feeling bad”, the colloquial term I have used for negative affects. One of the first things that comes to mind is the question of whether militant women activists from the 1960s and 1970s, such as Weather Underground members Kathy Boudin and Judith Clark “regret” their involvement in violent actions such as the 1981 Brinks Robbery that led to the death of a Brinks driver and two policemen. Boudin was also involved in the 1970 Greenwich Village townhouse explosion that killed three of her comrades. I am intrigued by the ambivalent status of radical left militancy and by the feelings that accompany the turn to violence to make a better world. In so many examples, perpetrators (itself a loaded term)—Nazis, sex offenders, slave owners, imperialists, murderers, terrorists— are represented as unsympathetic, and it is easy to project homogenizing and alienating concepts of evil onto them. Because of that, their cases don’t manage to ad ride much traction on the complex and ambivalent feelings that can accompany acts of violence. The minor archive of radical activists admitting their mistakes, feeling regrets, or figuring out ways to make amends is thus useful.

As a specifically political feeling regret resembles the forms of disappointment and despair about the failures of activism that I and others have experienced under the rubric of political depression. But whereas political despair can be the product of doing what you think are all the right things and still not getting what you want, regret captures the circumstances of having tried something that you now recognize to have been wrong and even harmful to others. The case of the Weather Underground, and more generally the pursuit of militant action for a good cause—such as armed struggle in revolutionary contexts like South Africa, Ireland, and Palestine—is a source of intrigue for radical activists committed to non-violent protest. What happens when you intend to do violence, or when violence that wasn’t supposed to result in the loss of life doesn’t turn out the way you had expected? These difficult cases of the relation between feeling and action make for morally ambiguous stories of uncertain agency that are infrequently told in the popular media. We have very few models for what it means to discuss acts of violence or to be a political leader who acknowledges mistakes, because doing so means displaying disparaged forms of public vulnerability. (Gender, sexuality, and conceptions of masculinity are central here, in addition to my interest in whether or not women and lesbians who have committed acts of violence are more inclined to acknowledge feelings of regret.) If we had a better sense of how one might acknowledge a mistake and still move forward, and of how one were able to create a different relation between past feelings and actions and the future, what would concepts such as reparation, apology, atonement, or making amends look like? Kathy Boudin and Judith Clark were, for example, co-founders of AIDS Counseling and Education (ACE) at Bedford Hills prison, and Clark has taught parenting classes, participated in writing programs, and trained service dogs.

The proposal for this special issue of Manifesta Journal places regret alongside nostalgia and shame, both categories that have been of interest for queer affect studies, particularly as the focus of efforts to de-pathologize negative affects and to consider their productive potential. If queer theory de-pathologizes shame, for example, might it also de-pathologize regret? Does “de-pathologizing regret” mean that we refuse to regret or that we embrace it? Or perhaps that we can do both simultaneously as a measure of the contradictory nature of emotional life? I think, for example, of the ambivalent force of Edith Piaf’s “Je ne regrette rien” in which the world-weary diva articulates a tough refusal of feeling (one that can underwrite forms of historical amnesia) while at the same time indulges in feeling through its refusal, particularly through the mournfulness of vocal sound itself.

The link between regret and nostalgia is also suggestive because recent theories of melancholy and queer temporalities struggle with the problem of whether to critique nostalgia or claim it.1 When queer theorists and artists seek versions of holding on to the past that retain the negative—ones that don’t abandon the present or the future in favor of


2 See Tom Robbins, Judith Clark’s Radical Transformation,” New York Times Magazine, Jan 12, 2012. Other examples include Katherine Ann Power (who was involved in robberies in Massachusetts that led to the death of a police officer. She went underground and then surrendered in Oregon in 1993), Patty Hearst (the subject of performance work by Sharon Hayes), Bernadette Dohrn, and the Baader-Meinhof Gang.

3 See Kathryn Bond Stockton’s discussion of the film Heavenly Creatures, in which she argues for the complexity of the affective conditions for murder, which cannot simply be explained in terms of ‘premeditation’ or conscious ‘motives’. See The Queer ONS. Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).


an idealized past but instead seize the negativity of the past as a resource for the future—they often try to reject bad versions of nostalgia that, like the sentimental, erase negative affect or whitewash the past. But I am drawn to the dismissive or post-Marxist reactions that feel as being truly bad instead of being useful, productive, or good versions of bad feelings and I thus want to retain nostalgia as a category.

With this prelude in mind, I am curious to know how the term “regret” resonates alongside your work, since for you, as for me, it doesn’t necessarily seem to be a primary category but rather one that is potentially present in the interstices of shame and nostalgia. I understand that these are significant categories for you, including their relation to the category of the “toxic,” whose ambivalent meanings you have been exploring of late.

(Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz):
As you have aptly pointed out, we have worked more on “shame”, which somehow seems to be “part of the family” of regret, since we might regret to have done something which in turn forces us to blush. Therefore regret may be directed not only to dramatic events but also to really small and everyday practices, such as having uttered a wrong sentence or having forgotten to do something. Renate worked on shame in her recent book, Queer Art; but has developed the subject more extensively in Außwändige Durchquerungen, in the context of a queer perspective on labor, which has been an important subject in our common work since we met almost fifteen years ago. Shame indicates that the gaze of others reveals us to be something that we don’t want to be, while we have already experienced or fantasized otherwise. (See also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Elspeth Probyn on work on shame). Shame can also indicate that we have become someone we want to be on the one hand, but on the other hand that we do not want to be like that by any means. Thus the concept of shame is an effective tool in the field of neoliberal labor, since it is particularly produced by the meeting of contradictory or incongruous demands.

It also seems as if regret is particularly activated under current working conditions. This is another interesting aspect that you characterized in your reports on the “Public Feelings Groups”: That the groups themselves started as a questioning or protest against “professional norms that demand success, productivity, and a seamless public persona” and that many participants described a “sense of divided attention” between professional demands and political urgencies. If a person feels responsible for his or her own well-being, happiness or prosperous future, he or she might fear to regret something in the future which is or is not presently being taken care of. One might fear to regret having refused a task, such as working long hours, or giving a certain lecture. Yet at the same time one might also fear having wasted one’s entire life working and not having been lazy enough—police, or that sports and health should have been more of a priority. This kind of ongoing negotiation is one part of a deployment of labor that we call "sexual labor"; a term that combines concepts of a performative, repeated production of gender, race and sexuality with post-Marxist concepts of work and precariousness. Regret and shame both seem to be indications of precarious (and thus of vulnerable) bodies. However, their inner workings are unpredictable since they are both motivated by contradictions. This flexibility and unpredictability opens up the concepts to resistance and de-normalization. Our film, "Normal Work," refers to the photographs and documents of the Victorian housemaid Hannah Cullwick. Her leftovers from the late nineteenth century are a good early exemplar of those contradictions: Having felt ashamed to have opened her employer’s door to visitors in a completely dirty and dripping dress, she writes that at the same time, she loved dirt as a sign of achieved labor, and obviously as a sign of her masculinity. The permanent crossing of social positions is a very productive deployment but, as Hannah Cullwick’s photographic work shows and as we wanted to highlight in our film, it might also lead to the complete de-normalization of such practices.

We agree that just rejecting the feeling of “regret” full-stop might not work. Maybe not rejecting but multiplying the possible future of regret would be an interesting response. The American performer and artist Bob Flanagan wrote the great poem, “Why?”, which seemed to answer the unspoken question, “Why you are such a pervert and invest your energy in S&M practices?”. In so doing, he seemed to produce a collection of everything in the past that might have influenced him in a way that could have been regret but... well... it could also have been something else. A short excerpt: "... Because there was so much sickness; because I say FUCK THE SICKNESS; because I like the attention; because I was alone a lot; because I was different; because kids beat me up on the way to school; because I was humiliated by runs; because of Christ and the Crucifixion; because of Porky Pig in bondage.”

If we think of regret as something that feels bad because we cannot change the past that unavoidably influences our future, I think our art works might intervene into this complex since they invest a lot into chronopolitics; the politics of temporality. Our films, such as “No Future / No Past” particularly reference the politics of Punk, but actually all of our works, look for forgotten queer moments in the past and then rework them in order to create an archive of de-normalizing practices for a livable future. Our recent work, “Toxic”, refers to the violent history of photography as an instrument of the police and of racist colonial practices. It seems important not to refer to these practices by simply quoting them but at the same time to look for deterritorializing moments where the racist and homophobic impulses weren’t successful, in addition to intervening in the past in a way that may improve the prospects for the future.

6 Renate Lorenz, Queer Art, A Freak Theory (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012).
10 See Renate Lorenz / Brigitta Kuster, Sexuelle Arbeit (in German) (Berlin: b_books 2006).
12 See Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, Temporal Drag (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011).
* Note from the Editors: The plural and variegated resonances of chronopolitics are further investigated in Manifesta Journal 14 and 15. See www.manifestajournal.org.
No Future / No Past
Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz

Installation with two Super 16mm films / HD, 15 min and 15 min, 2011
Performance: Ginger Brooks Takahashi, Fruity Franky, Werner Hirsch, Olivia Anna Livki, G. Rizo

No Future / No Past is a film installation and part of a series of two films that both work on punk archives from the period between 1976 and 2031 investigating the radical negativity, the self-destructiveness and the dystopia of this past moment. This work takes another look – anachronistically – at the punk policy of aggressively slating and rejecting the present without ever proposing its own movement as the guarantor of future social justice. Instead of demanding social change, the five performers – four musicians (Ginger Brooks Takahashi/“Men”, Fruity Franky/“Lesbians on Ecstasy”, G. Rizo, Olivia Anna Livki), and a choreographer (Werner Hirsch) – stage and practice outmoded acts and sentiments of the past that have been deemed useless. The musician-performers provisionally take over the positions of four musicians from the punk movement: Darby Crash, Poly Styrene, Alice Bag, and Joey Ramone.
**Toxic and “Feeling Bad”**

(Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz):

We are currently very interested in the term “toxic”. Not only to address the historic and present discourses around toxicity and to introduce the term as a critical instrument, but also to highlight its ambivalence— somehow we use it as an equivalent to “queer”—as a term which is as much bound to violence as it is to pleasure; to a different beat in life and to the de-normalization of certain practices. Let us briefly describe our last film, entitled *Toxic*. The film starts without human performers, although it is located in a theatre space, indicated by colorful curtains and a projection screen. Instead of performers, on stage are many huge and small plants, including toxic ones such as winter roses and rhododendrons. The floor is covered with a dirty mixture of old glitter, cigarette butts and pills. The two performers, Werner Hirsch and Ginger Brooks Takahashi, enter first as simple on-screen projections. They are seen in a series of “mug shots” (photographs) taken both frontally and in profile at once, a style that was invented to photograph criminals, sex workers, homosexuals and people from the colonies, and was used by the police or in anthropology from the late nineteenth century onwards.

The people photographed are of unclear gender and origin. They wear masks and strange costumes and show off assemblages, referring not only to early ethnographic imagery, but also to queer underground subculture and to street protests. Sometimes the people in the photographs don’t even look human. Though there are references, there is also a certain level of imperceptibility. When the two performers finally enter the stage they seem not to care about the slide show in the background. Werner Hirsch inhales smoke from his cigarette and coughs a cloud of glitter out of his mouth, whilst Ginger Brooks Takahashi takes up a microphone and begins listing off a number of toxic substances, a cloud of glitter out of his mouth, whilst Ginger Brooks Takahashi takes up a microphone and begins listing off a number of toxic substances, thereby obscuring the categories of environmental catastrophes (the Great Pacific Plastic Patch; radioactive contamination; substances that cross national borders); treatments that supposedly heal (chemotherapy, Xanax); narcotics (cocaine, heroin); and soft drugs (alcohol, cigarettes). The usage of the word “toxic” seems not only to tolerate ambivalences but to produce and enhance them. It refers to bodies, which are permeable, extending beyond the layer of skin that contains them, as Donna Haraway has said, or even better, to “body-substance-assemblages”.13 The doses of the substances are important, but you never know what dose might produce which effect.

Our work on toxicity was initially inspired by a text by Mel Y. Chen, “Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections.14 Chen introduces her topic by showing how the discourses around toxicity currently install racist hierarchies (toxic toys are produced in China, but instead of protesting the toxic working conditions the discourse is more about China’s propensity to poison white children in the West). She further complicates her critique of the discourse by explaining her own condition, (Multiple Chemical Sensitivity), which forces her to live her life within the confines of this very discourse of toxic danger. In the end, “toxic” seems to be more about practices and relations, one between humans but also ones between humans and “animist” furniture for instance. While working on the film installation we came to the assumption that it could be useful to see not only substances—chemicals or parts of plants, among other things—as toxic but the photographic / filmic apparatus as well: its history since the nineteenth century; the technologies, matters, practices, discourses and social effects that are implied therein, in addition to the way we continue to work both in and through them. Yet even if the cinematic apparatus tries to allow for unmediated objectivity and knowledge it might also produce ec/static bodies and queer connections as dirty and uncanny by-products, if you will.

(Ann Cvetkovich):

Although I have not used it directly in my own work, I, too, have been intrigued by Mel Chen’s discussion of “toxic animacies” and was excited to see your use of it in *Toxic*. Chen’s examples of small children licking toys and the intimacy between her fatigued body and a cough render vivid new theories of affect that underscore how the object/thing world is just as “animated” or alive as human beings are. The porous boundaries between people, objects, and environments make for queer and unpredictable forms of embodiment and intersubjectivity. Although this vulnerability opens up the body to toxic forms of contamination, it is also an enabling condition towards being affected by the world, for forms of “chemical” (or biological) sensitivity are also about being attuned to people, objects, and environments. The “transmission of affect”, to borrow a term from Teresa Brennan, takes place at a sensory level that is not necessarily conscious or cognitive, and it thus necessitates the new accounts of sensory experience provided by recent theories of affect.15

This conception of intersubjective and sensory embodiment is present in my thinking about depression, which I describe as the result of being so overwhelmed or flooded by sensations from the outside world that one is unable to sustain a self. Critiquing the medicalization of depression and pharmacological solutions—the idea that a pill can “cure all”—is important to me. Anti-depressants and their marketing feed the desire to find a drug and ingest it in order to alter the biochemical substrate of felt experience. The list of drugs in *Toxic* reveals the range of ways in which we seek the assistance of “chemical substances” and our medical world makes me wonder whether “toxicity” necessarily entails notions of the pharmacological relation. I am interested in new ways of working with the integrated relation between inside and outside, and between body and mind.

As in the case of “regret”, practices of re-description are also central, which are manifested both in writing and in art practices that re-imagine the medical, the political, and the therapeutic in everyday and lived contexts. (Renate and Pauline’s work would be an exemplary case here.) I have, for example, favored the term “feeling bad” over ‘depression’,

13 For a further discussion of such a concept see Lorenz, Queer Art, 2012.
Toxic
Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz

Installation with Super 16mm film / HD, 13 min and archive, 2012
Performance: Ginger Brooks Takahashi, Werner Hirsch

The film Toxic shows two protagonists in an undated time, a punk figure in glitter (Ginger Brooks Takahashi) and a drag queen (Werner Hirsch), both of unclear gender and origin. They linger in an environment of glossy remains, of toxic plants and transformed ethnographic and police photography. While the punk gives a speech on toxicity and a performance referencing early feminist art works, the drag queen reenacts an interview of Jean Genet from the ‘80s and blames the filmmakers for exposing her to the police-like scenario of being filmed. As the camera turns and depicts the space-off, the space outside the frame, a question is raised: what happens if the film and photographic apparatus is focused from a perspective of toxicity?
because I wanted a term that was open-ended and that wasn’t freighted with the medical connotations that so often foreclose more nuanced stories. This strategy served as a point of departure for The Alphabet of Feeling Bad, my recent film/performance collaboration with Karin Michalski, which seeks to generate multiple vocabularies for feeling bad, including ordinary words such as numbness, dread, and hopelessness.16

**The Politics of Passivity**

(Ann Cvetkovich)

We have both expressed interest in the “politics of passivity”, a concept that comes up in the conclusion of Heather Love’s Feeling Backward, which is inspired by the same “Public Feelings Discussions” on political depression that also catalyzed my book.17 As I understand it, the “politics of passivity” is a way of describing conceptions of politics that don’t turn on heroic action or revolution, that make space for quieter, less melodramatic, more ordinary forms of activity or even for states of being that do not look like action. A useful resource for the concept is Anne-Lise François’s theory of recessive action that was laid out in her book, Open Secrets.18 Focusing on Romantic and nineteenth century texts that do not reflect Enlightenment notions of progress and productivity, François identifies scenes of non-action that are emotionally sufficient even when “nothing happens.”

I realize that having started with an image of 1960s revolutionary activism was no accident—it is actually a constant provocation for my efforts to imagine activism in new ways. Neither do I want to neglect exploring them. They possibly fit under the rubric of regret, and enable new ways of thinking about activism that can include what otherwise looks like passivity, inaction, and mixed feelings.

Perhaps your interest in the non-melodramatic moment in Toxic that appears in the midst of what looks like a theatrical staging of dramatic performance and affect might follow along these lines: the moments that come before or after the performance, or that happen alongside it, or the moments that are articulated in a flat or affectless register. These connect with my own interest in ordinary affects (as articulated by Kathleen Stewart) and especially in questions of how to represent them.19 In Depression: A Public Feeling I turned to memoir because I wanted to explore different ways of writing the non-dramatic moment—the forms of non-activity, such as sleeping in, shopping, going to the dentist, or swimming repetitive laps in a pool, where it seems like nothing important is happening or where things do not add up to anything in particular. As I tell the story, those moments can contain resources for later insight or action, but in ways that are unable to be anticipated and thus do not necessarily have implications for how the moment could be lived differently.

Regret may thus be resisted here, as well as shame or nostalgia—there is no point in thinking about how it might have been different; it simply was. My interest in depression stems in part from wanting to sidestep the relentless demand for productivity under capitalism. As you also suggest above, “regret” takes specific forms under capitalism—sometimes people regret not doing more (not working harder, not getting better results), and sometimes they regret not doing less (for example, working less in order to leave more time for family and for leisure). Either way the condition that produces these forms of regret is the demand for productive results. If we relinquish this demand, what affective experiences and what conceptions of politics might be possible? Furthermore, what forms of documentation or representation could help us to imagine other ways of thinking and feeling?

(Paule Boudry / Renate Lorenz):

Referring to your question how to work on conceptions and representations that reject the demand for productivity under capitalism, we would like to come back to our common interest in ‘ambivalences’. We think that there is a connection between the politics of ambivalence and queer passivity. You mentioned the moments of “flat” actions in Toxic, for instance. The fact that you have privileged ‘feeling bad’ as an element of concern with the everyday affect and the seemingly less-important distress instead of “trauma” seems to go in the same direction. These kinds of actions seem to nourish the different types of ambivalences (for instance between playing the role of substance use and the toxicity and possible normalizing effect of medication against depression) instead of trying to straightforward them or to produce a clear position (which often appears to be the most important precondition of leftist politics). We also like Heather Love’s work on “queer passivity” in Feeling Backward, especially her argument that leftist politics produce their own norms, which further render certain politics and abilities invisible or useless and that it might be important to produce an archive of political gestures which are not based on those norms. Our research on the Punk movement (No Future / No Past) was particularly concerned with the question of why it might still be useful to aggressively reject the world as it is, choosing to long to destroy it without providing a better alternative. Finally, in your text, Public Feelings, you also mention that negative affect should be seen as a resource for politics rather than as its antithesis. Here, we like Avital Ronell’s neologism “pathivity”, which addresses a way of being passive whilst still moving.21 This matches the idea that agency and passivity are not mutually exclusive.

We suppose that a certain passivity of action also produces a rhythm or pulse that might be an important part of an alternative and anti-capitalist “worlding”, a way to invest in imperceptible politics or politics of opaqueness.

20 See http://www.boudry-lorenz.de/.
Civil awakening at this time / sheds a new light on the great revolutions of the eighteenth century / exposes the fact that they are the revolutions of ruling powers / which, on behalf of the nation's right to self-determination / expel entire populations / And in the name of the capital they covet / recruit all who are allowed to remain or enter / as the nation's sentries.

For every horror / that today might seem a novelty / a precedent is found in regimes that rose, inspired by those great revolutions / revolutions that created / an ongoing regime-made disaster / A disaster for the mere fact that based / on religion, nationality, gender or race / not all governed are recognized as citizens / A regime-made disaster in which / the body politic is abstracted from all who are governed / and becomes an idea / A product of a ruling power / that by brute force decrees: these—yes, those—no.

Those who were distanced from the body politic / created in the great revolutions of the eighteenth century / women, blacks, the poor, and children / are the ones whose civil awakening moved revolution / But the civil revolution was immediately replaced by governmental power revolution / and instead of partnership among members of the body politic / they became ruled.

Since then, when sometimes against all chances / Opportunity appears on the horizon / Citizens have not given up / The possibility of imagining another life / Once in a while they re-emerge and declare: / Without us there is no body politic; only an idea on paper.

Home they are in the pictures / sweating, shouting, putting up tents / surrounding policemen, holding fishing rods as well as pots and pans / with ropes and in underwear / sharing the space and claiming a re-partitioning / Determined to be, and not to be evicted / They transform time and again / Turn civil language into a spoken one / A language learnt in the body / and written in pictures / spoken in the plural / together with others / Anyone who speaks it is present as a living reminder / of the fact that she is not a resource / neither she nor the world in which she lives / That rule is merely a temporary deposit / and when it does not enable being-together / it must be re-constituted.

Civil language is not new / It is being revived today / because all over the world / simultaneously / more and more women and men speak to each other in civil language / The broad expansion of this language creates an opportunity to rethink Palestine / To suspend, ad hoc, solutions proposed by oppressive politics / of which nationality, capital and war are an syntactic foundations / To reconstruct possibilities of being-together in which Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies / To recognize refugees as an ongoing ‘occupy’ movement / to claim a civil state to which refugees return and shape their destiny as full citizens for all purposes / To realize the potential of the world's political map, showing that / of all places, Palestine, whose people were expelled and oppressed for decades / has been spared the 'award' entitled 'nation-state' and the lie of self-determination / To contest the conformist idea that a nation needs self-determination and a nation-state / No state better demonstrates how the nation-state oppresses than the State of Israel / All those who do not belong to its people / Fortification of borders / Refusal of refugee to those who seek it within its area / and Use of the force vested in it by its citizens to intimidate them / and in the name of their security / Expel those marked as its enemies.

A huge number of civil language speakers in places far and wide / are learning and using it nowadays, simultaneously / The revival of civil language on a global scale / is a golden opportunity to reconstruct / rich repertoires of past civil actions / and to re-weave all its performances / that have been consistently oppressed by sovereign national regimes.

For the first time in history / civil awakening has managed to break through the shackles of the nation-state / Today in Bahrain, tomorrow in Montréal / yesterday in Ramallah / next week in Tel Aviv / in June in Seoul / and in October in San’ā.

The hour of Palestine has come / the time to revive Palestine / as a beacon for all nations—state in which / Palestinians and Jews will live together as citizens.

Information with which to complete the list of photographers is welcome.
Fifteen thousand demonstrators filled the streets in protest of lifting the ban on American beef importation. They reached public space equipped with ropes and pipes fearing that the police would prevent their protest. Demonstrators surrounded by policemen are a common sight. When it reverses and the policemen are surrounded, one may begin to ask poignant questions about the right to public space. One might also ask if the answer for the question of why the policemen turn their backs to the mass of protesters that circle them cannot be found in this image of one particular protestor whom they have surrounded.

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One hundred policemen surround a small encampment that has remained in the square after a night of “settlement” in protest of pension payment reforms. Some of the protesters wore masks and sunglasses to protect themselves against policemen whose helmets imply that their setup in public space is ominous.

Photographer: Pete Hendrick. © Pete Hendrick

Bil’in, July 12, 2012
In this act, too, Palestinians are the ones who will be arrested. This time, however, they force the Israeli soldiers to chase them as if they were chasing Jewish prisoners under the Nazi regime. The soldiers can insist that these are only Palestinians, but the photographic act preserves the meaning with which Palestinians wanted to imbue the situation.

© Photograph Haitham Khatib / Haitham Khatib Photography

Bil’in, February 12, 2012
Palestinians, Israelis and internationals in Nabi tribe costume fight imperialism, turning the film “Avatar” into an allegory of Palestinian existence. Whoever does not support their struggle against the regime that subjugates them is assigned a rather dubitable role in the plot.

© Photograph Oren Ziv / Activestills.org
Tel Aviv, Rabin Square, June 30, 2012

An armored vehicle installed with state-of-the-art combat equipment—“Raccoon” (“Stalker”) intelligence-gathering system. The “Raccoon”, which has so far been used against Palestinians in the West Bank, has begun to roam Tel Aviv–Jaffa freely, illegally gathering information on citizens and their political views.

© Photograph Ariella Azoulay

Cairo, January 28, 2011

The presence of a military armored vehicle in the city center is nearly as outrageous as the statue of a tyrant. The lack of reaction by the policemen in its turret to a garbage bag thrown at its windshield is another omen of the turnabout in the position policemen would adopt shortly after, in the civil awakening of Cairo.

© Photograph Goran Tomasevic / Reuters

Madrid, July 18, 2012

As a sign of their support of the demonstrators, policemen remove the riot helmets they wear when suppressing protest. The Spanish firefighters went a step further and initiated their own protests, expressing their participation in the civil struggle, crying: “We save people, not banks!”

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Tel Aviv, August 2011

The bank is secured and an armed guard stands in front of it. Facing him, along the sidewalk, are members of Public Movement. Wearing white uniforms, and with their fists clenched, they stand as guards of their own accord, as reminder or warning that the public has a part in the capital invested in the bank, and that keeping the public distant from the bank’s management and profit-making is the outcome of free-marked violence that should be challenged.

© Photograph Oz Mualem / Public Movement
Napels, June 30, 2012

Demonstrators use their bodies to depict the common expression of their impoverishment—"We were left with barely our underwear"—and demand the return of economic and banking discussions from the abstract sphere in which they have traditionally taken place. This, through the concrete manifestation of the violence they inflict upon the body (politic).

© Photograph Zero 81. All rights reserved

Anata, July 12, 2012

Palestinian and international volunteers rebuild the home of Selim and Arabiya Shawaannah without permission of the authorities. In doing so, however, they risk its repeated demolition by the Israeli regime.

© Photograph Ryan Rodrick Beiler / www.activestills.org

London, November 18, 1910

In response to violence exerted against them (including sexual violence) for having contested the parliamentary illegality of excluding rightful citizens from elections, the Suffragettes smashed several shop windows. They claimed that the government was more concerned about protecting private property than about protecting the lives of women.

Montréal, May 1, 2012

Policemen patrolling the sidewalk, equipped as though they anticipated violent combat, are received by a line of demonstrators with "warning rods" against the donut temptations offered to cops for free in various eateries, and making them forget that they have no fewer reasons than the demonstrators for getting out on the street and claiming their share.

© Photograph Dario Ayala / The Montréal Gazette
New York, September 30, 2012

The human microphone is a simple and effective mode of action. It enables people to bypass bans on citizens’s use of megaphones in public space and serves as a way to learn the syntax of a new—civil—language. The speaker calls out, “Mic: Check” and waits for the echo of listeners, invited to express their position with gestures while speaking.

© Photograph Lucas Jackson / Reuters

Madrid, July 10, 2012

The miners’s march on Madrid received the support of a million citizens throughout Spain. In numerous localities, supporters wore helmets and lanterns, not merely in an effort to say, “We are all miners!” but in an effort to signal their actual presence to the mainstream media that so frequently ignored them—even when the police exerted violence against them.

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Tel Aviv Jaffa, January 2, 2009

Demonstrators wear overalls recalling those of fighter pilots. The blood shed by pilots at the touch of a button in the cockpit is foregrounded here by large red stains and signs that leave no doubt—“The blood of children is on your hands”. The demonstrators are on their way to block the entry gate of the air-field from which lethal assaults on Gaza took off.

© Photograph Oren Ziv / www.activestills.org
Jerusalem, September 28, 2000

In the existing world of political categories, this photograph symbolizes the outbreak of the Second Intifada. Palestinians protest against Ariel Sharon’s visit at Temple Mount. If it reads within the continuum of ongoing Palestinian protest, it is actually a part of the “Occupy” movement that has operated for decades now without being recognized as such. When they are not being cruelly suppressed as “terrorists”, it is far more convenient to depict them as the subjects of a nonexistent authority that is expected to represent them one day with a territorial agreement, thereby denying their having been subjugated by the Israeli regime for decades and having a variety of claims that cannot be reduced or solved solely by national self-determination. However, the Palestinians, as all other governed peoples the world over, do not only protest in the terms accorded to them by the regime to which they are subjugated. Israeli citizens are subjugated to the same regime. The separation of these two groups contributes to the naturalization of enmity between them, preventing their possible recognition that they are actually struggling against the same regime. Splitting their struggles is an oppressive technique for the preservation of power.

Bethlehem, September 2012

For decades, the Israeli regime has nurtured the “national conflict”, causing the governed—both Jews and Arabs—to perceive their lives only through its perspective. Without any symmetry in the two populations, enslavement to “the conflict” took over life in both: the Jews entrusted their life to the “security forces” that dominate every aspect of their civil life, while the Palestinians devoted their life to the struggle against occupation, integrated with national longing for liberation and self-determination. The Palestinian civil uprising—beginning towards the end of this summer and directed against the Palestinian Authority and its failing economic policy as protection for the Israeli regime—was a further step towards liberation from the burden of “the conflict”, as that which the regime can exploit its subjects in its name, denying them the means for a reasonable life. The photo shows the protest of taxi drivers who shaped the word “STRIKE” as an image to be seen only from above, as if wishing to make the global protest movement recognize the civil nature of their own protest and their demands to be extricated from the national deal that the international community has been backing.

© Photograph Ahmed Masoud. All rights reserved

Nabi Saleh, Summer 2011

The tent in which Israel has forced Palestinians to dwell ever since 1948 (every time their homes were demolished or expropriated) finally became a symbol of civil awakening in summer 2011. State citizens—Arabs and Jews—put up tents in cities, and in the West Bank, Palestinians carried them, covered with “social justice” slogans as a major cry in demonstrations.

© Photograph Oren Ziv / www.activestills.org
The partition plans promoted by the UN in the late 1940s, which led to the partitioning of Pakistan and India, created not only states with differential body politics, but also an ideology that enabled the existence of long-standing differential political bodies. The argument was that since they had each belonged to a separate history, history could be partitioned. The librarian in the photograph is required to separate the knowledge accordingly: one part to these peoples, and another to those.

© Photograph David Douglas Duncan. Harry Ransom Center. Source: Life Magazine, August 18, 1947

Map of the world prepared by the UN which presents the spread of the nation-state concept to every corner of the globe. One persistent red stain stands out in the map: a small territory called Palestine. The state by which it is ruled—Israel—has both prevented the inhabitants from founding a nation-state and has refused to naturalize them as its own citizens. Thus this little stain has become nearly the only place in the world where aside from the obvious possibility of another nation-state being founded with all its disabilities, the reciprocal possibility of becoming a state-of-all-its-citizens is also open to consideration. Perhaps from here, as a beacon to all nations, the idea would spread throughout the world and civil language might turn things about.

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Maroun al-Ras, Northern border of Israel, May 15, 2010
Palestinians expelled from their land over sixty years ago in a non-violent procession on Nakba Day. They insistently refuse to let nation-state logic obliterate their civil claims, and they non-violently advocate the obvious—their wish to return to and live in the places from which they were expelled, thereby participating in shaping their own political future.

All rights reserved. Source: www.uprootedpalestinians.blogspot.nl
The Sound Evidence of Sonic Warfare: Notes from the Aural Contract Audio Archive

Lawrence Abu Hamdan

Part 1: Colin Powell’s Sound Evidence
Part 2: Sonic War-Farce
Part 3: The Chipmunk in the Court of Saddam

Aural Contract is a project that is constituted by a series of events, publications, exhibitions, compositions and workshops that examine the contemporary politics of listening through a focus on the role of the voice in law. Throughout the project I have built up a sound archive, containing audio extracts of my works together with specific moments of juridical listening and speaking gathered from a wide range of sources such as the trials of Saddam Hussein and Judas Priest, UK police evidence tapes, films such as Decoder and readings from texts including Italo Calvino’s “A King Listens”.

The components of this archive are then mixed together, generating audio documentaries and narrative compositions that immerse its audience in the heart of a discussion about the relationship of listening to politics, borders, human rights, testimony, truth and international law.

For Manifesta Journal, I have put together a selection of tracks from the Aural Contract Audio Archive to provide an audio analysis of the vocal manipulations and distortions that occur in the two political-juridical forums that buttress the war in Iraq. Here, both Colin Powell’s 2003 “Speech at the UN” and the “Trial of Saddam Hussein”, are examples of the contemporary role of audio as a weapon of war.

In March 2003, whilst he was secretary of state, Colin Powell gave a notorious speech at the United Nations Security Council in which he made the case for war in Iraq. The two heavily distorted audio recordings he played to kick start his warmongering torrent of “evidence” speak clearly about the speech as a whole. The contrast of Powell’s amplified address through the audio infrastructure of the UN security council, with the raw crackles of an intercepted walkie-talkie exchange readily reveals who dictates the right to speak and who controls the capacity to hear in such forums. It is in his hybrid role of secretary of state and voice-over artist that Powell is able to both legitimise and initiate the war.

In October 2005, Saddam Hussein’s trial began. Pitch shifting and other voice effects were used through the trial to disguise the witnesses

Jerusalem, Mamila Street, November 1947
The UN’s newly unveiled partition plan is contrary to the wishes of most of the country’s inhabitants. Palestinians took to the streets in protest. This was the last time Palestinian protest was perceived as a civil movement. Since then they have been doomed to expulsion and have been viewed as mere assailants from without.

Tel Aviv Jaffa, June 30, 2012

The necessary condition for the persistence and expansion of the new civil awakening movement in Israel lies in its possibility to recognize itself as a fraction of a civil movement that preceded it for several decades and was led by Palestinians. No civil movement can exist on the basis of ethnic or national differentiation, especially under a political regime that uses the separation of populations as a self-preservation weapon of its older apartheid regime. The signs in the picture, which are carried by both Jews and Palestinians, re-draw the territorial continuity between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River as a space whose definition the regime must change. The condition for this is to do away with military occupation. Un-occupy Palestine.

© Photograph Oren Ziv / Active Stills

Listen to the sound file on www.manifestajournal.org
who testified in defense of Hussein. By aurally zooming into the use of voice manipulation, a set of political intentions can be discerned. Standardized for a long time now by the BBC in addition to other media channels is the voice-disguise technique that pitches down voices in an effort to preserve their anonymity. In Saddam Hussein’s trial, the voices are pitched up to the level of “chipmunk”, an effect that infantilises its witnesses. These absurd and puerile voices allow the court to perform the ascendency of the nation into its “democratic” adulthood while at the same time ordering the death of its father.

These two examples complicate the conventions of sonic warfare: from sound canons and Metallica songs to that of complex audio manipulation and vocal destruction in sites where speech acts. Hence this audio composition gathers together and processes a set of archival manipulations and vocal destruction in sites where speech acts. These absurd and puerile voices allow the court to perform the ascendency of the nation into its “democratic” adulthood while at the same time ordering the death of its father.

The Form of Remains

August, 2012
Ljubljana—Frankfurt

Dear Hito,

I’ve recently watched your Journal No. 1—An Artist’s Impression (2007) again, the documentary in which you recreate some of the personal and collective memories people have of the 1990s Bosnian wars through footage about and belonging to the ex-Yugoslav film studio, “Sutjeska”. More than anything else, the archive, with its burnt racks and missing films, evoked for me the various local and internationally-run DNA and re-association labs that store human remains from the more than 40,000 unaccounted-for at the end of the Yugoslav wars, all ready for testing. In place of films, the racks hold parts of commingled and sometimes decomposing body parts. During the war, material objects sometimes shared the same destiny as people—dented by shell splinters, pocked, scored, burnt, hidden, exchanged, left to rot. Nowadays, these people or these parts play a crucial role in post-conflict attempts to make sense of what happened. Human remains stand above all as evidence of war crimes and atrocities.

Yet what does it mean to make sense of the war? What constitutes proof of a war crime? Moreover, what are bodies and what are remains? Some authors suggest that unlike in academia, where “the body” is generally treated as a text or a trope, in society at large and in the global economy, “the body” must always be understood as a tangible, palpable, undeniably “real” material object; one that, furthermore, is sometimes a “commodity” that can be bartered or sold.1 Others think that the dead body has been dematerialized in certain representations to the point where it is no longer intelligible as a former social being—and that these representations of bodies do not help people to understand what it means to be a victim of a human catastrophe.2 Yet over the course of my work, I’ve found distinctions between (on the one hand) a “real” body, and (on the other) a conjectural or metaphorical one—or between ordinary and “spectacular” bodies—a distinction that is increasingly difficult to police, or to use to understand the experiences of those who had lost family members in conflict.

As you know, over the past decade, I’ve been examining a range of material practices and rhetorical strategies engaging the dead body in post-conflict Serbia and Tasmania. Considering various cases of political burials, mass exhumations, re-interments and claims for bodily


retrieval and repatriation, my research attended to the ways in which people imagine and enact relations between the deceased and their corpses. I sought to document and understand the value and meaning of the body and of human remains in the twenty-first century from an anthropological point of view. Human remains, nowadays, are intersected by a set of highly charged contemporary discourses of scientific rationality and legitimacy, property and human rights. In the different ethnographic cases of Serbia and Tasmania, diverse parties have identified the recovery and identification of bodily remains, and their subsequent return to bereaved families, as part of a healing or restorative process. Yet the forms in which bodily circulation is claimed in these situations—as a means for reconciliation, as commodities, as private mementos, and as a form of DNA-coded information—were always more various than the official narratives of attribution and assignment suggested. My research sought to illuminate and contextualize the realities of the diplomatic, spiritual, scientific and legal resources that shape and enable the movement of the dead or dismembered body. Needless to say, what interested me most was the creation with which people deal with their troubled pasts and imagined futures.

My work did not pursue a straightforward equation of bodies with social beings, but rather inquired into how representations—and the experience—of dead bodies enact persons. That the dead body is necessarily the site of a physical individual is a wrongful assumption. Societies conceive death, personhood, and interpersonal attachment in a variety of ways. Resisting the urge to ontologise the body, or bodily remains, by presupposing a specific physical reality, I came instead to the view that different phenomena make up the “field of the body” in post-conflict societies. Whilst the “dead body” throughout my research was often an undeniably material object, it also named a conceptual tool for understanding the past and projecting a future, even as it offered a site of knowledge production, moral dispute and the representation of victimhood. The dead body could also be a synecdoche for reconciliation, or a placeholder for scientific values. When people related to, evoked, or claimed dead bodies, they meant something more inclusive and less securely categorized than the bare physicality of the body. Bodies included, and emotionally meant, the clothes of the war-missing, the scars left by aesthetic interventions, the red blood cells of sick bodies, the genetic or DNA profiles of corpses, and the peace of the souls of the bodies that might accompany repatriation to an “ancestral” home. Phenomena of different orders—biological, discursive, material and conceptual—were all drawn into a coherent field marked by the term “the body”. Bodies were no less physical when they became frameworks through which people negotiated their relation to ideas of modernity, democracy, and accountability.

In one of your letters, you said that in the “Kiss” installation, like in your other works, you try to avoid showing bones or dealing with human remains visually. In your email on March 21, 2012, you wrote that “They make terrible / impossible aesthetic objects. Somehow I feel one should show them as little as possible but rather investigate the conditions and technologies that make them over/under-visible”. I too have always avoided showing human remains. After my talks, the audience always asks for photographs. They want to know what mass-grave sites and exhumations look like; they want to look into the faces of those searching for the remains of their missing relatives or those of the forensic anthropologists or lawyers taking care of those who have disappeared as a result of still-not-completely articulated reasons, I have always felt disgust at the idea of passing around the photos. Not because the images would be disturbing, but rather that in the process of exhibiting them, they would become mere objects, eliciting easily moral, perhaps learned emotions (shock, despair, horror, solidarity, compassion). Pictures of remains are supposed to be palpable, moving, and emotion-triggering. But what does it mean to be moved by the predicaments of others? What kind of emotions can be aroused by the sight of bare bones? Moreover, in my experience, rather than opening up listeners’ minds, this economy of representation—only showing the bones—has always tended to lock people into their presumptions of what dead bodies and remains signify.

In various reconstructions of Andrea Wolf’s story, you relate her life through pictures of her as a strong and beautiful feminist, a modern Amazon. Andrea left Germany to join the Kurdish liberation movement, assuming the name Sehit Rohani. Eventually she was taken prisoner and executed by the Turkish security forces. In “November” (2004), you say that her body was never found and has never been returned. What came back instead was a poster of a smiling freedom fighter adorning an insurgent banner. Andrea became a revered martyr for the Kurdish cause. The poster declared, “Martyr Sehit Rohani taken prisoner and murdered by Turkish security forces as a fighter for the free women of Kurdistan.” You saw the poster in a cinema next to posters for erotic films. The link between martyrs and pin-ups comes up again in the 2007 film “Lovely Andrea”. That documentary reconstructs the search for a series of photographs of a roped SBM model (yourself), who used the pseudonym “Andrea” and featured in Japanese bondage magazines.

Your work—your stills, excerpts, fragments, facts, artifacts and recollections—give the audience the chance to read, participate in, and construct Andrea’s history. Just as bodies are materially and conceptually capable of different constructions, so too are stories. When bodies become remains, they are perhaps the text of a story. As objects for emotional identification and cathexis, and as physical remnants, human remains tend to be conceptualized as being fractured. They almost always stand for parts. Furthermore, this fragmentation of the body goes hand in hand with the notion of the fragmentary nature of the truth(s) =biological, discursive, material and conceptual—invokes a kind of constitutive disproportionality, revealing the excessiveness, and the necessity of investment, in the processes by which body parts are “pressed” into sense.

The color of Hitto Steyerl’s text, which is lying inbetween the lines above, will change to black once she has found experts—anthropological archaeologists or forensic, lab analysts for chemical weapons, forensic chemists or otherwise, who help her secure more evidence as well as test the evidence she has already collected from the remote mountain site where her friend Andrea Wolf was supposedly extrajudicially executed that the they make terrible / impossible aesthetic objects. Somehow I feel one should show them as little as possible but rather investigate the conditions and technologies that make them over/under-visible”. I too have always avoided showing human remains. After my talks, the audience always asks for photographs. They want to know what mass-grave sites and exhumations look like; they want to look into the faces of those searching for the remains of their missing relatives or those of the forensic anthropologists or lawyers taking care of those who have disappeared as a result of still-not-completely articulated reasons, I have always felt disgust at the idea of passing around the photos. Not because the images would be disturbing, but rather that in the process of exhibiting them, they would become mere objects, eliciting easily moral, perhaps learned emotions (shock, despair, horror, solidarity, compassion). Pictures of remains are supposed to be palpable, moving, and emotion-triggering. But what does it mean to be moved by the predicaments of others? What kind of emotions can be aroused by the sight of bare bones? Moreover, in my experience, rather than opening up listeners’ minds, this economy of representation—only showing the bones—has always tended to lock people into their presumptions of what dead bodies and remains signify.

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Yugoslav Partisan Memorials: Between Memorial Genre, Revolutionary Aesthetics and Ideological Recuperation

Introduction

More than any other art form, memorial sites are invested with ideology relating to the national past, to grand events and historical victories, or to what after World War II related to massive sufferings and the collective remembrance of terror and violence. In the territory of former Yugoslavia, which is now shattered into seven different new nation-states, one finds an impressive and scattered collection of socialist modernist memorials with peculiar aesthetic qualities, testifying to their commonly shared past. Nowadays, after the bloody dismemberment, and while a neoliberal capitalist recuperation is in full swing, the promise of the future—far more than it tends to do today. Even if we have condemned them to being completely forgotten?

The political dimension of memory is evident. Whose stories are being told, and by whom, is crucial for the determination of present and future. Indeed, Walter Benjamin's intervention in the history of philosophy resurfaces in its purest form here. If dominant narratives in history are necessarily those of the victors, and if emancipatory politics always aim to address the history of the oppressed, shouldn't the particular lines of memorial development attempt to clearly show how disputes, or radical disagreements, about the legacies are being outplayed, even if we have condemned them to being completely forgotten?

Some argue that memory must address specific stories of places, people and events that are long gone, and that have been buried in history. However, only through the materialization of the charged objects can we save these stories from complete oblivion. Yugoslavia is a country that nowadays exists only in memory. Perhaps it is on these commemorative sites, and through the legacy of the exceptional monuments they contain, that historical drama is again laid bare. This legacy points toward a past that had inscribed emancipation onto its future—far more than it tends to do today. Even if we are critical of a "simplistic" and nostalgic perspective, it must be said that socialist Yugoslavia pursued in many respects a more progressive politics than its successor states did, and that most post-Yugoslav societies did indeed miss out on emancipatory perspectives for the future. Twenty years after the bloody dismemberment, and while a neoliberal capitalist recuperation is in full swing, the promise of joining the European market does indeed look more attractive, but not necessarily more modern.

The Typology of Yugoslav Partisan Memorial Sites: The Beginnings of Socialist Modernism

Between 1945 and 1990, several thousand monuments to the revolution were erected. Many had already been built in the 1940s and 1950s, often as simple memorial plaques on which the names of local villagers were listed. This first phase of memorialization was based on a mixture of popular forms of sculpture, and had a realist undertone. Noteworthy here is that monuments to the partisan struggle do not resemble the many examples of massive socialist realist monuments that are more typical of either the Eastern European countries or the Soviet Union. Then in the second phase, from the 1960s to 1980s, a sweeping movement of memorial building (or memorialization) emerged under the label of "socialist modernism". The monuments were not only modernist, but they contained their own peculiar typologies: monumental, symbolic (fists, stars, hands, wings, flowers, and rocks), bold (sometimes structurally daring), otherworldly and fantastic. A large majority of the Yugoslav monuments to the revolution were henceforth erected on historic sites of the partisan struggle, and as a consequence are nearly always located outside villages or towns amidst open landscapes. They form an invisible network of symbolic sites that still generate a consciously constructed Yugoslav space. However, they do not occupy the more classic and highly-visible sites of representation such as the central streets and squares of big cities. Many of these memorials were placed in parks, showcased by leisure-time destinations with picnic facilities, cafés, restaurants, or even hotels. In yet other memorial parks, museums or amphitheaters served as open-air classrooms. In addition to their double function as sites of mourning and celebration, memorial parks were conceived of as hybrid complexes, merging leisure with education, architecture with sculpture, objects with the surrounding landscape. Sometimes museum and sculpture merged; sometimes sculpture...
is was actually integral to the amphitheater. The mission of the amphitheater seemed to be important: it was regularly integrated into the sculpture, while sometimes the monument itself unfolded into a stage set. As classical modernist works of art, they stand as objects in the landscape, and the landscape surrounding them is transformed into a park that in turn stages the monument.

In the ideological systems developed after WWII, the opposing models of socialist realism versus abstract modernism were respectively identified with the socialist versus the capitalist world. After the break with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia began to aesthetically distance itself from socialist realism. In 1952, at the Yugoslav Writer’s Congress in Ljubljana, Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža renounced socialist realism in a remarkable text that was also endorsed by party officials, and the path towards socialist modernism was advanced. It not only prevailed in architecture, but especially prevailed in sculpture and later on in other arts (theater, cinema, and performance art, to name a few).

In the debates on the artistic heritage of socialist Yugoslavia, the role of modernist art has been interpreted differently. Artists have either been considered heroes, who fought for artistic autonomy or freedom under the dominance of the socialist system, or mere vassals of the authoritarian state, serving it with the proud production of a modern image. The relationship, however, between the state and artists cannot be understood through the simple iconology of the “state artist” versus the “dissident.” Excepting for the early post-war period, the Yugoslav state never proscribed a certain style. Instead, it adopted and appropriated new tendencies and positions in its own cultural policies. The state preferred more formal and decorative types of art—in other words, art that didn’t cause a stir. This formalist tendency within Yugoslav modernism earned it the title of “Modernist Aestheticism”, and yet we would argue that at the time, formalism was no less of a phenomenon in the Western modern art system.

Artists such as the sculptor Vojin Bakić or the architect Bogdan Bogdanović worked for the state institutions most of their lives, and insisted on never giving up their own positions. Bakić entered into dialogues with the avant-garde art group, Nove Tendencije (New Tendencies), consequently following his path into abstraction, which aimed to question traditional patterns of reception/expression. Bogdanović, who considered himself an agnostic, took a critical stance toward the Yugoslav socialist system, all the while fully supporting the partisan struggle. He developed an abstract-surrealist language, which strove toward being universal, yet was simultaneously grotesque and fantastic.

Between Abstract Form and Revolutionary Politics

Immanent motives of the monuments include various attempts at universality on a formal and artistic level, in addition to the universality inferred by their politics. There is a certain fascination for the very sweeping character of the monuments; a formal strength that outlives its own time, and that, simultaneously, is the result of very specific historical circumstances. “Unlimited timeliness” generates a multi-layered space and opens up a dialogue between the history of art and specific historical experience. The idea of the communist revolution contains many all-embracing claims such as the equality of men and women, but even more than that, it aims to integrate the perspective of a worldwide or even
cosmic planetary community. In the specific case of the Yugoslav communist revolution, its application took the form of the abolition of private property and a more just distribution of surplus value, in addition to the projects of modernization, education, antifascism and the construction of a common, multi-ethnic space. The major task of these monuments to the revolution was to consider how their universal claims were addressed, and then later formalized into an aesthetic language.

We are faced with a logical contradiction at the heart of the very idea of constructing a monument to the revolution. Revolutions are generally associated with government overthrow and a destruction of certain (oppressive) heritages, operating primarily through the destruction of institutions themselves instead of the destruction of memory and its institutionalization in the form of monuments. Simultaneously, if we consider history as both an open process and a revolutionary practice—as a practice to keep the place of transformation open for further change—then a monument should intervene in this practice without presupposing a simple ‘passive’ position of the subject, which would only follow from an official reading of the past. The idea of “making history”, however, indicates that social change generates new stories and memories that people want to keep and experiences that people want to preserve. It is not only the grandiose form that can preserve revolutionary form for eternity, but people’s everyday interventions. Perhaps revolutionary history strives for the opening up of history itself. In terms of transformation, one must assume the indeterminate character of any “real” movement.

The Yugoslav monuments operate by institutionalizing collective memory of WWII events. They then evoke formal gestures of opening towards the future. It is clear that the most obvious strategy of representing universalism is abstraction. In the abstract formal language of the Yugoslav revolution, memorials instigate a certain sense of openness that allows for personal associations. They remain receptive to multiple interpretations, and they awaken fantasies. Their abstract vocabulary allows for an appropriation of meaning that bypasses official narrations, allowing access to the monuments even for people who disagree with their official politics.

The monuments in question play much more into the realm of modernist art. Narratives of progress and modernization are apparent in the time structure that many of them embody. In their linear and progressive formulations of time, revolution is rather idealistic, and masks the often painful, difficult and complicated processes of social transformation. How can a monument to the revolution, which celebrates the social power that leads to change, relate to the realities of social practice? How can the trap of a program of prescribed and formalized memory be avoided, thereby creating space for people to develop their own memorial practices, which would then relate back to this change?

Current Ideological Investments: The National Reconciliation and Re-appropriation of Memorial Sites

The abstract monuments stand on symbolic sites, where many people have died and/or experienced the horrors of WWII. The memorial sites represent partisan universalism; the only social force that really rejected the logic of nationalism and consequently the logic of ethnic cleansing that was imposed by fascist forces. Abstraction in this regard has mainly...
provoked opposition by nationalist ideologues who have criticized the monuments for neglecting to show what actually happened on the sites. The gestures found in the monuments have been perceived as expressing particular national interests whilst conveniently suppressing others. Furthermore, the form of abstraction they engender denies the logic of a "national" form, as well as a certain kind of politics of victimization, which especially in the Yugoslav context became a very problematic logic in light of the civil war in the nineties.

Indeed, the memory politics of the Yugoslav Communist Party aimed at a conciliatory universalism that rested on a positive and inclusive idea of socialist Yugoslavism. During the socio-economically insecure 1980s, extreme forms of nationalism surfaced in various places, and the Yugoslav politics of memory in addition to the centrality of the antifascist ideology was undermined. In the eighties, a bitter dispute over the number of victims in the Jasenovac concentration and extermination camp was unleashed, in which the number of victims were either drastically over- or under-reported by the opposing sides. Similarly, the post-WWII extrajudicial killings (some of which were motivated by revenge, others by politics) by communists and partisans were for the first time broadly addressed, opening many wounds of the civil war that had taken place during WWII. New memorial sites were re-imagined and re-appropriated for the national cause, with the intent of rehabilitating local fascists and demonizing communists / partisans. Unfortunately, the attention mobilized in the process of memorialization was less motivated by the idea of bringing historical truth to surface than by its exploitation for the coming battles in the 1990s civil war.

Reconciliation thus became a part of the general nationalist politics that prepared the ideological grounds of the bloody breakup. There, communist leadership would perhaps have been better off openly addressing these issues before the breakup, however (apart from the 1946 documentary film, Jasenovac, which is actually one of the first Yugoslav films) the idea of broaching the subject of trauma just after the war had ended in a country that needed all the support for reconstruction it could muster was a problematic issue to say the least. Yet socialist Yugoslavia was actually more stable “right after the war” than it would be later on, which makes the topic one of the most significant blind spots of the communist’ leadership.

The Fate of Modernist Monuments: Destruction, Decay and Decontextualization

If we partly agree with the statement that the new historical context re-appropriated monuments for the nationalist cause, then we disagree with the thesis that their abstract form allowed an easy re-adjustment. On the contrary, it was precisely because of their antifascist and communist legacy, which symbolizes the other space (Yugoslavia), that many modernist partisan monuments have been destroyed and/or left to decay (as Bogdan Žižić’s film, Damnatio Memoriae aptly documents). They had to be destroyed, because they were a sign of a different future that embodied the universalist claim of the partisan figure. It seems that this specter haunted some, inciting them to undertake a rigorous “monument cleansing” by means of dynamite.

Nowadays, the partisan memory is increasingly condemned to oblivion. Monuments have been partly forgotten by most people, and due to their distant locations have become less and less visited (if at all then only by a few surviving partisans and art historians). Certain sites have even been destroyed or abandoned in the instances where their narrative has been reconciled with those of other patriotic groups such as the Chetniks and Home Guards, who have received their own memorial sites. Within Macedonia, the historical revisionism is dramatically visible. If in the ethnic Albanian parts, the monuments are in utter neglect (case in point, Struga), in the ethnic Macedonian parts, the monuments have been well kept (Prilep, for example).

With most museums around memorial sites closed and very few regularly organized field trips, these sites have been completely decontextualized. Yet the very recent fashionable academic turn toward “archaeologies of modernism” includes a renewed interest for these monuments. They attract attention as peculiar design objects posted on many design blogs, triggering both enthusiasm and discussion. The monuments still capture people’s imaginations. It could be argued that this interest is instrumentally helpful in saving some of the sites from total demolition, in that it insists on their high artistic value (the tactic of claiming that the monuments are not political but instead, works of “pure art”). Nevertheless, this tactic is still problematic, because it follows from a formalist understanding of art as an autonomous space. It is this formalism that denies the social function of objects and the complex role they play in a political discourse, one that could be described as being part and parcel with the process of abandonment.

What seems contradictory at first glance might therefore best be described by the term, “musealization”. Things that we find in museums tend to have fallen out of use. Our knowledge of the past...
becomes but a sediment, and its role in the present thus nullified. It is only when these objects connect to a social practice that they are again imbued with true meaning. Returning to these monuments is thus not simply about saving them, but about the possibility of retrieving the emancipatory and antifascist politics that they embody. It is not only about the consideration of “resources of hope,” as Raymond Williams has aptly put it, but about the possibility of their re-enactment and mobilization for present struggles.

Last but not least, the formalism of the “pure art” approach is embedded in the contemporary post-communist time-structure, which is primarily characterized by two discourses: 1) the discourse of totalitarianism, and 2) the discourse of nostalgia. Both lack the intention to open the present towards the future. Totalitarianism dismisses everything that challenges the present order as a threat to freedom, while nostalgia dwells in the construction of an idealized past. In the logic of this time structure, objects that challenge its order have to be either utterly revised or erased. Intervening in this context with the aesthetic ideology of the artistic autonomy of the object does not help us “rehabilitate” or mobilize the emancipatory potential for the future, but rather freezes it in a stand still, and in so doing stripping memory of its references to both the past and future references. The memorial art work becomes “eternal”, in a way, and in this respect it is complicit with dominant post-communist manners of dealings with the past.

Conclusion

Although the real future of the modernist memorials already lies in the past, the promise of a better future remains crystallized in the formal power of their material existence as sculptures. As physical witnesses, the monuments are not only witnesses to WWII and the partisan struggle, but they have become monuments to Yugoslavia itself, to its irrevocably progressive anti-nationalist and anti-fascist perspective. They maintain an invisible network throughout the territory of former Yugoslavia and make apparent the disruption and segmentation of a formerly common space. Where the political investments of official power seem yet again to have been stripped of their ideological content—whether through past reductionism to Yugoslavian nation-building, or through the nation-building processes of the present—they fail to address their radical core, which is embodied in the monuments themselves: the call for a different future.
The Turkish word “Kar” is used for snow, and is also the title of an Orhan Pamuk novel, set in the eastern Turkish city of Kars. Appearing throughout his work are civilians, the army, politicians and the idea of modernity. Crime and morality are also some of the social dilemmas that create individual tragedies at the sites where both the public and private are violated. My earliest memory of Orhan Pamuk is of a public library in Karaman, my hometown. Karaman is a small city in Anatolia, not even as big as Kars. The same political climate existed in both Kars and Karaman. The two are not far from each other, connected in much the same way as Anatolia and Istanbul are. Upon encountering my first Orhan Pamuk novel, I remember that the public library had been moved from its old building into a newly renovated one. All the things that one would miss about the old library—its smell, its particular light, and the old, scratched up wooden shelves—had been replaced by new elements of design. No distinguishable features from the previous space had been kept. Everything looked like an airport, a hotel or a contemporary art museum. Sleek and clean, with a hardly-bearable lightness, the library uncannily contained the same combination of glass, steel, and 1990s-style polished shelves. It felt like nowhere.

Füsun was from Istanbul, and lived with her family throughout her whole life. At the very end of Orhan Pamuk's latest novel, The Museum of Innocence (first published in 2008), she died in a car accident. It was the first time she had left them. Füsun is the muse of the main character, Kemal. Throughout the novel, Pamuk talks about Kemal's strong form of obsession for Füsun: his memories of having spent his childhood and youth with her, as well as the eight long years of having stalked her, later on. After having lost Füsun in the car accident, just before their honeymoon, Kemal relinquishes all hope for life and his last wish is to establish a museum full of Füsun—a portrait of a lover. While he was hopelessly in love with Füsun, Kemal (fictively) collected many of the items and objects that they had shared. Used cinema tickets, her earrings, newspapers, postcards, everyday objects and all kinds of ephemera—pictures of celebrities, logos of popular brands of their time. All the way down to the remains of the cigarettes that he had smoked (or supposedly smoked) while he was thinking of her. He inscribed everything with a date.

Orhan Pamuk worked for several years on the project. At first, the novel included the map of Kemal's museum on the last page, in addition to the news for those fanatic readers who would go looking for the museum in Istanbul, and would be disappointed to find the building closed. Pamuk's name later surfaced with the launch of the 2010 Istanbul European Cultural Capital program, which was a political failure for the Turkish supporters of the European Union membership campaign. After speculations about corruption at the organizational level, Pamuk took a step back. He eventually brought his project to fruition as an independent institution and a not-for-profit foundation. The museum was inaugurated in 2012. Eleven thousand people visited it in its first three months of being open to the public.
In several of his interviews, Pamuk has mentioned the absence of a city museum or an institution that held the records of the modern urbanization of Istanbul. Having reconsidered this question whilst visiting the museum earlier this summer, I have decided that it has lost its relevance for the locale. The museum space is dominated by wooden boxes filled with ephemera, and objects including projections and small installations. Its staged atmosphere attempts to reflect the silence and pain of the character, Kemal, who dies after his agreement with the author. Nevertheless, one of the many concerns about this experiment is the artistic approach to the translation between two realms of imagination: namely from text-based imagination (the bulk of the material) into image-based imagination (the remainder).

Orhan Pamuk produced his museum project as an artist, a curator and the author of the story. In so doing, he created a place for the imaginings of Kemal and Füsun, and he made them real for his readers. His design taste was not as refined as his writing skills were, however. The representation of Kemal (especially on the top floor) is very theatrical. Far removed from being a conceptual approach, it fails to communicate with the viewer and does not suggest that it was left behind by the character. In general, the museum resembles the public library that I used to borrow Pamuk novels from. Not only does its architecture seem not to have made use of the potential offered by the relationship with its location, it lacks a sense of sensitivity towards its context. In the neighborhood surrounding it are so many antique shops selling items similar to those found on display in the exhibition. Pamuk’s museum is frozen in its own conceptual time and spatial thinking, and does not respond to any clear intellectual or political position.

What happened to Kemal’s Istanbul, Füsun’s view, and their city?
This "Etude" is an excerpt from the film *I Travel Because I Have To, I Come Back Because I Love You* (*Viajo Porque Preciso, Volto Porque te Amo*), directed by Karim Aïnouz and Marcelo Gomes, released in 2009.

Straddling between fiction and documentary, *I Travel Because I Have To, I Come Back Because I Love You* is formally a road movie, but in content, it is a long elegy on love, the loss of love, loneliness, regeneration, search for self, and the loss of one’s sense of self in the search. A geologist is dispatched on an official mission to Sertão, a far-flung region in the north east of Brazil, to survey water sources and study the proposed map for water canalizations. The opening sequence of filming the road ahead, at night, recurs throughout the film and sets a cadence to this physical, geographical as well as interior journey. Through letters to his former wife, the viewer is intimated to the chronicle of the protagonist’s emotional journey, and soon after, the attributes of the natural environment begin to allegorically resonate with his interior state. The overwhelming longing, the pangs of estrangement, and the sense of loneliness are compounded by the aridity of the landscape around him. The various characters he comes across seem to embody different forms of solitude and abandonment. Some are pensive and quiet, others are sad, and others still are sex workers, poor farmers, or truck drivers. The prospect of bringing water to a semi-deserted area is itself a potent metaphor in the geologist’s life. He wavers between painful memories of marital warmth and the desire to rekindle a love lost on the one hand, and the awareness of its impossibility on the other. The scientific findings he collects along the journey thus become poetic measures of loneliness.

The Editors

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**Day 02.**

Geological study of tectonic structures for the construction of a canal connecting the Xexêu region with the Souls’ River. Duration of the field trip: thirty days. Fuck it! Thirty days...

I am on the BR 432, Kilometer forty-five. Altitude 450 meters.

The climate is arid, the terrain tertiary. Cambrian limestone clay, composed of arenites, siltites and reddish-brown ferruginous conglomerates.

The region is called Little Meadow—though there is not a meadow anywhere in sight.

It is twelve o’ clock.

I take advantage of the mapping work to make contact with the few locals whose lands will have to be requisitioned in order to cut the canal. Nino and Perpétua will be the first to be resettled. They have been married for over fifty years. They have never lived anywhere else, have never had a fight, have never spent one night away from each other.

Nino went out to turn off the radio, but I called him back in. I didn’t want to film them apart.
Day 18.
Blondie, Good Morning!
Good morning, my love.
It is October 28, Civil Servants' Day. No one is working at the department back in Fortaleza, and here I am, slogging away in the dry dirt.
Seventeen days and twelve hours to go. It seems like an eternity. Hardly a soul on the road since leaving Fortaleza.

Stopped at a gas station today and saw something kind of hippie painted across the wall. I didn't heed any attention to it at first, but when I drove off it dawned on me what had been written there. I TRAVEL BECAUSE I HAVE TO; I COME BACK BECAUSE I LOVE YOU.
I keep the radio on, thinking of you the whole time. And that is all. I wear myself out thinking about you so much.
Driving along this road, with a romantic sunset. I remember our last sunset together, there on Praia do Futuro, in Fortaleza.

I cannot stand the thought of being alone.
This trip is taking me back, back to the day you left me.
I think about going back the whole time, but there isn't anywhere to go back to.
Unbearable! I let on that we were still together, that we had never broken up. I started writing you letters and replying to others you never sent.
I keep the radio on, thinking of you the whole time. And that is all. I wear myself out thinking about you so much. I took this trip to try to forget that you dumped me but it has just made it worse. Just makes me remember. Endlessly.

When you said never again
Don't call again; it's better that way
That wasn't exactly
What I wanted to hear you say.
and you said, sharp as a knife,
I want you out of my life.
that it was all insane
all so absurd...

Then out of the blue you call me up
a few days later, you look me up,
your voice all soft, almost formal.
and you say you've had second thoughts
that it doesn't have to be the end
of something so right and so casual,
and suddenly everything
is sent into a spin
and the one who lost can now even win.

Day 29
I feel bursts of love and hate for you.
I travel because I have to.
I won't go back, because I still love you.
Ezzeddine Qalaq was born in 1936, in a village near Jaffa. With the Nakba, his family was displaced to a refugee camp in Syria, near Damascus. He studied chemistry at the University of Damascus, joined the Communist Party and was jailed briefly for subversive activities. He traveled to Saudi Arabia and worked for nearly two years as a teacher. He left in order to pursue a doctoral degree in letters, his true passion, at the University of Poitiers, in France. Whilst there, he joined the local branch of the General Union of Palestinian Students there, and shone, a natural born leader. Yasser Arafat appointed him as the PLO’s representative in France after he graduated, and he moved to Paris in 1973. On August 3, 1978, Qalaq was killed with his colleague, Adnan Hammad, when a bomb exploded in their office in Paris. This, in brief, is his “wiki-style” biography.

On May 14, 1948, the British colonial mandate was officially ended and the last of its administration staff and army corps evacuated, but war between armed Zionist groups, factions, militias and armed Palestinians resistance fighters, seconded by Arab armies, had broken out much earlier. An armistice was brokered in 1949, defining the boundaries of the state of Israel and territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which was administered by the Jordanian and Egyptian armies respectively. During the war of 1948, an estimated 800,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes, villages and cities located in the territory of what would become internationally recognized as Israel. These refugees were settled in camps within the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but also in neighboring Arab countries, namely Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

While Nakba refers to the shock and horror of military defeat and loss of homeland in 1948, it also marks the protracted lived experience of humiliation, dispossession and hardship in the decade that followed. In 1952, the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) was established, and spread very quickly across university campuses in the Arab world, Europe and the United States. Shattered and disenfranchised political representation, dispersal and destitution, the right for Palestine to exist, the ability for Palestinians to return home, the entitlement to self-determination and sovereignty were each indeed at the risk of being absent, eluded and silenced. The GUPS was actively invested in defending these basic rights in any and all of the public spheres to which they had access.

Commemoration of the twelfth year of the Palestinian revolution, by Ismail Shammout, 1977. Produced by the Unified Information Office of the PLO, Berlin. From the Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.

Palestinian Cinema, An Essential Front in our Struggle, artist unknown. Produced by the Unified Information Office of the PLO, Beirut. From the Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.

Fat’h. The Revolution Continues, by artist Kemal Boulata. Produced by Fat’h. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection. Kemal Boulata is very well established Palestinian artist and intellectual. This poster was conceived on the occasion of the twelfth anniversary of the revolution. It is remarkable because it conjugates calligraphy, an art considered traditional, within a modernist style of expression.

Abu Ammar (Arafat) at the UN: War starts in Palestine and Peace Is Born in Palestine. Produced by the Unified Information Office of the PLO. From the Ezzeddin Qalaq collection. The poster marks the first speech Yasser Arafat gave at the UN General Assembly in 1974, and the formal recognition of the PLO by the world community as the official and legitimate representing Palestinians.
A few influential cadres among the PLO’s intelligentsia had understood early on that the political struggle was as much a military as it was a discursive one. Qalaq was one of the most eloquent and inspiring of such high-ranking militants. The PLO was structured to operate like a government in exile, replete with executive and legislative bodies, a constitutional text, a higher command, as well as both military and civilian leadership. In lieu of ministries, it instituted departments. The principal challenge was to represent and communicate with its own constituency, which was scattered across territories in refugee camps, in cities and under Israeli occupation. The second challenge was to communicate with the world the legitimacy of their narrative and mobilize support.

In 1965, the department of Arts and National Culture was both established and headed by Ismael Shamrouh, a Palestinian artist who had studied art in Cairo and Rome, and who had moved to Beirut in 1965. In addition to his position in the PLO, he was elected the first president of the Union of Palestinian Artists (1969) and of the Union of Arab Artists (1971). Shamrouh’s wife, Yamam al-Akhla, also an artist, headed the Arts and Heritage Section that organized an exhibition of traditional Palestinian clothing and crafts, which toured in seventeen cities in Europe in the late 1970s. Throughout the 1970s, Shamrouh and al-Akhla organized different exhibitions in the Al-Karama Gallery, a space supported by the PLO to exhibit art. In addition, the Department of Unified Information and Culture was remarkably active in the production and support of cultural and artistic activities. In the Graphic Arts section instigated the production of posters, the Palestinian Cinema Institute produced documentary films; other arts included Folk Dance, Theater and Popular Arts. The Plastic Arts Section provided Palestinian artists with stipends and supplies, and organized exhibitions in Beirut and around the rest of the world. The Exhibition of Palestinian Posters 1967–1979 in Beirut Palestinian Artists exhibition in Oslo, Norway, 1980, as well as the Art Exhibition of the Palestinian Resistance at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, 1980. And last but not least, The International Art Exhibition in Solidarity with Palestine, in Beirut in 1978.

The new political class as well as intellectuals that emerged within the PLO was culled from refugees and the diaspora. Both its political universe and its aspirations were as much informed through their lived experience of humiliation as they were informed through the liberationist revolutionary fervor that swept the region (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, etc.) and the rest of the world (Cuba, Chile, Vietnam). From the middle of the 1960s until about the early 1980s, the question of Palestine and the struggle for liberation were enunciated as revolutionary projects that intended to defeat the settler-colonial Israeli state, and to upheave comprador Arab regimes complicit to the prevailing order. Thus the Palestinian revolution was perceived and experienced as a profoundly transformative project that sought to restore justice, dignity, equality and sovereignty in the Arab world. In other words, Palestine became a metaphor that crystallized the aspirations for a life with dignity for young militants in the Arab world.
Qalaq’s genial feat is to have regarded representation and agency as cornerstones of political and artistic practice at once. He mobilized artists and intellectuals to shape a representation and narrative of Palestinians that crystallized their aspirations and image of themselves. He also inspired European artists to see in Palestine a mirror of the world’s injustice. He had realized that the most effective means to counter the traumatic dispersal of Palestinians in safeguarding their sense of peoplehood was also through culture and the arts. If homes were lost, the poetic record of having had a home would remain alive; if the land was too far removed from sight, its visual imagining would remain visible and in myriad forms; if citizenship were denied, then being-in-the-world as Palestinian would thrive.

In 1973, Qalaq accompanied Guy Champouillet and Serge Lepérin, filmmakers from the Cahiers du Cinéma, as they traveled to Lebanon and Syria for their film L’Olivier. In 1973, he met the French painter Claude Lazar, who, involved with several anti-fascist artistic events, was the then general secretary of the Jeune Peinture Salon. A deep friendship was forged almost instantly. Together they established a group of “artists for Palestine” within the Jeune Peinture Salon. A number of events and actions and provided us with what we needed. He advised us, while respecting each one’s personal research. He did not hesitate to criticize stereotypical and banal imagery and was strict on the political significance of our work. For example, he had once asked me to produce a poster on the theme “Zionism is a form of racism and discrimination”, and I had rendered the star of David from barbed wire; he explained to me that using these elements could lead to misinterpretation, (as) he was against the use of religious symbols to refer to Zionism.”

Qalaq was also one of the most active PLO cadres in the production, dissemination and circulation of posters. If the body of Palestinian poster art is regarded as a political movement’s propaganda machine, its most astonishing feature is the extent to which its production was unshackled from dogma and its articulations close to the everyday lived experience of refugees as well as to collective memory. One of the reasons for this was that artists and propagandists were themselves children of refugee camps and not an elite intelligentsia socially disconnected from the “people.” Posters were an interpellative platform for the revolution’s constituency. They were produced in an era when television broadcast was the exclusive purview of nation-states and was not beyond the means of the PLO’s extra-territorial framework. Posters were lightweight, cost-efficient, easy to disseminate and fantastically communicative.

Without him, this collective would have never seen the light of day; he helped us with obtaining accreditations, (he) encouraged our initiatives, facilitated events and actions and provided us with whatever we needed. He advised us, while respecting each one’s personal research. He did not hesitate to criticize stereotypical and banal imagery and was strict on the political significance of our work. For example, he had once asked me to produce a poster on the theme “Zionism is a form of racism and discrimination”, and I had rendered the star of David from barbed wire; he explained to me that using these elements could lead to misinterpretation, (as) he was against the use of religious symbols to refer to Zionism.”

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“The Olive Tree. Who Are the Palestinians? 10

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First was the imperative to provide generations of refugees dispersed across countries that could not physically see Palestine with images of their homeland. Second, was the imperative to debunk the prevailing Zionist claim that Palestine was “a land without a people for a people without a land”, put forth by Golda Meir (who was Prime Minister of Israel from 1969 to 1974). That statement or “representation” denied Palestinians the right to be. The Israeli state systematically referred to Palestinians as the “Arab” population of Palestine, with the explicit purpose of “normalizing” the melting of Palestinian refugees into host Arab societies, undercutting discourse and action of rights of return and reclaiming homeland. Posters explicitly depicted the people of Palestine and the myriad ways in which they belonged to the land. So for instance, Jaffa oranges branded worldwide as an “Israeli” product were reclaimed as a native symbol of Palestine; so were the Galilee’s olive groves. The Palestinian traditional folk dress was reproduced in its plural versions as a national symbol hallmark of Palestinian identity.

Revolutions invent the world as well as its people anew. Palestinians transformed from peasants to revolutionaries, from helpless victims to fearless men and women who were shaping their own destiny against the insuperable odds stacked against them.

Poster for the Moroccan association in support of the Palestinian people's struggle. artist unidentified.

10 Artist unidentified, circa 1974. From the Ezzeddin Qalaq collection. This poster was made to promote the film, L’Olivier. Qui sont les palestiniens? (The Olive Tree. Who Are the Palestinians?), directed by a group of filmmakers from the Cahiers du Cinéma in France.

11 Poster for the Moroccan association in support of the Palestinian people's struggle. artist unidentified.


13 Struggle is the Only Path to Jerusalem, artist unknown. Produced by the Unified Information Office, PLO. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.

14 Jerusalem in Our Hearts, by artist Hilmi al-Touri. Produced by the Unified Information Office, PLO. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection. El-Touri is considered a pivotal figure in children’s book illustration in the Arab world. His style bridged the legacy of folk drawing and modern artistic expression using a vibrant palette and reproducing symbols that children identified and memorized easily. His calligraphic style was inspired by popular genres used for film posters, insignias and signage. This poster iterates some of the canonical elements that would become emblematic symbols of Palestine: Jaffa oranges, the al-Aqsa mosque, the traditional folk dress, and Palestine embodied as a woman.

15 Poster commemorating the seventh anniversary of the founding of the DFLP in which tribute is paid to women more generally and to their commitment to the revolution more specifically, by artist Hilmi al-Touri. Produced by the DFLP Ezzeddin Qalaq collection. In this poster, al-Touri represents a woman—who also “embodies” Palestine—, carrying Jaffa oranges and donning the traditional folk dress; behind her is a rainbow in the colors of the Palestinian flag and in the corner of the poster the Dome of the Rock. All are visual codes that iconize Palestine.

16 We Will Return, artist unknown. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.

17 The Land Belongs to those who Liberate It, by artist Abdel-Rahman al-Muzayyen. Produced by Fat’h (Palestine Liberation Movement, or PLM). Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.
Posters were instrumental in disseminating Palestine’s national history, countering the Zionist claim that it had never existed, or that it was “stillborn” in 1948. At the same time, the posters recorded orally-transmitted collective memory and minted important events as milestones that refugees had lived first-hand. May 15th, the day that Israel celebrates its independence, was christened alternately as the “Day of the Martyr” and the “Day of the Palestinian Struggle”, a gesture that celebrated the courage and steadfastness of Palestinians in spite of their catastrophe and attempted to reverse the burdensome defeatist sense of loss and humiliation.

One of the notable landmarks of the Palestinian revolution is an armed confrontation between a Palestinian commando and the Israeli army in the village of al-Karama in the occupied West Bank, in 1968. While the Palestinians fought to the last man and suffered losses, the battle was noteworthy because the Israeli army battalion had also lost a great deal and had in turn retreated, leaving a battlefield with charred tanks and dead soldiers. The morning after, newspapers published images that ignited shockwaves across the Arab world: for the first time since the humiliating defeat of 1967, hope and dignity was restored to the Palestinian revolution. Thousands were galvanized to volunteer and fight alongside Palestinians. Furthermore, by a strange twist of fate, in Arabic, al-karama means “dignity”: the battle and its double signification in fact became a foundational myth in the Palestinian revolution. A large number of posters were produced for years thereafter, commemorating the al-Karama battle.

Another noteworthy date was marked on March 30, 1976, when Palestinians living in Israel were protesting confiscation of their land in Sakhnin, in the Galilee, and were shot at by the Israeli army. Six were killed and others severely injured. News spread and sparked more protests among Palestinians worldwide. The PLO coined March 30th as ‘Land Day’ and produced posters at every commemoration.

18 Poster for the film Victory in their Eyes by Samir Nasr. Produced by the Palestinian Cinema Institute. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.
20 Women’s Struggle Constitutes one of the Essential Pillars of the Struggle for Freedom, artist unidentified. Produced by Fat’h. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.
21 Palestinian Women Fight for Liberation, by artist Burhan Karkoutly. Produced by Fat’h. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection. Karkoutly was a Syrian artist exiled in Germany whose style was distinctive. He attempted to weave together traditional folk graphics and a modernist expression. The poster illustrates the transformation of Palestinians from peasants to revolutionaries, and obviously celebrates gender equality.
22 May 15th. The Day of Palestinian Struggle. Glory to our Martyrs, by an unidentified artist. Produced by the PFLP. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.
23 Unity is the Objective, by an unidentified artist. Produced by the PFLP. General Command. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.
26 Hommage to the al-Karama Battle, artist unidentified. Produced by the June 5th Collective. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.
27 Al-Karama by artist Samir Salameh. Produced by the Unified Information Office, PLO. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.
28 Land Day. Our Roots, by artist Suleiman Mansour, with a poem by Munib Makhoul. Produced by the Unified Information Office, PLO. Suleiman Mansour is a leading Palestinian painter who now lives and works in the West Bank. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection.
Posters were also used to denounce massacres, attacks and war crimes that had been perpetrated against Palestinians from the beginning of their struggle against the Jewish colonization of Palestine under British colonial rule. To inscribe acts of violence into a serial record, and to publicly identify them as crimes, was a remarkable counter to the media’s indifference towards the Palestinian’s plight as well as a manifestation of the reclaiming of agency.

Every revolution has heroes. The Palestinian revolution identified fallen fighters, assassinated intellectuals and leaders as its heroes-martyrs; they were integrated in popular history, iconicized, but rarely idolized. Martyr posters very quickly became a genre in itself, evolving from a straightforward photo portrait of the martyr, with name, date of death and political slogan, to complex visual expressionist or abstract compositions with a poetic verse replacing the slogan.

The Palestinian freedom fighter was known in Arabic as "fida'i" (plural fida'iyyin or fida'iyin). He traded his life for the defense of his people and land, for the recovery from the humiliation of passive victimhood, for the overturn of the historic injustice he was subjected to. Semiologically, the word was originally attributed to Christ, the quintessential martyr. The modern use of the term to designate Palestinian insurgents was consecrated in a poem published during the Great Revolt of 1936, the popular uprising against British colonial mandate rule. The Palestinian revolution was also a people's war, and the fida'i was at once anonymous and epic. He covered his head with a kuffiyah to infiltrate enemy lines without revealing his individual identity. Posters celebrating the fida'i were intended to debunk negative representations of fighters as terrorists, and to mobilize generations to the call of battlefield.
Palestinian political organizations were also faced with the tremendous challenge of the changing perception of their revolution in the West. In mainstream media, Palestinians were at best helpless refugees and at worst, unrepentant terrorists. The Palestinian cause found a friendly terrain of solidarity among anti-colonial, anti-imperialist liberation movements. Generally, they articulated two motifs: denunciation of Israeli crimes committed against Palestinians (military occupation, arbitrary expulsions, detentions, assassinations, massacres, bombardment, etc.) and the righteousness of the revolution.

The Palestinian revolution captivated the hearts and minds of the progressive and militant intelligentsia in the Arab world, and Palestine became a metaphor for a just, democratic, free and sovereign Arab world. As regimes across the region became more and more autocratic and intolerant of dissent and critique, artists and intellectuals found a friendly haven in their engagement with the Palestinian revolution. Cultural production was prolific: exhibitions, film screenings, publications, and concerts abounded.
One of the tragedies of statelessness is the impossibility of establishing and administering proper archives. Qalaq had the visionary foresight to collect posters produced in Beirut, Damascus and Europe. His collection represents a unique and vibrant record of how Palestinians once saw themselves: dignified, sovereign and beautiful; men and women in color and in verse defying a world that denied the simplest fact of their existence. Who could believe that from the pallid squalor of mud-drenched, tin-roofed refugee camps that so much radiance, lyricism, valor and inventiveness could rise to reverse the course of history?

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This virtual projection was inspired by an exhibition I was invited to curate the exhibition in 2008, titled Posters of the Palestinian Revolution. The Ezzeddin Kalak Collection. It was part of MASARAT Palestine, an artistic and cultural season in the French Community of Wallonie-Bruxelles, an initiative of the Commissariat général aux Relations internationales and the Palestinian General Delegation at the European Union, Belgium and Luxembourg, under the high patronage of the International Relations Ministry in the French Community, Mahmoud Darwich, and with support of the Ministry of Culture. Conception and Execution: Les Halles de Schaerbeek, Brussels. Posters of the Palestinian Revolution. The Ezzeddin Kalak Collection was hosted at The Mundaneum, an archive center and exhibition space in Mons, Belgium (www.mundaneum.be), from November 7 until December 21, 2008. The exhibition sponsored by the Commissariat Général aux Relations Internationales (CGRI) and the Palestinian General Delegation at the European Union, Belgium and Luxembourg.

48 Poster for screening of a Palestinian film followed by a debate on the Black September massacre, artist unidentified, 1971. Ezzeddin Qalaq collection. The photograph in this poster was taken in a training camp, the emphasis of the revolution’s emancipation of women was noteworthy. The young woman’s disposition is endearing. She smiles serene, self-assured and reassuring. Her gun is visible, but it rests against the wall, unthreatening. There is no celebration of violence; the composition of the poster is all about the young fida’iyyeh’s attractiveness.
Mnemosyne 42 is the experimental answer to Alain Fleischer's April 2012 proposition to create a work on images in the context of Le Fresnoy Studio national des arts contemporains. The rules of this proposition were at once very open and very strict. Very open, because like everything that counts in Alain Fleischer's eyes, it concerned a game of invention, with those very "serious" things that haunt us in history and in images: the general title that was eventually chosen for the game actually took up Aby Warburg's phrase for defining his own object of study in the Mnemosyne atlas, or the history of images, as a 'ghost story for adults'.

It was nevertheless strict in that Alain Fleischer had already set the limits of space and visibility: first, it was a question of "doing something" with the space of the grand nave of Le Fresnoy Studio national des arts contemporains (approximately one thousand square metres). Second, Alain wanted everything on view to be seen exclusively from the gangway of the first floor where, moreover, we were to install Atlas, suite, a series of images by Arno Gisinger created from the Atlas exhibition" (in its ultimate version, as it was exhibited in Hamburg at the Sammlung Falkenberg). Third, therefore, the "exhibition" to be invented had to be directly engaged with the discussion developed in Atlas and in Atlas, suite, namely, that the montages of images were specific forms of knowledge of the world and of its history. Fourth, everything had to be conceived of and created in just four or five months—never mind that the montages of images were what Warburg meant by "images" and that the exhibition he conceived of and created in just four or five months

The idea was quite simple: to project onto the ground, vertically from the ceiling of the nave, a gigantic plate from an atlas, to take up again—"because I would have liked to include him in my previous project, but..."—how Warburg had done with his black hessian screens and his little pincers with which he endlessly arranged and rearranged his great figurative puzzle of the "tragedy of the soul, from the perspective of, or according to, the Marguerite de Foix". In my work, the times of assembling and dissembling. A ghost story for adults.

It would have been enough to choose, to arrange, and to make a montage of all these images or sequences of images. It would have been enough to experiment: to see what this might create, to play with the relationships between images, rhythms, scales, dimensions, or colours. Perhaps as Warburg had done with his black hessian screens and his little pincers with which he endlessly arranged and rearranged his great figurative puzzle of the "tragedy of Western culture" as he called it. And to the vertigo already aroused by the photographic montage of Plate 42 must be added, in vast proportions, the vertigo of other images whose coexistence, I imagine—since I write these lines before having seen or concluded anything whatsoever—could well produce something like a great kaleidoscope of the motions of the soul, from the perspective of, or according to, the cornerstone of mourning and lamentation. It would be worthwhile, one day, to attempt the same thing with joy.

1 "Vom Einfluss der Antike. Diese Geschichte ist märchenhaft—to be dissembled. A ghost story for adults.
2 Alain Fleischer, Mnemosyne: Grundbegriffe, 2:7 July 1929) (London: Warburg Institute Archive, 2012.3)” (Loc. 159-160). Cf. G. Didi-Huberman, L’œil de l’histoire, 1992. 4 Atlas and in Atlas, suite, namely, that the montages of images were specific forms of knowledge of the world and of its history. Fourth, everything had to be conceived of and created in just four or five months—never mind that the montages of images were what Warburg meant by “images” and that the exhibition he conceived of and created in just four or five months could well produce something like a great kaleidoscope of the motions of the soul, from the perspective of, or according to, the cornerstone of mourning and lamentation. It would be worthwhile, one day, to attempt the same thing with joy.

4 This line was previously attempted something like this, in the space of a catalogue rather than an exhibition, in “Esquisse d’atlas”, G. Didi-Huberman, L’œil de l’histoire, 1992. 5 Atlas, suite, namely, that the montages of images were specific forms of knowledge of the world and of its history. Fourth, everything had to be conceived of and created in just four or five months—never mind that the montages of images were what Warburg meant by “images” and that the exhibition he conceived of and created in just four or five months could well produce something like a great kaleidoscope of the motions of the soul, from the perspective of, or according to, the cornerstone of mourning and lamentation. It would be worthwhile, one day, to attempt the same thing with joy.

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©The Warburg Institute
The images of Mnemosyne 42 arise to a certain extent from the memory—and even the citation which is central to the arrangement—of the Warburgian plate. As though by strata (for still images) or by successive waves (for moving images): archaic figures and ancient sarcophagi, medieval frescoes and Italian altarpieces (Duccio, Giotto, Lorenzetti, Boticelli, Bellini, Crivelli), reliefs by Donatello or Bertoldo di Giovanni, the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and intensely sculpted groups by Guido Mazzoni or Niccolò dell’Arca, to name a few. Soon enough, however, the great moderns: first of all Goya, whose Disasters of War, unknown to Warburg, decline (to the point of nausea and infamy on the one hand and total dereliction on the other) the various gestures adopted by the survivors before the dead; and then of course Picasso, who prepared and prolonged Guernica through a whole series of studies on the cry, tears and pain in the face of history. Perhaps even Bertolt Brecht, who documented and collected in a montage several Pietà situations in his work journal and his War Primer.

One must then introduce movement, which is a more delicate operation to the extent that I did not seek a kaleidoscopic abyme or abyss effect, nor any chaotic confusion whatsoever, but instead the possibility for the spectator to compare certain images in movement and to take advantage of space—through intervals, the scales of figures, hazardous desynchronization, and the configuration of the ensemble—which this comparison beckons.

First of all, there will be certain “monuments” of cinema in which scenes of lamentation intervene by way of narrative “hooks”, or crucial moments: Eisenstein’s Potemkin, Vangelo, Medea or Rabbia by Pier Paolo Pasolini, as well as, for example, Terra em transe by Glauber Rocha. The archival images will be collected in a montage by Artavazd Pelechian in Nous; the cinematographic documents of the public funerals of Buenaventura Durruti in 1936; Yasser Arafat in 2004; or Kim Jong-II in 2011. Two extracts from Zhao Liang’s film Petition, The Court of Complaints will also be on view, in addition to ethnographic documents such as those collected by Ernesto De Martino in Italy in the 1950s, or by Filippo Bonini Baraldi who in 2004 filmed a lamentation of Rumanian Gypsies. Also part of the exhibition is a martinet funeral of a cante jondo sung by Manuel Agujetas near a photograph of Carmen Armaya on her deathbed. All of this unravels as but an indication,
since the “Lamentations” folder of my own atlas of images, which contains some two thousand six hundred audio and visual documents, is far from closed.

- Mnemosyne 42 is thus presented like an immense carpet of images projected onto the floor of the nave of Le Fresnoy. It is therefore an installation, as is commonly said. The question, however, is: Are the philosopher and the art historian—even the exhibition curator—not assuming the role of artists? Of course they aren’t. The question should not be articulated in such terms. Mnemosyne 42 is not a work of art for the very trivial reasons that it will not be for sale, and it will not live on. Rather, it will give rise to other equally impermanent forms (except perhaps the book, which remains the fundamental element of my work). More profoundly, it is not a “work” per se, concluded, or “operated” (opus operandum); but a visual modus operandi that is at once historical and arguementative. It is intended to remain a site; the site of the construction of a “laborious” or “hard” work, open, full of images, which contains some two thousand six hundred documents, is far from closed.

On the other hand, the fact that Le Fresnoy is also a school engages the pedagogical dimension of Mnemosyne 42. Here too, it is simply a matter of the disproportionalising of a visual arrangement that I develop—and modify—in my weekly lectures at thecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. I have, however, learned from Warburg, as I have from Bertolt Brecht or Walter Benjamin, that pedagogy (the transmission of knowledge, not in the least of “the gay science”) is such a crucial question that it cannot be separated from a poetic dimension. There is no production of knowledge without problematization; that is, without questions posed at a new expense. Yet there are no new questions, not even new contents of knowledge, without an invention of forms; without a “form-making” that can draw our attention to the questions themselves. As such, Mnemosyne 42 comes under what we could quite modestly call a visual essay. This is why, once again, the “installation” is not to be seen as a work of art, but rather as a mere arrangement that instigates questions.

It is worth remembering how Theodor Adorno characterised what is at the same time the theoretical and poetical form of the essay: it is a form for “coordinating elements rather than subordinating them” to a causal explanation; a form for “constructing juxtapositions” outside of any hierarchical method; a form for producing arguments without renouncing their “affinity to the visual image”; a form for seeking “a greater intensity than discursive thought can offer”; a form for not fearing “discontinuity” and for seeing in it, on the contrary, a sort of dialectic at a standstill, a “conflict brought to a standstill”; a form for refusing to conclude and, yet, for “letting the totality light up in one of its chosen or haphazard features.” It is a form which, consequently, always proceeds in an experimental way, essentially working on a “presentation”, which reveals a certain relation to the work of art, even though its aim is clearly non-artistic. It is an “open form” neither teleologically closed, nor strictly inductive, nor strictly deductive—that agrees to present a contingent and fragmentary material in which what is lost in precision is gained in legibility. It is a form that is both “realistic” and “dream-like”, able to “suspend the traditional concept of method” by seeking its truth content in the transitions. All in all, it is a question of re-actualising this form of montage that inherited the paradoxical “method” assumed by Walter Benjamin in his Arcades Project: “Method of this project: literary montage. I needn’t say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them.”

The choice and arrangement of images in Mnemosyne 42 at last seeks to give clarity to the political dimension inherent in the way that the theme of lamentations is treated therein. First, through the de-prioritised coexistence of “documents” and of “works of art”, where an old Romany woman filmed by an ethnomusicologist can rightfully appear alongside the Virgin Mary of Giotto’s Pietà; and then, through the practice of citation—but not appropriation—with the aim of giving images back to everyone rather than “taking them” for oneself when “one” fancies oneself to be the author of everything. Finally, it is a question of making sensitive the dialectical established between lamentation (the emotion, the non-power, the pathos) and political demands. We will see here how peoples in tears eventually become peoples armed; and that, people who are not satisfied with pitying themselves in the face of death, but who demand justice and who make a complaint against a certain state of the historical world.
Museum texts are probably amongst the most neurotic literary genres that exist. Rare are the voices that point out that reading is, in fact, one of the most prevalent activities of the audience in a museum, for it drives the visitor to “consider the logic and wholeness of something that cannot be present, but is represented by something that is perpetually present in the object or the specimen.”1 Curatorial doxa still agrees with French museologist Georges Henri Rivière who hopes to see “the museum epigraphy” brought down to a minimum, and hopes that the right staging, lighting and dramatization will allow artworks and objects to babble, because “an exhibition is not a book and the objects themselves ought to speak.”2 The use of videos and interactive guides beamed down to handheld devices, in addition to the ever-present hypnosis-inducing audioguide, ventriloquize an infinity of artifacts. Yet however animated the objects become, they unfortunately remain dumb to the fact that the audience members (a.k.a. wandering visitor-cum-zombies) have already got tired of the same old boring texts. On the other hand is the late modernist ideal of visual hygiene that identifies any interference with the purity of the contemplation of works of art as a loitering of its aura by academic graffiti. Even experimenting with LCD-editable labels that are continually updated from a distance,3 institutions seem to consent to making texts as fleeting and immaterial as possible. Traces vanish in the river of the information overload. Curators know that their ideas are never destined to be written in stone.

All those rules fell into dust in November 2009, when I walked in amazement into the Sculpture Gallery at the Shanghai Museum located in the People’s Square. Right in front of the doorway, I was struck by a one-and-a-half meter tall black stone, which appeared to be made of granite and was marked with an inscription. To my disbelief, this was not one of the exhibits of the collection: I had in fact stumbled upon the most daring of curatorial gestures, a room label written for posterity, which would surely outlive any of the objects shown in the room. Its placement seemed to have been thoroughly thought out. Whereas the Chinese text stood proud as a stele displaying its golden ideograms under the spotlight, the other half, written in English for foreigners, had toppled onto the floor. Sic transit gloria mundi.

Having just visited a Prada showroom fifty meters away that not only

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sold overpriced garments, but whole silk sofa sets and bedrooms to the burgeoning new Chinese elite, I had to accept that the label as yet another omen of the impending demotion of Western hegemony. A few weeks later, the words of a Jorge Luis Borges poem were thick in my mind. Partly for their content, and partly for their historical context (as the author wrote them just after visiting The Cloisters in New York City, which is yet another museological marker of the transfer of geopolitical power). They went:

We see in the tapestries
the resurrection and the death
of the doomed white unicorn
because the time of this place
does not obey an order.
The laurels I touch will flower
when Leif Eriksson sights the sands of America.
I feel a touch of vertigo,
I am not used to eternity.4

Like Borges, I also felt the structure of time crumbling under my feet, but what is a museum if not a place whose time "does not obey an order"? I realized that the curators of the Shanghai Museum had effectively produced the Rosetta Stone of the future. Thanks to this bilingual label, the philologists of 3000 C.E. will be able to start bringing the works of Shakespeare back to life, rescuing them from the midst of primitive western alphabetic writing. They will probably conclude that De Quincey was an imitator or disciple of Borges; with some luck, they will be able to decipher the name of Champollion. Because alas, the credit line for the curator who wrote the Shanghai stone was only recorded on administrative reports printed on acid paper.

Nothing is more daunting for a curator than critical analysis of projects past. Aside from the common professional difficulty of revisiting one’s accomplishments—something not restricted to curators—our profession’s parameters and vocabulary are crafted in such a way that innumerable specters are embedded at the onset of every proposition. This open-endedness and the neurotic ambitions that accompany it set the bar high enough to make almost every retrospective assessment disappointing. At best, it is an exercise in melancholy. Such is the case, for instance, with the second project that Venus Lau and I brought to fruition in April 2012 at Para/Site, entitled rites, thoughts, notes, sparks, swings, strikes. a hong kong spring. It was intended to be a pause in the institutional unfolding of discernible programming, and a space for reflection on what we are doing. What weight and implications do the things we do have in the institutional context of Para/Site (moreover, what exactly is this context?), in the city of Hong Kong, and in the grander scheme of the world?

Rites, thoughts, notes, sparks, swings, strikes. a hong kong spring was defined as a one-month long restless exhibition, predicated on the association of items of different physical quality and temporality. Artworks and poems were installed at Para/Site, and were combined with talks, performances, screenings and curatorial episodes by artists. They were presented in different sessions, held in different venues in Hong Kong, throughout the duration of the project. Contributors included professionals from all different fields, disciplines, and geographies. The nature of their involvement was heterogeneous, within a deliberately provocative framework: a “Hong Kong Spring”. We were acutely aware of the radical political specter that

the word once again resurrected (complicated as it was by the unity and univocality of spring as a semantic and physical object, coming back every year with commencements and promise). The surrounding streams of tension in both Hong Kong and mainland China (which only intensified in the months after the event) entertained a sense of unease and unspoken hope. We filtered these moods through a reading of Ackbar Abbas’s analysis in Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance, in which he describes the Hong Kong phenomenon of mourning for the loss of things that still exist; a summoning of the ghost of collective history in the midst of its own miscarriage. In his opinion, mourning the ghosts of a spectral history—a history yet to come—is a defining state in Hong Kong. We tried to play this up, both in order to look at the art system in the city, and in order to interrogate the possibilities it offers for our own work.

Looking at the project retrospectively, I will leave aside the forensic comparison of our original intent and its outcomes, so as to develop upon a few questions sparked at the intersection of our initial ideas, and some lingering thoughts.

First and foremost, do we hold a fetishistic attitude toward the forms of our practice, and more precisely, does our work manifest a constant desire to dismiss existing forms? Indeed, our project followed neither the established structure of an exhibition, nor the conventions of delivering art works and discursive items to audiences. In this organism of unstable roles, hierarchies and translation issues are still at play?

Looking at contemporary curatorial practices (and I am afraid that our project did more to feed into this logic than to effectively critique it), reveals a self-righteous disbelief in both the specific means and language of art and exhibition-making. Added to this is a fetishistic approach to theory and politics, which are rather sterile developments in these times when the intellectual and the political relevance of art is most under question. From large scale exhibitions based on nihilistic mantras that deny the very possibility of the art system to others that decompose exhibitions by staging them according to the logic of strolls in a park, curators have become uncertain of every tool at their disposal, starting with the very name of their profession, renaming themselves with various questionable synonyms. This looming sense of crisis in the vocabulary specific to exhibition-making feeds into the logic of the wider system—a system that constantly proclaims a crisis. In the same way, the elusiveness, disembodiment and ungraspable nature of many current curatorial projects (a critique that does not exclude our own) seem to be better serving the system’s need for flexibility and unaccountability.

In spite of being a central issue in the thinking about art today, the curator’s need to constitute his or her own autonomous space of production, away from the principles of production in the capitalist system, operates as if the very economic system that one opposes would still be organized along Fordist lines of production, and would not have employed disembodiment and flexibility as its main ethos.

Secondly, when questioning the nature of our global encounters, what roles, hierarchies and translation issues are still at play? The most visible and perhaps the most successful component of rites, thoughts, notes, sparks, swings, strikes, a hong kong spring was the staging of encounters between a number of practitioners of our field, people who each came from various contexts with different experiences of participation in the contemporary art system. In order to fully approach this question, however, I would like to go back to the beginnings of Para/Site and to another time in the history of contemporary art. Para/Site was founded as an artist-run space in early 1996. It emerged in circumstances specific to Hong Kong, such as the lack of contemporary art institutions in the city at the time (a fact that was made even more obvious by the earlier opening of the Hong Kong Museum of Art, a museum that lacked satisfactory contemporary art programming) and, in a more diffused but perhaps more catalyzing way, the impending handover of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China, on July 1st, 1997. In that time of great uncertainty, a sense of heightened political awareness and a need for self-organization emerged in the city’s public sphere.
Historical specificity aside, however, the institution was in many ways also a symptom of a global phenomenon specific to the era. The middle of the nineties witnessed an accelerated expansion of the system of contemporary art throughout the world. Following the great trade routes of the globalized era, contemporary art set shop throughout the emerging world, reproducing institutions, practices and vocabularies. The lack of contemporary art institutions started to be recognized and named for the first time as such, in many different parts of the world, not just by the founders of Para/Site in Hong Kong. This happened as the places began to be regarded as part of the same realms as the regions in which the contemporary art system first emerged; bundled together by great economic forces. This “resetting of the clocks” in the art scenes around the world and the abrupt synchronicity that the highly unified system and common language of contemporary art had brought about in the early nineties has nonetheless been imperfect, leaving some strains only partially connected and some narratives still un-translated in the different genealogies and the vastly different realities of production that were amalgamated. The methods of implementing the system relied on different agents—from biennials to residency programs, from newly established magazines to artists-turned-curators (and often, later, curators-turned-gatekeepers). Yet perhaps the most available format, the one that required minimal resources and better fit the pioneering ethos of the times, was the artist-run-space.

It is important to note that the geography of expansion towards the margins did not only follow the old colonial routes of expansion, as margins within the central realms have been important pieces of this process. What occurred in Hong Kong and Singapore was analogous with what occurred in Glasgow and Scandinavia. During that phase of expansion, the anchor institutions performed an enthusiastic ambassadorial function, promoting the system within their contexts, and projecting production from their surroundings in the international field, often directly towards the centers, which still acted as filters of what was to be circulated further within the system.

Fast forward to 2012: a very different landscape emerges. The expansion has been remarkably successful. Following the fluctuations of the economy more directly than ever in the history of art, the global animal of contemporary art has indeed managed to impose a unified voice: common tools, mutually recognizable institutions, and this in spite of the remaining (and mutating) differences. The above analysis was our premise, which we accepted both as a critical description of our realities and as an aspirational project. We chose to extract ourselves from the logic of furthering the global institutional construct but also from questioning the adequacy of contemporary art as a space for approaching our reality, assuming that this internationalized field still has untapped potential for creating new forms of solidarity in addition to diving into the specificities and the un-translated blind spots that persist alongside the contemporary art nuclei in various parts of the world.

Whether or not this premise was naively ambitious (as many other previous attempts to create vehicles of internationalism were), or a strategic mistake altogether, taking us toward a dead end with yet more mistranslations and false assumptions along the way, is still a burning question for us.

Third, and finally, is our more melancholic question. Following the growing sparks and strikes that have been occurring in Hong Kong over the past months—ones that have primarily been set off by a young generation which has started to craft a new understanding of politics and self-organization that nobody would have been able to predict even at the beginning of the year—and following the language and use of spaces that are beyond the reach of art and its institutions, I cannot help but ask the question that has been in many ways our greatest fear in the past decades: is the true nature of curating a metaphorical one?
The Project Horizon: On the Temporality of Making

The present text is a shorter version of the longer essay that was first published in the issue No. 149–150, vol. XXVII (Autumn 2012) of Maska, Performing Arts Journal.

I

In recent decades, probably one of the most commonly used words among artists, producers and other cultural workers is the word “project”. Artists, scientists, politicians, producers and all others who work in the so-called creative sector all are united through the word with which they (or we) refer to what we do “projects”. This word seems to be not only endlessly extensible (it can describe everything and anything), but also overwhelmingly pervasive: everyone is involved in projects; probably several of them at the same time, and in different places. All of us are finishing off old projects and starting up new ones; continuously taking part in the completion is already implied in the projected future. A significant amount of what artists and cultural workers do today seems to be caught up in this unaddressed and never-approached “projective time”. Over the course of this “projective time”, artists are expected to successfully negotiate both realized and unrealized projects in addition to projecting new imaginary futures. However, such acts of imagination always depend on a successful calculation between the present and the future, the project can only be finished (or rather, the projection can only be completed) if there is a successful financial implementation that enables the promise to be realized in the end. The main paradox here is that artists are constantly challenged to imagine and to form proposals for the future. To do this, they perpetually rehearse ways of imagining that which has yet to come or that which has yet to happen. Paradoxically, despite that so many creative people are preoccupied with imagining and creating proposals for the future, we are living in a time that is deeply characterised by the impotence and impossibility of imagining and creating modes of political and economic life different from the ones that we already know.

In their discussion Fate Work, Stephano Harney and Valentina Desideri talk about how our current relation to the future has impacted our notion of work. Under capitalism, the future is an open field ahead of us that we can shape and construct through our work. However, we are continually condemned to have a future, we’re condemned to work, and at the same time, if you are condemned to work, you are condemned to have a future. So if you want to realize your dreams you have to work (always assuming that those dreams are something that belong to a future scenario and not the present one). If you want to avoid work, you have to work just as hard because you have to find a way; you have to have a plan. A strategy. Whatever you choose, you will be working and you will be acting strategically towards a goal, and therefore you’ll be productive. In order to change this dominant fate that wants to control the future, and therefore stays in the realm of the known, you have to sabotage this double machine of work and future, so that it stops functioning for a while and so that a space is opened up (a present), and later, the future will come.1

II

The intriguing relation between work and the future underlines the overwhelming use of the word “project” in the productions of value, that is, in the production of artistic works, namely contains a peculiar temporal dimension that has never been stressed or questioned as such. With this in mind, I would like to reflect upon how this peculiar temporality is framing contemporary artistic practices of making, collaborating and creating “projects” have turned out to be the ultimate horizon of creation today. “Project” is also a name for a multitude of singular works, ones that come into existence as a continuity of endless additions (supplements); however, the ultimate horizon of the project can never be reached or exceeded.

In this peculiar continuality, it is always important to start again. After each completion, there is always a breakthrough in which something different has to appear. Something very perplexing is at work here: regardless of the myriad possibilities it presents, it nevertheless projects its own completion as the ultimate horizon of work. Yet even while this “projective temporality” as I’ve described in the first part of the paper somehow opens many possibilities, it does not produce the differences among them: at the end what always arises is a completion of already projected possibilities.2 This is, of course, a paradox—in the continuity, one always has to begin again.

1 The intriguing relation between work and the future underlines the overwhelming use of the word “project”, and projects as such. With this in mind, I would like to reflect upon how this peculiar temporality is framing contemporary artistic practices of making, collaborating and creating “projects” have turned out to be the ultimate horizon of creation today. “Project” is also a name for a multitude of singular works, ones that come into existence as a continuity of endless additions (supplements); however, the ultimate horizon of the project can never be reached or exceeded.

2 Stefano Harney and Valentina Desideri, Fate Work: A Conversation, as yet unpublished, private notes.

3 The use of the word, “project” may also be brought to light with the help of Gilles Deleuze and his conceptualisation of the difference between virtual and possible: the project can only disclose the possible, it does not belong to the virtual. The possibility is already implemented in it. In that sense, it does not belong to the realm of change.

SPECULATION

3

The intriguing relation between work and the future underlines the overwhelming use of the word “project” in the productions of value, that is, in the production of artistic works, namely contains a peculiar temporal dimension that has never been stressed or questioned as such. With this in mind, I would like to reflect upon how this peculiar temporality is framing contemporary artistic practices of making, collaborating and creating “projects” have turned out to be the ultimate horizon of creation today. “Project” is also a name for a multitude of singular works, ones that come into existence as a continuity of endless additions (supplements); however, the ultimate horizon of the project can never be reached or exceeded.

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they are not necessarily in the spotlight because of the projects they have already finished, but because of the "promise" they embody as regards their "younger self". Their individualization. It thus comes as no surprise that much art today is produced through numerous residencies, open processes, showings, and works-in-progress; where unfinished, still-incomplete work—nothing that it does, however—have to be promising work—is shown and exchanged, its value circulated, and, through this exchange, subversively affirmed.

This phenomenon indicates first and foremost the instability of contemporary artistic value that has to be mediated and tested continuously, and secondly, it tells us a lot about the work that young artists produce today. Artists participate in the production of subjectivity (a promising one, an experimental one, or a daring one), which at the same time, is with all its imaginative and creative force, constantly in a state of 'experimental precariousness': a work force that is only illusory well-paid, and which constantly has to be on the move in terms of travelling from residency to residency. It must share the process of aesthetic transformation with its audience, in addition to being prepared for lifelong learning. And it is, above all, in the process of aesthetic transformation with its audience that we are not referring to chronological temporality (which is never truly imagined anew, but remains even more and more abstracted from the present context). The enumeration of projects is therefore connected to the notion of time acceleration.

To a certain degree, there is a change of viewpoint with the subjective experience of time. For many, contemporary subjectivities are increasingly experienced as the simultaneity of many projects, be they private, public, societal, intimate, or otherwise. It seems as if the time frame of each individual project also influences the rhythm of the transformation of subjectivity, which must be flexible, yet at the same time move towards an accomplishment; a consummation. Thus, a changing and flexible work force must always aim itself toward finalization, toward the accomplishment of that which was promised in the present, toward the realization of possibilities.

On that point, one last comparison with another current problematic social dimension is perhaps useful. The notion of productive subjectivity is connected to the role of debt in today's economic, social, and political relationships. Debt is, as we know, a strategy for managing the temporality of subjectivity—and the project itself very often functions in exactly the same way that debt does (though sometimes the word 'promise' is preferred in the cultural and artistic sectors, because it invokes a sense of generosity). The projective temporality of both work and activity is also intertwined with the acceleration of that same activity, where the unexpected happens only because of the outburst of crisis, exhaustion, and withdrawal; the difference between the two may only make itself known in the moment of break and total exhaustion. The 'artistic life' is in the middle of "otherness", an abstract omnipresence of such a state of affairs literally absorbs the experience of artistic work and work-making, and at the same time forms the peculiar temporality of subjectivity that is involved in its completion. The enumeration of projects is therefore connected to the notion of time acceleration.

It is not the fact that artistic life is fascinating but that it has "artistic life" as their horizon of the present and future is set up, in the sense that whatever has yet to come is already projected in the present. The possibility of the future only emerges in the balance with the current power structures: projective temporality is never related to the time out of joint; to the now without a future. It is precisely current power structures that also give us the belief that it is possible to foresee what is actually unforeseeable.7 This balance (or lack thereof) is precisely the reason why many people feel that the present time is somehow disappearing. Thus, we not only have less and less time for work because we are so preoccupied with a foreseeable but as-yet-unrealised future, but also, with projective time, artists cannot imagine that they have actually become more and more abstracted from the current context of work. In such a situation, all work contexts seem to be the same (especially as they are increasingly managed in the same way); the differences between communities and collaborative complexes have become invisible; and, with that, they have also been dissolved and lost in their political power. It is likewise at work in our society. Such a resistance to the projective temporality, subjectivity is abstracted from the present social, cultural and political contexts of work; from their antagonistic and multiple forms of complexity. At the same time, contemporary modes of working suffer from a real deprivation of time—an actual one, not only a theoretical one: we never actually have time. What we lack is the actual time of the present, because we have sold off the present in return for a project outline. A constant dispossession of duration is likewise at work in our society. Such a resistance to duration underpins the current discussions about crisis and austerity measures. Austerity measures purify the present, shortening the duration of life lived "in the present" if it is as we believe that only through such acts will the future arrive, and that we will emerge from our crisis. The present is thus a debt that we owe to the future: in order to live better we should not live in the present. However, the problem is that the future is never truly imagined anew, but remains even more closed-off. Time-deprivation is therefore cancelling the imagination and the creation of radical gestures in addition to making all experiment and, with that, also less time to enable social, collaborative, political or intimate relations. The only way in which we maintain a relation to our present is through its administrative and managerial regulation, which is combined with the constant evaluation and re-evaluation of what we have done. And that is always to reach something within the present (or in many different presents) and, with that, to rethink the relation between temporality and its production, and find new ways in which to push the time “out of joint”, or of the speculative balance between that which is and that which has yet to come...
In 2008, I contributed to Taipei Biennial with a site-specific intervention with the Shijhou tribe. In collaboration with inhabitants and a support group of the tribe, I constructed a banner that claimed: "WE WILL WIN. The banner 'spoke' from the ground up to the heights where powerful elites both plan and surveil their city. The intervention was located at the center of contested plans to dismantle housing for the purpose of 'improving the quality of life' in a larger operation of "urban renewal”.

Invited to rework the project for the 2010 Taipei Biennial, I decided to conduct a survey that explored the impact of the WE WILL WIN intervention and the implications of the critical practice that it entailed. The format of the survey was appropriated from market research techniques. In the first section, I investigated the general idea of how art is perceived. The questions in the second section related specifically to the work, attempting to explore what exactly, if anything, the work managed to accomplish in people’s perceptions.

The survey addressed four groups that had a direct interaction with the art world: 1) Decision makers / managers, 2) Curators / Artists, 3) Audience members and 4) Staff / Interns. The aim was to understand public perceptions of the WE WILL WIN intervention, and at the same time disclose the different agendas within the culture industry. For Manifesta Journal 16, readers will find excerpts from the book, which included the resulting data and its accompanying text. The surveys will achieve their purpose if they can make even a modest contribution to ongoing discussions of the role of art in the context of governmental power.
4. If Yes: Why?
問著「是」的原因除？

- Freedom of expression
- Openness to all
- Other

5. If No: Why not?
問著「不是」的原因？

- Labor exploitation conditions
- Discrimination
- Other see page 33

8. Do you agree that criticality depends on specificity? (We mean a mode of address from a specific person, group or place to a specific person, group or place.)

- Totally agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Totally disagree

Totally agree
Agree
Disagree
Totally disagree
10. Do you think that art should be autonomous from dominant political and economic power?
Yes
No

14. Did you like the project?
Yes
No

A. What would you say is important for a young artist's success?
- Attitude
- Originality
- Ability to balance all of the above
- The true nature of creation
- The idea of the artist himself, messages he wants to convey, to interact and communicate
- The true nature of creation

B. If No: Why not?

The capability

Art is everything, and a free form of display thoughts. Therefore, politics that shows in art is n't talking about politics, it's just showing what artists idea about the life he experienced. It is controlled by elites Justice doesn't really exist I do not think democracy is a correct word to describe art world Above all. More self-formed class (rank) theories Different backgrounds, different talents, different institutions, different situations, different surroundings, different histories, different power relations... It is one of the modalities of cultural-colonialism and globalization Art is merely a medium, there's no ontological essence in it The value of art is disgraceful, and the method of evaluation is nonsense Mostly they are just toys of the rich It does not belong to the structure of such procedure The maturity of the society The gap between the rich and poor Art is subjective The capability

It's another structure: 斷絕與反轉不願的 The core and the edge 透視的夢幻 The talent is different 出入》

Art condition subjectively: 能力可以是反轉不願的 From every perspective, art is different from other fields, no matter it is at school, in the market or perspectives from general people 資本在於反映者是參與者或是市場上的一個人的創作， 許多一次的「不是」，都是十次的「是」

The difficulty of gift and talent, the resistance of long investment and edition 當藝術名大眾人之意見，及在視覺藝術的寫作的協助 All of the above

C. If Yes: With a keyword or two, please indicate why?

Consciously 少數派  純粹

The influence

Attitude, a position/a view Soft power

Yes, we should be win! Fighting for the public in this country

Opening

Clear, eye-catching

Try to know the truth from different perspectives 試著用不同角度了解真相 The truth is through silence of harmless 真的解读好 Riotous  佔領和運動

The truth is through silence of harmless

Clever and engaged 佔領和運動

Prevention, funny and strong 佔領和運動

Powerful 佔領和運動

Art intervenes the society, intervention, criticizing. Caring about the issue on the moral and social 佔領和運動

Because of its political engagement, its visual form of expression Concerning the local, 共同體驗 In strictly goes to the system in the hierarchy of global art Art intervenes the public issue in the society 介入社會 公共

Power and people  佔領和運動

Locality and to be visualized 佔領和運動

It is meaningful and beautiful 佔領和運動

Deep into the edge of the city, to unveil the problems 入住後社區和現實 impression 實在

Humanity, 人道

Concrete and keyword: 佔領和運動

Non obvious 不同進化

Clear appeal 佔領和運動

Flustering, bold  佔領和運動

WeWillWin

It's another structure: 斷絕與反轉不願的

The core and the edge 透視的夢幻

The talent is different 出入》

Art condition subjectively: 能力可以是反轉不願的

From every perspective, art is different from other fields, no matter it is at school, in the market or perspectives from general people

資本在於反映者是參與者或是市場上的一個人的創作，許多一次的「不是」，都是十次的「是」

The difficulty of gift and talent, the resistance of long investment and edition 當藝術名大眾人之意見，及在視覺藝術的寫作的協助

All of the above
We Will Win

Make a statement against the real estate company
Contradiction
To arouse people's attention, solving the real estate issue
Introspection
Let people know the truth about the situation
Bless, exposes, return, truth, justice, will.
Justice, moral
Beauty, truth
Integrate with the reality, express the idea
To reflect the reality, answer the public
Shrink people's attention to the issue through powerful artistic presentation
Justice and mercy
At least it's optimistic
Just three words, but simple and clear
Social participation
It's worth to be discussed
It's controversial
We will win!
Armament and sharpening the weapon
Speak for the people, few words
It's creative and speak for the local
Exposure and us, to change, to change our society
Care
Creativity:
Belief and become better
Challenge and sensitivity
Public, local, community
It's so meaningful, local people's thoughts
diversity, deeper, in the feeling
Human rights
Let people pay attention to this issue
Special and unique
This artwork comes from love towards human beings
To be direct
To be disappointing and lie
To be critical and protest
Reflect the reality and criticize the cliché of bureaucracy
Justice and mercy
A new style of expressionism and peace
The locals can live a happy life
Beauty, truth
Crash effect
Independence
Art exists for people's life
Admiring and supporting
To fight with desire, to express the desire
To change the minority to tell the truth, as dirty secret behind
Collaboration and sensitivity
To express the feeling of minority, to express the desire of minority
Social practice
The concept and expression is simple and clear, which is very impressive
The concept and expression is simple and clear, which is very impressive
Reflection of the truth and reality

Power
Realty
Realism
Caucasian
Intervention, society
To be critical, faith

Announcement
Give
Competition
Love and care
Protection and care, against the community
Social justice
Defend
To speak out
We will win
To speak out

Social related
It's special and unique
This artwork comes from love towards human beings

Power
Realty
Realism
Caucasian
Intervention, society
To be critical, faith

Announcement
Give
Competition
Love and care
Protection and care, against the community
Social justice
Defend
To speak out
We will win
To speak out

Social related
It's special and unique
This artwork comes from love towards human beings
To care

To be honest

The reality

To be influential

To be powerful

To go beyond

Fighting

To use the simple slogan express our thoughts to the government.
Justice

To show the reality

To speak for the people

Win

To support the minority and against the authority

To express people's thoughts clearly

To be engaged in the society, to observe and to introspect

To resist

Very good

Living right

To be provocative

Great!

Localization, to speak out

Power of the truth

To claim equal rights and against bureaucracy

The value of existence

Clear appeal

We

Enjoy

Cool

Speak for art and see the truth lies within

Peace

and

Hope

Given much thought

We

Interesting

Care, care, and speak for the people

Art

Environment protection, safety

and

Society

Powerful

Care, care group

We

Minor group

Lower golf course

Anger

You want to be on the headline

The authenticity that people joined with this issue

Grandstand act

People and passion

What you want to say from the picture?

Invalid, fake issue

Hard to feel its effect

Invalid, fake issue

The work was torn down too fast, and it didn't lead to any protest.

It consumes the source material/ topic

No creativity

No feeling

You want to be on the headline

A closed statement, rawing

Hard to feel its effect

Invalid, fake issue

It's a social movement, not art

Politics

You are trying to create conflicts

It's too biased

I don't have interest in it

Not aesthetical

No feeling
Not to beauty，Not to art

What do you want to show?

No

The message is too plain without any self-reflection and self-criticism

No comment.

If the impure idea and / and also happens, just don’t ask for the national compensation.

The statement is too abrupt.

The message is too plain without any self-reflection and self-criticism

No comment.

No comment.

The message is too plain without any self-reflection and self-criticism

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If the impure idea and / and also happens, just don’t ask for the national compensation.

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No comment.

If the impure idea and / and also happens, just don’t ask for the national compensation.

The statement is too abrupt.
Feelings and emotions are generally considered to be features of the individual, and their connections with society often disregarded. Shame, for example, is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as “a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrongdoing or foolish behaviour,” but “wrong” or “foolish” are categories defined by social norms. A feeling such as shame might then provide the opportunity to collectively question social values (i.e. Why do I feel this way? Why is this wrong? Is it wrong? How are the categories of right and wrong defined, and by whom? et cetera). Most often, however, this opportunity is not taken up, as the negative feelings produced by the violent encounter with social norms rest solely on the individual, who is made to bear those feelings alone. When their weight becomes too great, she may resort to therapy. Once again consulting the Oxford Dictionary, therapy is revealed to be a “treatment intended to relieve or heal a disorder.” Yet, a disorder is a social category defined against a category of order, of normality; of an ideal healthy subject that consequently becomes the goal of the therapy. However well-intentioned, such an understanding of therapy as a “fixing” procedure avoids questioning the very categories of thinking that give rise to the “problem” in the first place.

If we instead assume that feelings and emotions are not only a feature of the individual, and their connections with society often disregarded. Shame, for example, is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as “a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrongdoing or foolish behaviour,” but “wrong” or “foolish” are categories defined by social norms. A feeling such as shame might then provide the opportunity to collectively question social values (i.e. Why do I feel this way? Why is this wrong? Is it wrong? How are the categories of right and wrong defined, and by whom? et cetera). Most often, however, this opportunity is not taken up, as the negative feelings produced by the violent encounter with social norms rest solely on the individual, who is made to bear those feelings alone. When their weight becomes too great, she may resort to therapy. Once again consulting the Oxford Dictionary, therapy is revealed to be a “treatment intended to relieve or heal a disorder.” Yet, a disorder is a social category defined against a category of order, of normality; of an ideal healthy subject that consequently becomes the goal of the therapy. However well-intentioned, such an understanding of therapy as a “fixing” procedure avoids questioning the very categories of thinking that give rise to the “problem” in the first place.

If we instead assume that feelings and emotions are not only a feature of the individual, but are also features of the social, then we must also recognize that: (1) troubling feelings are not only individual problems but political problems, (2) what we normally consider political problems, or issues, affect people on all levels: physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual, (as Denise Ferreira da Silva has aptly put it.) they therefore cannot exclusively be dealt with on an intellectual level.

Political therapy is a playful way I have found to engage with this issue. Anyone is welcome to practice it. It entails individual sessions of approximately one hour. The therapist addresses specific issues with hands-on healing in order to develop other languages and ways of dealing with politics. The session addresses a political problem that has been brought forward by the patient. In operation, a “political problem” is any problem, thought or question that has a political dimension for the person who experiences it. It may be something that bothers or preoccupies her, regardless of whether it is primarily lived out on a practical, personal, ideological, conceptual or existential level. What a political problem may be is a category for us to define further.

What is Political Therapy?
Practiced between two individuals, Political Therapy deals with problems of a political nature and creates the conditions to develop other languages to talk about and live through politics. There is no specific discipline or theory behind it. Its practice develops as it happens. Neither the therapist nor the patient is responsible for any kind of “solution” to the problem. Instead, the problem is treated as an occasion for language to develop, for speculation to happen and for politics to be felt. It is a form of therapy for those who neither need, nor want, to be fixed. The role of therapist and patient are always exchangeable.

What is Therapy?
“Therapy is not the return of the sick body to normality but of Being to what is possible to be.”
Franco “Bifo” Berardi

“Perhaps one day we will know that there wasn’t any art but only medicine.”
J.M.G. Le Clézio

Should I give / receive Political Therapy?
Yes.

Who should give / receive Political Therapy?
Whoever puts him / herself in a position to give or receive a political therapy session is someone interested and open to discovering new ways of discussing politics. He or she does not mind pretending, and is a person capable of engaging in a present with no future goals or guarantees, who is nonetheless fully committed and clear in his or her intentions.

What are the possible side effects of Political Therapy?
Some feel uncomfortable touching or being touched. In that case it is enough to communicate this to your partner or stop the session entirely at any moment. It is also possible that your political behaviour may change in unforeseeable ways; you must be willing to take that risk.

Where I should practice Political Therapy?
You can practice political therapy anywhere political problems present themselves that you want to deal with. You may also practice political therapy with whomever you would like, during conversations about politics. You can do it at home, at work, at a dinner party, at an art fair, at a conference, when you or someone else around you has a political problem, at friend’s place, at an occupation... as long as you have enough space for the patient to lie down.

To practice you can make your own deck of fake therapy cards. You can find the existing cards here: http://faketherapy.wordpress.com/cards-deck

How should I give / receive Political Therapy?
One person takes the role of the Therapist (T) and the other person takes the role of the Patient (P). T invites P to tell her what her political problem is. T and P consult each other briefly in order to formulate P’s problem in the most concise and clear way. This is best if it is formulated as a question. T invites P to embody her political problem and to lie down either on her front or back, in a comfortable and relaxed position.

T shuffles the set of fake therapy cards and picks the first four cards from the top of the deck. T can start from the indication written on the cards to give a pretend “hands-on healing” session to P until T feels that it is enough. Minimum time is ten minutes. T tells P that she has finished and then asks P, who is still embodying the problem, how she is feeling and if any images, thoughts or sensations during the therapy have come to P’s mind.
T and P engage in a discussion about the problem starting from what they experienced during the therapy, connecting it with the original issue.

Option: T and P can write a conceptual map together, putting the problem / question in the middle of the page and linking it out to all the thoughts, ideas and possibilities that have emerged from the discussion. They shall continue until they both feel it has been enough.
Berlin.

he obtained a degree in Architecture at TU—

interested in collective art practices. In 2009,

the Academy of Fine Arts (Nuremberg) and is

is assistant professor at

Robert Burghardt

1998.

where they

boudry-lorenz.de) live and work in Berlin,

Pauline Boudry

Renate Lorenz

(www.

2004 Algerian prize for Best Novel.

Bavardages du Seul

several plays and novels, among which is

Mustapha Benfodil

is an Algerian writer,

is a renowned scholar in Middle East studies

Majda Petrović-Šteger

is now the director of Para/Site,

Hong Kong. After having been the curator at

BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht (2008–

2011), the co-curator of the 1st Usul Industrial

Biennial, Esztergom (in 2010), and the editor of

the documenta 12 magazines, Kassel/


Ann Cvetkovich is the Ellen C. Garwood

Centennial Professor of English and Professor of

Women’s and Gender Studies at the

University of Texas at Austin and is the author of

An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality,

and Lesbian Public Cultures (2003) and

Depression: A Public Feeling (2012).

Burak Delier (b. 1977) is an Istanbul-based

artist who explores the relationship between

capitalism and contemporary artistic

practices.

Valentina Desideri (valedesideri [at] gmail.

com) practices both Fake and Political

Therapy, makes performances, and, among

other things, writes biographies by reading

people’s palms.

Georges Didi-Huberman is a philosopher

and art historian who has published some

forty books about history and the theory of

images in addition to having curated several

internationally-renowned exhibitions.

A renowned scholar in Middle East studies

and former Associate Professor of Middle

Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York

University, Khaled Fahmy is currently

Professor and Chair of the History Department

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Marcelo Gomes (marcelogomesfilms [at]

gmail.com) is a Brazilian scriptwriter, director

and video artist from Recife. He graduated

from film studies at Bristol University.

A philosopher, dramaturge and performance

theoretician, Bojana Kunst is a professor at

the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies in

Kassel, and former Associate Professor of Middle

Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York

University, Khaled Fahmy is currently

Professor and Chair of the History Department

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Ariella Azoulay (http://cargocollective.com/

AriellaAzoulay) is at Brown University and is

the author of Civil Imagination (Verso, 2012)

and From Palestine to Israel, A Photographic

Record of Destruction and State Formation

(Pluto, 2012).

London-based artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s

ongoing project, Aural Contract, has been

presented at Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm

(2012) and Homeworks S Beirut (2010). He is

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Mustapha Benfodil is an Algerian writer,

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Bavadage’s du Seul, which was awarded the

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Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz (www.

boudry-lorenz.de) live and work in Berlin,

where they have been collaborating since

1998.

Robert Burghardt is assistant professor at

the Academy of Fine Arts (Nuremberg) and is

interested in collective art practices. In 2009,

he obtained a degree in Architecture at TU—

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Curator and writer Cosmin Costinaș (b. 1962,

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Biennial, Esztergom (in 2010), and the editor of

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Ann Cvetkovich is the Ellen C. Garwood

Centennial Professor of English and Professor of

Women’s and Gender Studies at the

University of Texas at Austin and is the author of

An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality,

and Lesbian Public Cultures (2003) and

Depression: A Public Feeling (2012).

Burak Delier (b. 1977) is an Istanbul-based

artist who explores the relationship between

capitalism and contemporary artistic

practices.

Valentina Desideri (valedesideri [at] gmail.

com) practices both Fake and Political

Therapy, makes performances, and, among

other things, writes biographies by reading

people’s palms.

Georges Didi-Huberman is a philosopher

and art historian who has published some

forty books about history and the theory of

images in addition to having curated several

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A renowned scholar in Middle East studies

and former Associate Professor of Middle

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University, Khaled Fahmy is currently

Professor and Chair of the History Department

at the American University of Cairo.

Marcelo Gomes (marcelogomesfilms [at]

gmail.com) is a Brazilian scriptwriter, director

and video artist from Recife. He graduated

from film studies at Bristol University.

Gal Kim (galkim [at] gmail.com) holds a

PhD on the topic of French Contemporary

Philosophy and Socialist Yugoslavia (University

of Nova Gorica). Co-editor of Documentation

4thwasser (Continuum), Yugoslav Black

Wave Cinema (JvE Academy) and editor of

Postfordism and its Discontents (JvE

Academy/Peace Institute), he does research at

the ICI-Berlin on the topic of the Politics of

Memory in the (post-) Yugoslav context.

A philosopher, dramaturge and performance

theoretician, Bojana Kunst is a professor at

the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies in

Kassel, and former Associate Professor of Middle

Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York

University, Khaled Fahmy is currently

Professor and Chair of the History Department

at the American University of Cairo.

Ariella Azoulay (http://cargocollective.com/

AriellaAzoulay) is at Brown University and is

the author of Civil Imagination (Verso, 2012)

and From Palestine to Israel, A Photographic

Record of Destruction and State Formation

(Pluto, 2012).

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Hito Steyerl never managed to work as the documentary film director she was trained to be. Lately, she has been seen on an unspecified dirt road humming Elvis’ “Trying to Get to You” from the legendary Sun Studio recording sessions.

A consulting professor at Goldsmiths College, London, and president of the French Committee for the Memory and History of Slavery, Françoise Vergès has collaborated on many cultural and artistic manifestations and has published widely on the topic of colonial memories, alternative cartographies, post-colonial museography and diasporic worlds in the Indian Ocean.

Since January 2011, Adnan Yıldız has been the artistic director of Künstlerhaus Stuttgart. He is currently producing a series of solo exhibitions called the Artistic Dialogues at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, and another called Methodical Inquiries at Polistar Gallery, Istanbul, in addition to a discussion-based event program called Critical Voices, at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart and Platform3, in Munich.