
POSZERZANIE ŚWIATA
Augmenting the World
Masaki Fujihata
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Editorial

The critique of bureaucracy slithers like a sewer – hidden, warm, and necessary – beneath the aging towers of the twentieth-century intellectual metropolis. Arising first as one answer to The Question – namely, what happened in the USSR? – bureaucracy eventually came to replace the bourgeoisie as the preferred explanation for why everything was the way it was. To this day, pseudonyms for bureaucracy remain highly fashionable pieces of conceptual hyperbole. Any characterization of instituted sociality as uniform unfreedom – the spectacle, the body without organs, libidinal economics, Empire, Bloom – has its origins in the bureaucratic obsession with control, as distinct from the bourgeois obsession with ownership.

In "The Great Accelerator," Oleksiy Radynski narrates the story of Soviet scientist Viktor Glushkov, whose efforts to develop an early version of the internet were an attempt to overcome bureaucratic inertia from within the Soviet system itself. Cybernetics, it would seem, represented the solution to the bureaucratic problem of the social as such. If technology is one signifier for anti-bureaucracy, art is another. In "The Poetry of Feedback," Jasper Bernes examines the impact of cybernetic theory on the development of postwar American art in general and the work of Hannah Weiner in particular. Like technology, art can be seen as either undoing bureaucracy or reinforcing it.

As Boris Groys discusses in "Art, Technology, and Humanism," Martin Heidegger saw technology as the essence of bureaucratic alienation, something to be undone or counterbalanced by art. Groys argues that "art" and "the human" name two distinct centers of gravity around which technologies of preservation orbit. This is why many of the revolutionary, avant-garde museologists discussed by Arseny Zhilyaev in "Tracing Avant-Garde Museology" looked to the museum as a factory of resurrection. Eventually, technology merges the two forms of preservation into one. Nevertheless, technology is fundamentally split, as Gilbert Simondon postulates in "The Genesis of Technicity." The unity of the magical world cleaves in two, with technical objects falling on one side, and religious subjects on the other. Art, science, and ethics spring up like flowers growing in the canyon that results from this divide.

Whatever its origin, any ethics should be capable of responding adequately to what Irmgard Emmelhainz calls "the colonial blind spot" that she sees distilled in the work of Juan Rulfo. A writer, filmmaker, and agent of the state, Rulfo recognized the violence of modernization even as he participated in it. Is it fog that blinds

labor of death of the soldier and banker. The labor of love, obviously. And of course these activities were domesticated, feminised, relegated to slaves etc. So these are the high-end technologies we need to build on. Actually cooking is the only technology in human history that literally changed – or really created the human body as we know it. Cooking provided the calories needed to sustain the brain size of our present species. It precedes our current form. Humans are a by-product of cooking. And fashion, dressmaking, food preparation, child care etc. could be a huge part of another push to transform human existence into something way more pleasurable and sustainable; whether this involves bodily transformation or not. So, basically, cosmist fashion is a pleonasm. Fashion (as short cut term for all these activities) is a high tech enterprise to recreate and reprogram the living, their relations and their shared minds. It is egalitarian and allows for everybody, including, if needs be, winged ones. I mean, fuck Artificial Intelligence, when you can have Artificial Elegance!

AV: Yes, "cosmos" means beauty in Ancient Greek. It also means harmony. Fedorov and his circle were keenly aware of this and constantly referred to the cosmos in opposition to chaos. I guess the name for this movement could have been Harmonism rather than Cosmism … Also, the Russian word for universe literally means "populated" or "settled" – the emphasis is on people rather than just place or space. "Universal" was also the title of the orthodox patriarch in Constantinople – a religious claim to the totality of the universe, to all people. The Russian Orthodox Church thinks that it inherited this claim after the fall of Constantinople. This is partly why some right-wingers, since the fall of communism and its particular universalism, have become interested in cosmism, like the Duginists and so forth. It seems to me that they are aware of the gaps in their belief system, which is no match for Marxism, so they try to borrow something to fill the holes, like the Nazis did with Nietzsche.

What you say about reproductive labor is extremely important. It is by far the most potent, powerful, existential force – more potent than anything else humanity and possibly the whole planet, the biosphere, has. It is life, it is also love. Because of love, we must resurrect our ancestors: from cosmic particles, as minerals, as animated plants, solar, self-feeding, collectively conscious, immortal, trans-sexual, on Earth, on space ships, on space stations, on other planets. So, is your next film going to be *Biosphere 3*?

HS: Yessir! And it's going to have a long catwalk!

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1
See http://magazines.russ.ru/zvezda/2008/1/ma11.html (in Russian)

2
See Arseny Zhilyaev, "Tracing Avant-Garde Museology" in this issue of *e-flux journal*. See Oleksiy Radynski, "The Great Accelerator: Notes for a Film" in this issue of *e-flux journal*.

3
See Oleksiy Radynski, "The Great Accelerator: Notes for a Film" in this issue of *e-flux journal*.

4
From a geological point of view, the biosphere (the part of the planet in which life can exist) is minuscule compared to geosphere (the solid earth, as distinguished from the atmosphere and hydrosphere). Yet the biosphere has developed to such an extent that it has a controlling relationship over the geo-mass of the planet, including an ability to destroy it.

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See Boris Groys, "Art Technology, and Humanism" in this issue of *e-flux journal*.

water produced by the condensation of vaporized water can be regarded as the same water. He suggests that it is the same and this seems to imply to him that a recreation of certain conditions can result in the recreation of more complex systems, even humans who "evaporated" in the past. He sees this as the control and production of time. He also makes a point of differentiating this from shamanism, which believes that the reproduction of certain sounds, movements, or utterances, or mixtures of ingredients, can result in the production of unrelated actions or objects elsewhere. He stays more on the scientific side of things.

Oh, and I would not worry so much about bringing back people with "ancient" thinking. It seems discriminatory and presumptuous to think that we are now or will be in the future smarter than Socrates or Aristotle and so many others … but separate museum planets are a must!

I think Bannon was brought in on the second attempt to live in the Biosphere in 1994. The original experiment in 1991 also ended badly – apparently a love triangle among participants in the dome resulted in a stabbing and the experiment had to be stopped. I did not know that there was an earlier Soviet experiment like this, but it makes sense because of the space program and the obsession with control over complex systems, etc. It may have been successful because people in the Soviet Union were a bit more patient and used to put up with much more discomfort than probably most American scientists in the 1990s. I am sure it was just as miserable though.

HS: The other interesting detail is that *Big Brother*, arguably the first reality TV show, was based on Biosphere 2 (which already had a large entertainment component, including live broadcasts and *The Theatre of all Possibilities*, from which crew members were drawn, etc.). Probably one could say that a lot of contemporary politics is modeled on similar aesthetic forms, starting from Berlusconi's emergence out of trash TV. Certainly Trump is nothing without *Celebrity Apprentice*. So this was basically bred in the Biosphere as an unforeseen side effect in the wider noosphere. Even if the sphere would have been perfectly sealed, this effect would still have escaped. One wonders what kind of "thing" will "escape" from AI labs, and which unforeseen side effects this will have on the cosmosphere.

But also, most people agree that after the premises of Biosphere were taken over by different universities, very interesting research took place, mostly about the effects of climate change. One didn't need to rely on computer simulations, since one could create micro-atmospheres and study the effects. And interestingly, as climates change outside, in the future some species might have better living conditions inside than outside …

In the last few days I was reminded of Gayatri Spivak's idea of "strategic essentialism." This is about a tactical politics of identity for oppressed people in a colonial or postcolonial context, sort of like an identity politics in brackets. Now, in many places the brackets have come off and minority identity politics have been appropriated by reactionaries of different kinds in the form of men's rights, white separatism, and extreme religion. All of these groups pretend to be oppressed minorities in a takeover of 1980s leftist identity politics. So, while in the '80s "strategic essentialism" may have been a progressive strategy for some (or not), now it definitely isn't.

I think that right now one might need to reverse this term – with full respect to its original inventor – and call for a *strategic universalism*, no brackets necessary. Everyone should be considered equal, period, even though we know that of course everyone is different. And of course, the term "universalism" has been attacked many times as deficient, incomplete, Western-biased, and so on. Actually, as far as I know cosmism too has been described as a very culturally specific set of ideas, tied to the Eurasian movement, with its ideologically dubious and Duginist offspring.

So, let's confront this. Universalism refers to the universe and cosmism to the cosmos. Neither of them is tied to any specific human cultural identity per se.

How to create a set of positions that claims that everyone is an equal and constituent part of the universe/cosmos, not only humans but also other elements and different spheres of the cosmos? Connected, transindividual minds, as well as all the other strata of universal matter? A biopolitics that understands life as anchored in material and energetic processes that go beyond what is currently understood as such.

Is this a way to redeploy cosmism as an answer to current pressing problems?

By the way, did you know that "cosmos" also relates to women's fashion? The Greek 'kosmos' meaning order or adornment becomes the French cosmetique which finally becomes cosmetics in the 17th century! This is wonderful! It connects all the dots! We have to think of cosmism (or strategic universalism) as consisting of advanced experiments in reproductive activities. By this I do not mean genetics, even though it could eventually form some part of it. I mean, for example, the whole range of reproductive labor, which recreates and rejuvenates humanity. It is the labor of life, of creating society and relations, in contrast to the

us? Or smoke from a village that we have already forgotten is burning? In the matter of complicity and participation, Dena Yago considers the work of profane divination in art production and commercial branding following an apocalyptic collapse in brick-and-mortar retail. How does art respond when commodities merge with their contexts and creativity is the watchword of a revived national corporatism? Finally, Anton Vidokle and Hito Steyerl discuss the limits and possibilities of the latest returns to sun-centered cosmology in a conversation entitled "On Artificial Elegance and the Production of Time." What future for the sunlight that gathers, relentlessly, under our collective power?

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Boris Groys

Art, Technology, and Humanism

In the public imagination, technology is mostly associated with technological revolutions and the acceleration of technological change. But, actually, the goal of technology is completely the opposite. Thus, in his famous essay on the question of technology, Heidegger rightly says that the primary goal of technology is to secure the storage and availability of resources and commodities.[1] He shows that historically, the development of technology has been directed towards the decreasing of man's dependence on the accidents to which the natural supply of resources is inevitably prone. One becomes increasingly independent from the sun by storing energy in its different forms – and in general one becomes independent of the annual seasons and the instability of weather. Heidegger does not say this explicitly, but technology is for him primarily the interruption of the flow of time, the production of reservoirs of time in which time ceases to flow towards the future – so that a return to previous moments of time becomes possible. Thus, one can return to a museum and find there the same artwork that one contemplated during a previous visit. According to Heidegger, the goal of technology is precisely to immunize man against change, to liberate man from his dependency on *physis*, on fate, on accident. Heidegger obviously sees this development as extremely dangerous. But why?

Heidegger explains this in the following way: If everything becomes a resource that is stored and made available, then the human being also begins to be regarded as a resource – as human capital, we would now say, as a collection of energies, capabilities, and skills. In this way, man becomes degraded; through a search for stability and security, man turns himself into a thing. Heidegger believes that only art can save man from this denigration. He believes this because, as he explains in his earlier text "The Origin of the Work of Art," art is nothing other than the revelation of the way we use things – and, if one wants, of the way we are used by things.[2] Here it is important to note that for Heidegger, the artwork is not a thing but a vision that opens to the artist in the clearing of Being. At the moment when the artwork enters the art system as a particular thing, it ceases to be an artwork – becoming simply an object available for selling, buying, transporting, exhibiting, etc. The clearing of Being closes. In other words, Heidegger does not like the transformation of artistic vision into a thing. And, accordingly, he does not like the transformation of the human being into a thing. The reason for Heidegger's aversion to the transformation of man into a thing is clear: in both of the texts cited above, Heidegger asserts that in our world, things exist as tools. For Heidegger, becoming

The technological development necessary to accomplish all these goals may have less to do with the industrial production of devices, machines, and all sorts of stuff that is reliant on the exploitation of raw materials, carbon energy, and so forth, and more to do with certain modifications of our biological bodies. One way to prevent hunger is to produce a lot of food, but another way is to adapt the body to not require food, to be self-feeding somehow. Similarly, one way to solve housing shortages is to build a lot of housing, but a more advanced way is to make the body stronger in such a way that it does not require shelter at all – like most other animals. I do not mean some type of a Terminator-type armored body, but the biological organic body we already have, only made better and stronger. Other life-forms on our planet suggest interesting possibilities in this respect. There are organisms that simply don't die – like the immortal jelly fish that reverses its life cycle perpetually, or those minuscule water bears who apparently are able to live even in outer space on the surfaces of satellites and other orbiting space craft. Or even common houseplants that are able to derive energy from photosynthesis. We share some of the genetic code with all this life and I do not think it is completely impossible to adopt some of their amazing abilities to our basic biology. I realize all this sounds like sci-fi, but our capacity for thought enables a lot of possibilities.

HS: I completely agree about the biopolitics part. Yesterday I talked to TSC, my protagonist from *Factory of the Sun* about this. He had two very interesting comments.

First, he argued that humans actually do not have enough body surface to be able to photosynthesize sufficient energy. They would need leaf extensions of some kind to provide that kind of surface. (He also said that lobsters are technically immortal already, due to some genetic features, but they die anyway because of accidents.)

The other point he made was also extremely interesting. He said that future developments hinge on one factor: What will we achieve first, superintelligence or the resurrection of the dead?

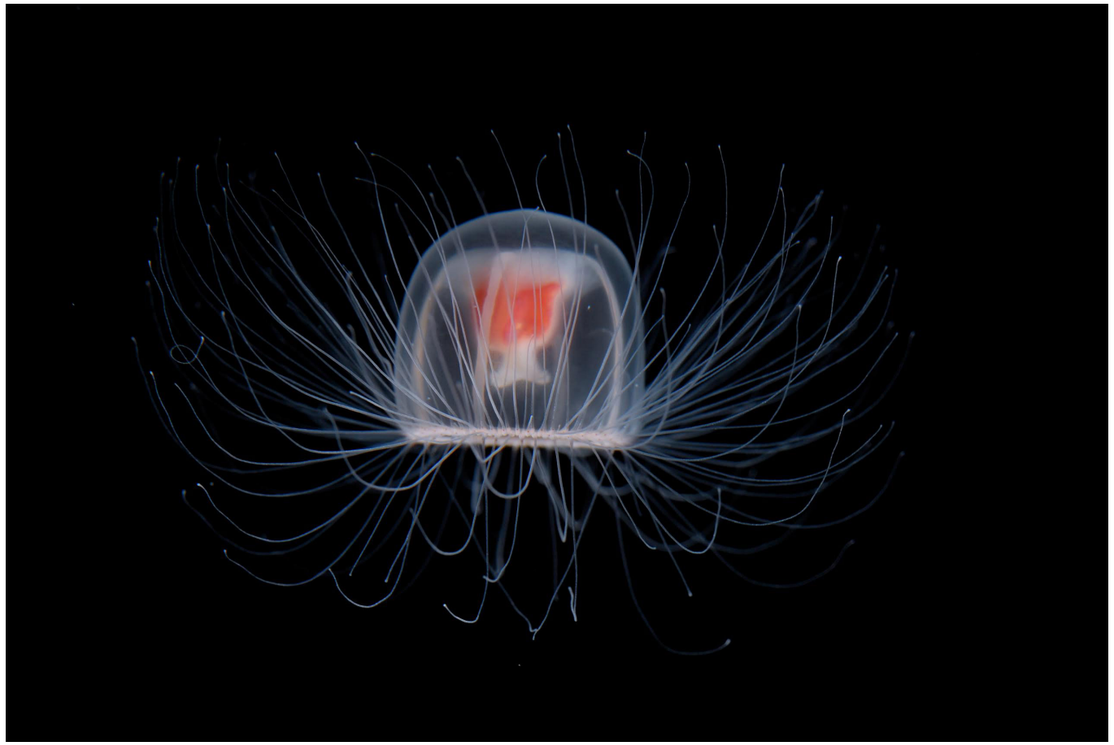
Because the resurrection of everyone would force a major slowing down of research. All these people with old or even ancient worldviews would cause a major cultural slowdown that would make the current exponential increase in technical knowledge unlikely. So most probably, if immortality was first, superintelligence would be much delayed or even not happen at all. On the other hand if the superintelligence was developed first, it would have its own agenda. And that would probably not necessarily include the immortality or even survival of humankind, so that would maybe be delayed or not happen. A fascinating aporia. What happens if neither happens or something completely different happens, which is the likeliest outcome? Will the ants take over? Or will someone smash the locked windows?

AV: We can imagines solutions for the lack of surface area: either by designing a more efficient form of photosynthesis or growing some type of folding extensions. Wings could work very nicely and could also enable one to fly.

The question of superintelligence is interesting. I think the singularity people and various post-humanists are very concerned with this. They are also obsessed with transferring human consciousness into computers and resurrecting the dead through the use of something like interpellation algorithms, etc. But this may be on the wrong track because many of these ideas are based on thinking about intelligence, consciousness, memory, and thought, as immaterial phenomena that can be programmed into various types of hardware, like the religious idea that there is a material body and an immaterial soul that can exist separately of the body, enter other things, and so forth. These kind of divisions between matter and spirit create a lot of confusion. Boris Groys thinks that this is a kind of a medieval thinking that shows how young the field of computer science is and that it has not yet reached the contemporary level of reflection.[5]

I have not found detailed descriptions of exactly how cosmists imagined resurrection technology would work. Fedorov writes a lot about museums using their techniques for preservation, conservation, and restoration to not just maintain and repair artifacts, but to radicalize this technology to bring people back to life. He does not elaborate on how. One possible reference to a method that I came across is in a small book by Valerian Muravyov about the production of time.

Muravyov was a theorist, a social-democrat, and was part of the February Revolution. After the October Revolution he was immediately arrested by Bolsheviks and was sentenced to be executed. Apparently Leon Trotsky visited him in his jail cell, where they had an overnight discussion, as a result of which he was released and given a job as a researcher with the ministry of labor. In his treatise about the production of time (which he means literally), he talks about how same events and phenomena recur when the same conditions are reconstructed: for example, water always boils when the temperature of 99.98°C is reached. It transforms into vapor and can condense into water again when the temperature is lowered. He wonders if



A turritopsis dohrnii jellyfish, known as the only immortal animal. Once the Turritopsis dohrnii have reproduced, they don't die but transform themselves back into their juvenile polyp state.

Man Ray, *Méret Oppenheim, Louis Marcoussis,* 1933. Ferrotyped gelatin silver print. 12.8 x 17.2 cm

objectified, commodified, etc., means becoming used. But is this equation between a thing and a tool actually valid?

I would argue that in the case of artworks, it is not. Of course, it is true that an artwork can function as a commodity and a tool. But as a commodity, an artwork is different from other types of commodities. The basic difference is this: as a rule, when we consume commodities, we destroy them through the act of consumption. If bread is consumed – i.e., eaten – it disappears, ceases to exist. If water is drunk, it also disappears (consumption is destruction – hence the phase "the house was *consumed* by fire"). Clothes, cars, etc., get worn out and finally destroyed in the process of their use. However, artworks do not get consumed in this way: they are not used and destroyed, but merely exhibited or looked at. And they are kept in good condition, restored, etc. So our behavior towards artworks is different from the normal practice of consumption/destruction. The consumption of artworks is just the contemplation of them – and contemplation leaves the artworks undamaged.

This status of the artwork as an object of contemplation is actually relatively new. The classical contemplative attitude was directed towards immortal, eternal objects like the laws of logic (Plato, Aristotle) or God (medieval theology). The changing material world in which everything is temporary, finite, and mortal was understood not as a place of *vita contemplativa* but of *vita activa*. Accordingly, the contemplation of artworks is not ontologically legitimized in the same way that the contemplation of the truths of reason and of God are. Rather, this contemplation is made possible by the technology of storage and preservation. In this sense the art museum is just another instance of technology that, according to Heidegger, endangers man by turning him into an object.

Indeed, the desire for protection and self-protection makes one dependent on the gaze of the other. And the gaze of the other is not necessarily the loving gaze of God. The other cannot see our soul, our thoughts, aspirations, plans. That is why Jean-Paul Sartre argued that the gaze of the other always produces in us the feeling of being endangered and ashamed. The gaze of the other neglects our possible future activity, including new, unexpected actions – it sees us as an already finished object. That is why for Sartre, "hell is other people." In his *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes the ontological struggle between oneself and the other – I try to objectify the other and the other tries to objectify me. This idea of permanent struggle against objectification through the gaze of the other permeates our culture. The goal of art becomes not to attract but rather to escape the gaze of the other – to deactivate this gaze, to convert it to a contemplative, passive gaze. Then one is liberated from the control of the other – but liberated into what? The standard answer is: into true life. According to a certain vitalistic tradition, one lives truly only when one encounters the unpredictable and uncanny, when one is in danger, when one is on the verge of death.

Being alive is not something that can be measured in time and protected. Life announces itself only through the intensity of feeling, the immediacy of passion, the direct experience of the present. Not coincidentally, the Italian and Russian Futurists like Marinetti and Malevich called for the destruction of museums and historical monuments. Their point was not so much to struggle against the art system itself but rather to reject the contemplative attitude in the name of *vita activa*. As Russian avant-garde theoreticians and artists said at that time: art should be not a mirror but a hammer. Nietzsche had already sought to "philosophize with a hammer." (Trotsky in *Literature and Revolution*: "Even the handling of a hammer is taught with the help of a mirror.") The classical avant-garde wanted to abolish the aesthetic protection of the past and of the status quo, with the goal of changing the world. However, this implied the rejection of self-protection, since this change was projected as permanent. Thus, time and again the artists of the avant-garde insisted on their acceptance of the coming destruction of their own art by the generations that would follow them, who would build a new world in which there would be no place for the past. This struggle against the past was understood by the artistic avant-gardes as also a struggle against art. However, from its beginning art itself has been a form of struggle against the past – aestheticization being a form of annihilation.

It was actually the French Revolution that turned things that were earlier used by the Church and the aristocracy into artworks, i.e., into objects that were exhibited in museums (originally the Louvre) – objects only to be looked at. The secularism of the French Revolution abolished the contemplation of God as the highest goal of life – and replaced it with the contemplation of "beautiful" material objects. In other words, art itself was produced by revolutionary violence – and was, from its beginning, a modern form of iconoclasm. Indeed, in premodern history a change of cultural regimes and conventions, including religions and political systems, would lead to radical iconoclasm – the physical destruction of objects related to previous cultural forms and beliefs. But the French Revolution offered a new way to deal with the valuable things of the past. Instead

nasty and will take time and a lot of fighting to defeat. But it will be defeated, and then we are still in the cemetery eating the remains of our fathers and mothers ... So, how to really move forward?

Death is capital quite literally, because everything we accumulate – food, energy, raw material, etc. – these are all products of death. But there is something else which seems to be fully in the realm of the living – labor, reason, love. I think maybe if the digital disruption you mention could be directed to amplify the latter and reduce dependence on the former, then this could be a step in the right direction. One of the scientists in the cosmist movement was Vladimir Vernadski, a geologist who developed the notion of the noosphere during the middle of the Second World War. It's a profoundly optimistic theory of how life on the planet will be transformed by an emerging sphere of reason and communication whose relationship to life will be similar to the relationship that the biosphere has to the geosphere.[4] Arseny says that noospheric theory is like an optimistic version of Anthropocene theory.

HS: Buffoons kill. Being ridiculous unfortunately does not inhibit an autocrat's efficiency. Look at all the people recently killed in Turkey's new civil war. So unfortunately, the autocrats will not somehow implode or just go away. There are very strong organizational formations behind these movements: religious, commercial, military. And just as we see everything changing, fascism too is undergoing major mutations. One of the most important – besides its traditional infatuation with death – is its creation of updated fascist versions of the life sciences and also of digital communication. We can observe an impoverished form of the noosphere in social media, whose fascist potentials are rapidly being expanded: divisiveness, fragmentation, the exploitation of affect, etc. This is definitely not to say that it is not necessary to keep striving for different forms of mediated consciousness, but only that this is just another arena where the fight against fascism needs to take place.

Speaking of the biosphere – and changing topics – there is an example that keeps fascinating me: Steve Bannon actually managed the Biosphere 2 experiment for a while. People were locked into a greenhouse sphere and had to be completely self-sustaining, including the production of food and atmosphere. It was an oligarch-funded experiment, a test for space colonization. Could they produce oxygen? Sustenance? Social bonds? The answer is that it all failed and that cockroaches and ants were the species that turned out to be best adapted to the oligarch space colony. Oxygen dropped to dangerous levels. The climate was completely fucked up. I think it's a great metaphor for technofascism. That's what happens if you try to breed a superior race – say, storm troopers with tentacles for faces. You get a lot of cockroaches, which actually in terms of Darwinist survival abilities are probably one of the most superior species on Earth. You actually get cockroaches in a huge filtered bubble, the perfect isolationist master race.

(Perhaps I need to apologize to the ants and cockroaches. The ants especially had really great social tactics – they practiced a form of cross-colony solidarity, which made them very resilient. The humans just divided and fell out; of course the ants won).

It would be easy to keep gloating over this outcome, but since I am not a cockroach, the results are not encouraging. So one needs to go back and look at how to actually get it right, right from the foundations, minus the extreme capital techno-eugenics advocated by alt-right forces. These guys have already started to seal the windows of the country they are running. The climate is changing ever faster. There seems to have been an uprising against Bannon and the oxygen ban he imposed back then. At a certain point the windows were opened by some renegade scientists. Other windows were even broken. The woman that led the revolt was later threatened by Bannon. She more or less said that it was her ethical duty to protect her fellow scientists from becoming human guinea pigs for bankers. So this episode is an interesting precedent for how to combat financialized techno-eugenics.

AV: Cosmism is biopolitics because it is concerned with the administration of life, rejuvenation, and even resurrection. Furthermore, it is a radicalized form of biopolitics because its goals are ahead of the current normative expectations and extend even to the deceased. It is a commonly acknowledged view that political power makes a biopolitical turn from simply exercising the sovereign right to kill its subjects without being responsible for their health or life, to governments accepting the obligation to care for the health and welfare of their citizens, to extend their life by administering health services and medical care, securing food supplies, maintaining clean water and air, and so forth. This has been an enormous shift – from the administration of punishment and death to the administration of biological life, upon which the consent to be governed is founded. The next logical step would appear to be for society to guarantee perpetual life for its members and then to extend this to the dead: parents and grandparents and so forth – basically everyone.

becomes a part of so-called terror management, a means to channel death drives.

Essentially, this is neither pro-death nor anti-death. It shows the different functions of death in material economies. But the return of these discussions – which originally culminated around the time of European fascism – not only comes at a time when fascist forces are winning out once more, but is also accompanied by many of the aesthetic/artistic concerns of that time, especially a resurgence of surrealist and animist tendencies. The digital surrealism of recent years ("data as dada") is just one very scattered example. We can add to this a new emphasis on ritual, sorcery, transgression, and meme magic. In a way, a lot of the ingredients of 1930s surrealism are present once again in the cultural debate; historically, we know that some surrealists went towards supporting communism and others towards supporting fascism, and others again went to the library. This is happening today as we speak within contemporary forms of surrealism, where a similar fracturing is starting to happen. Ten percent of post-internet artists go bro fascist, another ten percent go "*nouvelle gauche*" (left identitarian ethnoculturalist), twenty percent go communist, and the rest go into ceramics, fermentation, and art fairs.

However, I would like to focus on the aspects that are new in relation to the 1930s: digital disruption and another historical push for globalization and circulation. What kinds of new elements do they bring into the picture?

And very clearly I have never been very much attracted by the bombastic and baroque aspects of Bataille's ideas and style, nor by their continuation in – let's call it nihilist and postmodern media theory, in Baudrillard, etc. It's way overproduced. Too many synth violins and too much death metal.

A very different document from these times that I think is valid today is George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, which is a sober documentary account about both the struggle against fascism and persecution by Stalinism. Why is it relevant? Because it is actually about lived experience. It is lived experience. It is life plus, very essentially, form – the contrary of the entropy and spending spree of death. To me it feels luxurious, both in relation to a bare life that is deprived of any choice regarding it's own form, but also in relation to the baroque formlessness of death-spending. Perhaps the luxury lies in being able to spend one's life rather than spending one's death (or more likely, the deaths of others).

So, basically, to apply this back to our question: the fight against death. Today, to fight death first means to fight new fascisms.

AV: This is interesting. *The Accursed Share* – Bataille's last book where he speaks about surplus energy, the sun, death, and so forth – is one of my favorite books of his.

It's the one where he comes very close to the worldview of cosmists in the sense that life on Earth is very much shaped and controlled to some extent by celestial, cosmic forces, specifically the effect of the sun on our planet. The sun is super generous in the sense that it gives Earth an incredible abundance of energy, more than we can actually use safely. Energy in the form of sunlight is converted to plant life, animal life, and, through the death of all this living substance, into coal, oil, gas – all these fossil fuels, which are essentially sunlight trapped below Earth's surface. The surplus of this energy needs to be spent through extravagant activities that require expenditures of huge amounts of energy: violence, war, sexuality, and so forth. Bataille sees art as one of the ways to expend this surplus energy non-violently.

Fedorov's conception is similar and slightly different: he sees the entire surface of our planet, the biosphere in which we live and the planet's organic layer, the soil, as a kind of enormous cemetery where everything is made up of the remains of people, animals, plants – all the living matter that has died. We live in these remains, we literally eat, drink, breathe our ancestors, we are completely surrounded and entrapped in death and the remains it leaves behind. It is a horrific vision. So for Fedorov, the fight against death is a fight to liberate ourselves from the cycle of consuming the dead and being consumed ourselves, from being stuck in this swamp of dead bodies and misery.

Certainly, the fight against death has to start with a fight against militarism, fascism, racism, sexism, because they kill and keep killing. But I am not sure that fascism is winning. To me it looks like the Alamo – a kind of a last stand before its final obliteration. For decades it was able to exist in a veiled way and now it has come out in the open, largely because it feels it will not have another chance. But what has come out is kind of ridiculous, amateur, buffoon-like. I was just reading an interview in *Der Spiegel* with the older brother of Geert Wilders. It's really interesting what an isolated, solitary, pathetic figure Wilders is – someone completely removed from contact with the "people" on whose behalf he claims to speak, someone whose main talent is coming up with short provocative slogans that circulate widely but contain no real plan or program. It's very similar to Trump and many of the other figures that have emerged on the right. It's entirely desperate. I don't want to just dismiss this or be too optimistic, because it's

Hubert Robert, *The Grande Galerie,* between 1801 and 1805. Oil on canvas, 37 x 43 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: RMN-Grand Palais/Jean-Gilles Berizzi.

of being destroyed, these things were defunctionalized and presented as art. It is this revolutionary transformation of the Louvre that Kant has in mind when he writes in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*:

> If someone asks me whether I find the palace that I see before me beautiful, I may well say that I do not like that sort of thing … ; in true Rousseauesque style I might even vilify the vanity of the great who waste the sweat of the people on such superfluous things … All of this might be conceded to me and approved; but that is not what is at issue here … One must not be in the least biased in favor of the existence of the thing, but must be entirely indifferent in this respect in order to play the judge in the matter of taste.[3]

In other words, the French Revolution introduced a new type of thing: defunctionalized tools. Accordingly, for human beings, becoming a thing no longer meant becoming a tool. On the contrary, becoming a thing could now mean *becoming an artwork*. And for human beings, becoming an artwork means precisely this: coming out of slavery, being immunized against violence.

Indeed, the protection of art objects can be compared to the sociopolitical protection of the human body – that is, the protection afforded by human rights, which were also introduced by the French Revolution. There is a close relationship between art and humanism. According to the principles of humanism, human beings can only be contemplated, not actively used – not killed, violated, enslaved, etc. The humanist program was summarized by Kant in his famous assertion that in an enlightened, secular society, man should never be treated as a means, but only an end. That is why we regard slavery as barbaric. But to use an artwork in the same way that we use other things and commodities also means to act in a barbaric way. What is most important here is that the secular gaze defines humans as objects having a certain form – namely, human form. The human gaze does not see the human soul – that is the privilege of God. The human gaze sees only the human body. Thus, our rights are related to the image that we offer to the gaze of others. That is why we are so interested in this image. And that is also why we are interested in the protection of art and by art. Humans are protected only insofar as they are perceived by others as artworks produced by the greatest of artists – Nature itself. Not coincidentally, in the nineteenth century – the century of humanism par excellence – the form of the human body was regarded as the most beautiful of all forms, more beautiful than trees, fruits, and waterfalls. And of course, humans are well aware of their status as artworks – and try to improve upon and stabilize this status. Human beings traditionally want to be desired, admired, looked at – to feel like an especially precious artwork.

Alexandre Kojève believed that the desire to be desired, the ambition to be socially recognized and admired, is precisely what makes us human, what distinguishes us from animals. Kojève speaks about this desire as a genuinely "anthropogenic" desire. This is desire not for particular things but for the desire of the other: "Thus, in the relationship between man and woman, for example, Desire is human only if one desires not the body but desire of the other."[4] It is this anthropogenic desire that initiates and moves history: "human history is history of desired Desires."[5] Kojève describes history as moved by the heroes that were pushed to self-sacrifice in the name of mankind by this specifically human desire – the desire for recognition, for becoming an object of society's admiration and love. The desire for desire is what produces self-consciousness, as well as, one can say, the "self" as such. But at the same time, this desire for desire is what turns the subject into an object – ultimately, a dead object. Kojève writes: "Without this fight to the death for pure prestige, there would never have been human beings on Earth."[6] The subject of the desire for desire is not "natural" because it is ready to sacrifice all its natural needs and even its "natural" existence for the abstract Idea of recognition.

Here man creates a *second body*, so to speak, a body that becomes potentially immortal – and protected by society, at least as long as art as such is publicly, legally protected. We can speak here about the extension of the human body by art – towards technically produced immortality. Indeed, after the death of important artists, their artworks remain collected and exhibited, so that when we go to a museum we say, "Let's see Rembrandt and Cezanne" rather than "Let's see *the works of* Rembrandt and Cezanne." In this sense, the protection of art extends the life of artists, turning them into artworks: in the process of self-aestheticization they create their own new artificial body as the valuable, precious object that can only be contemplated, not used.

Of course, Kojève believed that only great men – thinkers, revolutionary heroes, and artists – could become objects of recognition and admiration by subsequent generations. However, today almost everyone practices self-aestheticization, self-design. Almost everybody wants to turn themselves into an object of admiration. Contemporary artists work using the internet. This makes the shift in our political system. Then suddenly it comes out from the pages of old books and is embraced as the dominant model of social organization. It is very strange how certain ideas play out over time.

HS: This takes us into a tangle of complex and contradictory ideas about the economy, excess, the gift, and mortality, pioneered by Bataille and others.

Lets start with this proposition: "Death is capital" (or "Capital is death").

This can have many implications: death can be managed using capital as a kind of fake immortality. But death in the form of giving your life is also the only form of currency many otherwise deprived people have. It can be a gift, a release of energy, a foundation for all sorts of community, including the fascist community. Death has a function in the cosmic circulation of energy, it can be a form of generosity or gluttony, a violent spending spree.

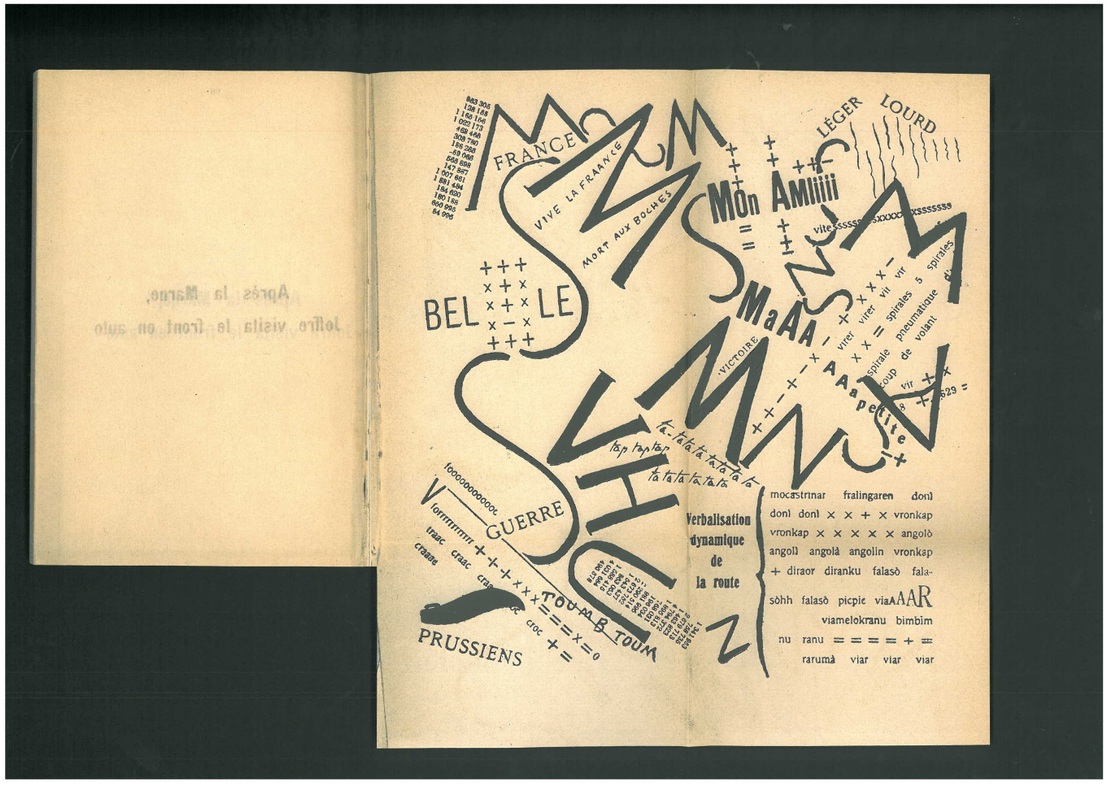
The energy and especially the fear of death has been "managed" by a lot of different economies: fascist ones tend to identify surplus energy with surplus people and try to kill them off. Many people argue that the current US government is a result of rising mortality rates for a segment of the white population that was until now comparatively shielded against the risk of premature death. They basically "invest" in a scheme that tells them that actually other people "deserve" to die instead as a form of "terror management." There is no mystery in this kind of process – the consequences are clear.

Economies of heroism work differently in that they are about giving your own life as an act of "generosity," leading to some form of immortality in circulation. Interestingly, there is also the opposite form of "hero" whose appeal relies on retention: on not giving, on being able to accumulate endlessly without choking – like Midas, who could even digest gold – or not even needing to eat, thus already being immortal.

But according to Bataille, death and especially the death of others is not the only process by which excess energy is managed. The art world, design, fashion, sex, and so on are different schemes by which surplus energy/capital is redistributed and "wasted." According to this, we can make sense of why contemporary art markets have been so inflated in recent decades. The worse or rather the more "worthless" the art, the higher the gratuitous expenditure. A part of excess capital is "wasted" in auctions, dinners, philanthropy, and, to a much lesser extent, in biennials and so on. Art thus

The eight researchers chosen as "biospherians" inhabited the self-contained ecosystem of Biosphere 2 in 1991 for two years.

A detail of Andrei Rublev's icon *Hospitality of Abraham* in which the three angels represent the three persons of God.



A page from Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's book *Les mots en liberté futuristes* (1919).

contemporary experience of art obvious. Artworks by a particular artist can be found on the internet when I google the name of the artist – and they are shown to me in the context of other information that I find on the internet about this artist: biography, other works, political activities, critical reviews, details of the artist's personal life, and so forth. Here I mean not the fictional, authorial subject allegedly investing the artwork with his intentions and with meanings that should be hermeneutically deciphered and revealed. This authorial subject has already been deconstructed and proclaimed dead many times over. I mean the real person existing in the off-line reality to which the internet data refers. This author uses the internet not only to produce art, but also to buy tickets, make restaurant reservations, conduct business, and so forth. All these activities take place in the same integrated space of the internet – and all of them are potentially accessible to other internet users.

Here the artwork becomes "real" and profane because it becomes integrated into the information about its author as a real, profane person. Art is presented on the internet as a specific kind of activity: as documentation of a real working process taking place in the real, off-line world. Indeed, on the internet art operates in the same space as military planning, tourist business, capital flows, and so forth: Google shows, among other things, that there are no walls in internet space. A user of the internet does not switch from the everyday use of things to their disinterested contemplation – the internet user uses the information about art in the same way in which he or she uses information about all other things in the world. Here art activities finally become "normal," real activities – not different from any other useful or not-so-useful practices. The famous slogan "art into life" loses its meaning because art has already become a part of life – a practical activity among other activities. In a certain sense, art returns to its origin, to the time when the artist was a "normal human being" – a handiworker or an entertainer. At the same time, on the internet every normal human being becomes an artist – producing and sending selfies and other images and texts. Today, the practice of self-aestheticization involves hundreds of millions of people.

And not only humans themselves, but also their living spaces have become increasingly aesthetically protected. Museums, monuments, even large areas of cities have become protected from change because they have been aestheticized as belonging to a given cultural heritage. This does not leave a lot of room for urban and social change. Indeed, art does not want change. Art is about storage and conservation – this is why art is deeply conservative. This is why art tends to resist the movement of capital and the dynamic of contemporary technology that permanently destroys old life-forms and art spaces. You can call it "turbo-capitalism" or "neoliberalism" – either way, contemporary economic and technological development is directed against any aesthetically motivated politics of protection. Here art becomes active – more specifically, politically active. We can speak about a politics of resistance – about artistic protection turning into a politics of resistance. The politics of resistance is the politics of protest. Here art moves from contemplation to action. But resistance is an action in the name of contemplation – a reaction to the flow of political and economic changes that make contemplation impossible. (In a seminar I taught on the history of the avant-garde, a Spanish student – she came from Catalonia, I think – wanted to write a paper based on her own participation in a protest movement in her native town. This movement tried to protect the traditional look of the town against the invasion of global commercial brands. She sincerely believed that this movement was an avant-garde movement because it was a protest movement. However, for Marinetti this would be a *passéist* movement – precisely the opposite of what he wanted.)

What is the meaning of this resistance? I would argue that it demonstrates that the coming utopia has already arrived. It shows that utopia is not something that we have to produce, that we have to achieve. Rather, utopia is already here – and should be defended. What is utopia then? It is aestheticized stagnation – or rather, stagnation as an effect of total aestheticization. Indeed, utopian time is time without change. Change is always brought about by violence and destruction. Thus, if change were possible in utopia, then it would be no utopia. When one speaks about utopia, one often speaks about change – but this is the final and ultimate change. It is the change from change to no change. Utopia is a total work of art in which exploitation, violence, and destruction become impossible. In this sense, utopia is already here – and it is permanently growing. One can say that utopia is the final state of technological development. At this stage, technology becomes self-reflective. Heidegger, like many other authors, was frightened by the prospect of this self-reflective turn because he believed that it would mean the total instrumentalization of human existence. But as I have tried to show, self-objectivation does not necessarily leads to self-utilitarianization. It can also lead to a self-

in the 1960s Glushkov tried to apply principles of cybernetics to enable computers to run the Soviet economy. While this was not precisely artificial intelligence in the contemporary sense, it was a pretty close approximation. By the 1970s the system was apparently fully developed and was nearly ready to be implemented, but was cancelled at the last moment because of certain political disagreements within the Politburo. I don't really know if it would have propelled the USSR and the world into communism, or resulted in a complete disaster that would have crashed an already flawed economic system. Interestingly, in the end this computer system was utilized to regulate Soviet gas and oil pipelines and is still in use apparently. So probably your apartment in Berlin is literally connected to this network.

The main principle of materialism – and both cosmism and socialism are deeply materialist ways of thinking – is that everything is matter and all phenomena are a result of material interactions, be it interactions of atoms or neurons or pixels or numbers, etc. It's a kind of a monism (and in keeping with the rest of this conversation, naturally the main philosophical book by Bogdanov is titled *Empiriomonism* – which Lenin attacked in his *Materialism and Empiro-criticism*), which is why I think that a lot of contemporary post-humanists and all these people hoping for some form of digital immortality are probably as off track as the Catholic Church was in the sense that they think they can separate consciousness from the body and transfer it into a different machine. Perhaps this is not very different from believing that the soul goes to heaven after death.

HS: So can we agree that to bring this into the present – or even into the future – one needs to start by creating an abundant, peaceful, nonviolent society? Because if the living can't do it, how could the revived?

The problem to solve first is how to keep humans from killing one another and making each other miserable. The explanations we get for this situation are very dull and unsatisfactory: the right says that it is human nature and the left says it is a result of unfortunate circumstances. So, what if one does not want to accept either? What does one need to look into? Are social physics a sort of alienating device that could help understand what this is about? How about social simulations with a wide range of possible outcomes? Cooking and game playing? How does one reprogram social dynamics?

AV: What Fedorov suggests as a model for such a society is the divine family: the father, the son, and the Holy Ghost. I am not a Christian, so for me the Triune God is a really weird concept that is difficult to get my head around. From what I understand, the three divine entities are not identical and can act independently, yet there is a total union and there are no disagreements among them. They are immortal and what binds them together is love. Can one model society on this? What kind of script do we need to game a model like that?

I also feel that maybe the reason why both the left and the right have sort of accepted killing as part of human nature has something to do with how powerful the death drive is. Our bodies are programmed to die on a genetic level, as is almost all other living matter on this planet. Unlike other living matter, humans are capable of a certain type of reflection, and yet we are for the most part resigned to death. We do not question it. We are like farm animals: we are okay with being slaughtered as long as we get some time to live, feed, play a little, feel affection, reproduce, etc. What were the most popular song lyrics with teenagers you found – "hell," "fuck," "die"? We see others being slaughtered but rationalize this as something natural because it seems unavoidable and because nobody escapes it in the end. I think if one is resigned to the inevitability of death, killing can be accepted as just another part of the package – painful and tragic, but somehow natural.

So maybe the first step has to be a movement towards a worldview within which death is not natural, where it is an enemy that has to be resisted and fought collectively. There needs to be a rebellion against death. This cannot be done by force, but though education, through ideas, through conversation, through literature, cinema, art, and so forth – in other words, by cultural means. I guess this is what I am working on.

It takes a really long time to change people's views of the world, but I think it is not entirely hopeless. Humans largely overcame slavery, even if this took many thousands of years. Gender and racial rights are gradually moving towards equality, even if this movement is more a zigzag then a straight line. The idea of representative politics has more or less become the norm in most places, even if it is imperfect and is being challenged and subverted by the elites, by the oligarchs, by fascists. I think it is possible that our views on death will change and that the right to rejuvenation, immortality, and resurrection will one day be recognized as an inherent right of all living beings and everyone who came before them. Biocosmists wanted to inscribe this into the Soviet constitution. They did not succeed at that time but this does not mean that this will not succeed eventually. For many centuries the notion of democracy existed solely as passages in obscure manuscripts preserved in monasteries, and it was inconceivable as a viable

exterminate humans and resurrect rich people as some sort of High-Net-Worth Robot race.

These eugenicist ideas are already being implemented: cryogenics and blood transfusions for the rich get the headlines, but the breakdown of health care in particular – and sustenance in general – for poor people is literally shortening the lives of millions, curtailing the possibility for them to pass on their genes. Negating, preventing, or destroying social health care programs is the most important accelerationist policy, and it has already been underway for some time.

There is another aspect to this: the maintenance and reproduction of life is of course a very gendered technology – and control over this is a social battleground. Reactionaries try to grab control over life's production and reproduction by any means: religious, economic, legal, and scientific. This affects women's rights on the one hand, and, on the other, it spawns fantasies of reproduction wrested from female control: in labs, via genetic engineering, etc. If the reproduction and maintenance of life is already a cosmist activity, then one has to recognize its strong connection to reproductive labor and so-called domestic activities. Caretakers, parents, nurses, nurturers, cooks, and cleaners are the first cosmists.

In the present reactionary backlash, oligarchic and neoreactionary eugenics are in full swing, with few attempts being made to contain or limit the impact on the living. The consequences of this are clear: the focus needs to be on the living first and foremost. Because if we don't sort out society – create noncapitalist abundance and so forth – the dead cannot be resurrected safely (or, by extension: AGI cannot be implemented without exterminating humankind or only preserving its most privileged parts).

The vital part of sorting out society is minimized in AGI mythology. People try to hastily accelerate in order to bypass it, thinking that there will be some sort of technological solution – for example, just getting rid of humankind by way of eugenic selection. But this is where the real technological challenge resides: How to create a just and abundant society? If the living want to offer it to the dead, then they should be able to create it for themselves. This is an immense technological challenge and this technology has nothing to do with computation or machines but with getting people to agree and collaborate with one another. It's not about the hardware but the programming. This indeed is an intractable problem which has never been solved by deploying technology in the narrow sense. Most people thought that the Industrial Revolution would have already enabled a much more equitable society, but again, hardware outpaced software. I think that this is where the most urgent technological challenge lies. If this is solved, then everything else is a minor problem – for example, whether to resurrect Nazis on the same planet as techno-eugenicists without washing machines.

My question is: Why didn't it happen already? As far as I understand it, the project of Soviet socialism was supposed to create these foundations. At what point did the technology fail? Which parts would need to be developed to create the necessary social technology? Is cooking (or other so-called reproductive activities) potentially the more advanced technology in this respect?

AV: Soviet socialism failed for a number of different reasons. Most importantly, all the major capitalist countries wanted it to fail and actively worked to undermine it. But there were also deep contradictions internally. Certain people, like Alexander Bogdanov for example, who was very close to Lenin from the start, acknowledged very early on that a violent insurrection and a militant attempt to seize power would only lead away from the possibility of socialism and communism. He stepped away from the Bolshevik party as it was just being formed precisely over the use of force, because he felt that it was like cheating, a kind of violent acceleration of politics and social organization, whereas for him one could arrive at communism only through emancipation, education, cultural means, and so forth – not by forcing or killing people. Of course he was also a cosmist …

Yet another side of this was human corruption: desire for power over others, desire for material goods, for privilege. By the late 1950s it became clear to some scientists and political leaders in the USSR that they would not reach communism while economic decisions were made by humans who made mistakes and had ulterior motives. A Soviet computer scientist, Viktor Glushkov, embarked on the construction of a vast interconnected network of computers distributed across the entire country, which would regulate all production and distribution of goods, food, energy, and everything else – a cybernetic control system.[3] Interestingly, some of the core principles of cybernetics are apparently inspired by a book written by Alexander Bogdanov around 1918, called *Tektology*. This was Bogdanov's attempt to develop a science of sciences that would organize and synthesize all scientific knowledge into very basic principles of interaction between systems. *Tektology* was translated into German and came to the attention of John Von Neumann and Norbert Weiner, who later developed cybernetics and systems theory and all that. So

aestheticization that has no goal outside of itself, and is thus the opposite of instrumentalization. In this way, secular utopia truly triumphs – as the ultimate closure of technology in on itself. Life begins to coincide with its immortalization – the flow of time begins to coincide with its standing still.

However, the utopian reversal of the technological dynamic remains uncertain because of its lack of ontological guarantee. Indeed, one can say that the most interesting art of the twentieth century was directed towards the eschatological possibility of the world's total destruction. The art of the early avant-garde manifested time and again the explosion and destruction of the familiar world. So it was often accused of enjoying and celebrating world catastrophe. The most famous accusation of this type was formulated by Walter Benjamin at the end of his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility."[7] Benjamin believed that the celebration of world catastrophe – as it was practiced, for example, by Marinetti – was fascist. Here Benjamin defines fascism as the highest point of aestheticism – the aesthetic enjoyment of ultimate violence and death. Indeed, one can find a lot of texts by Marinetti that aestheticize and celebrate the destruction of the familiar world – and yes, Marinetti was close to Italian fascism. However, the aesthetic enjoyment of catastrophe and death was already discussed by Kant in his theory of the sublime. There Kant asked how it was possible to aesthetically enjoy the moment of mortal danger and the perspective of self-destruction. Kant says more or less the following: the subject of this enjoyment knows that this subject is reasonable – and infinite, immortal reason survives any catastrophe in which the material human body would perish. It is precisely this inner certainty – that reason survives any particular death – which gives the subject the ability to aestheticize the mortal danger and the coming catastrophe.

Modern, post-spiritual man no longer believes in the immortality of reason or the soul. However, contemporary art is still inclined to aestheticize catastrophe because it believes in the immortality of the material world. It believes, in other words, that even if the sun exploded it would only mean that elementary particles, atoms, and molecules would be liberated from their submission to the traditional cosmic order, and thus the materiality of the world would be revealed. Here the eschatology remains apocalyptic in the sense that the end of the world is understood not merely as the discontinuation of the cosmic process but also as the revelation of its true nature.

Indeed, Marinetti does not only celebrate the explosion of the world; he also lets the syntax of his own poems explode, thus liberating the sonic material of traditional poetry. Malevich starts the radical phase of his artistic practice with his participation in a production of the opera *Victory over the Sun* (1913) in which all the leading figures of the early Russian avant-garde also participate. The opera celebrates the demise of the sun – and the reign of chaos. But for Malevich this only means that all the traditional art forms get destroyed and the material of art – in the first place, pure color – is revealed. That is why Malevich speaks about his own art as "Suprematist." This art demonstrates the ultimate supremacy of matter over all the naturally and artificially produced forms to which matter was previously enslaved. Malevich writes: "But I transformed myself into the zero of forms and came out of 0 as 1."[8] This means precisely that he survives the catastrophe of the world (point zero) and finds himself on the other side of death. Later, in 1915, Malevich organized the exhibition "0.10," presenting ten artists who also survived the end of the world and went through the point zero of all forms. Here it is not destruction and catastrophe that are aestheticized, but rather the material remainder that inevitably survives any such catastrophe.

The lack of any ontological guarantee was powerfully expressed by Jean-François Lyotard in his essay "Can Thought Go On Without a Body?" (1987). (This essay was included in a book by Lyotard with the fitting title *The Inhuman*.) Lyotard begins his essay with a reference to the scientific prediction that the sun will explode in 4.5 billion years. He writes further that this impending cataclysm is, in his view,

> the sole serious question to face humanity today. In comparison everything else seems insignificant. Wars, conflicts, political tensions, shifts in opinion, philosophical debates, even passions – everything's dead already if this infinite reserve from which you now draw your energy … dies out with the sun.[9]

The perspective of the death of mankind seems to be distant – but it already poisons us and makes our efforts meaningless. So, according to Lyotard, the real problem is the creation of new hardware that can replace the human body – so that human software, i.e., thought, can be rewritten for this new media support structure. The possibility of such a rewriting is given by the fact that "technology wasn't invented by us humans."[10] The development of technology is a cosmic process in which humans are only episodically involved. In this way, Lyotard opened the way for thinking about the posthuman or the

transhuman in a way that shifts the focus from software (attitudes, opinions, ideologies) to hardware (organism, machine, their combinations, cosmic processes, and events).

Here Lyotard says that man has to be surpassed – not so that he can become the perfect animal (the Nietzschean *Übermenschen*) but rather so that a new unity between thinking and its inorganic, inhuman – because non-animal – support structure can be achieved. The natural reproduction of the human animal should be replaced by its mechanical reproduction. Here one can of course deplore the loss of the traditional humanist aura. However, Walter Benjamin already accepted the destruction of aura – as an alternative to the auratic moment of the total destruction of the world.

The artistic practices and discourses of the classical avant-garde were in a certain way prefigurations of the conditions under which our own second, self-produced, artificial bodies exist in the contemporary media world. The elements of these bodies – artworks, books, films, photos – circulate globally in a dispersed form. This dispersal is even more obvious in the case of the internet. If one searched the internet for a particular name, one finds thousands of references that do not add up to any unity. Thus, one has a feeling that these secondary, self-designed, artificial bodies are already in a state of slow-motion explosion, similar to the final scene of Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*. Or maybe they're in a state of permanent decomposition. The eternal struggle between Apollo and Dionysus, as described by Nietzsche, leads to a strange result here: the self-designed body is dismembered, dispersed, decentered, even exploded – but still keeps its virtual unity. However, this virtual unity is not accessible to the human gaze. Only surveillance and search programs like Google can analyze the internet in its entirety – and thus identify the second bodies of living and dead persons. Here a machine is recognized by a machine – and an algorithm is recognized by another algorithm. Maybe it is a prefiguration of the condition that Lyotard warned us about, in which mankind persists after the explosion of the sun.

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A version of this essay was originally presented at the Walker Art Center as part of Avant Museology, a two-day symposium copresented by the Walker Art Center, e-flux, and the University of Minnesota Press. Video documentation of the original lecture at the Walker can be found here.

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Anton Vidokle, *The Communist Revolution Was Caused by the Sun*, 2016. Film still

1
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Ibid., 6.

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Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008).

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Kazimir Malevich, "*Sobranie sochinenii*," vol. 1 (Moscow: Gilea, 1995), 34.

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10
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Oleksiy Radynski

The Great Accelerator

Notes for a Film

On September 26, 2014, a blog post on a Ukrainian news website claimed to report on an overheard phone conversation between someone fleeing the war-torn region of Donbas and a friend who had stayed behind in the occupied city of Donetsk. They were discussing the ongoing battle for the airport then being fought between the Ukrainian army and Russian-backed forces. According to the blog post, a person from Donetsk claimed that the Ukrainian combatants fighting for the airport were referred to by their adversaries simply as "cyborgs." This was, allegedly, due to their "inhuman" ability to survive in the airport debris under constant shelling, and fight back despite a lack of ammunition and resources.[1]

The blog post went viral, and very quickly the word "cyborg" became a widespread designation for every Ukrainian soldier who fought in the Donetsk airport. Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko and other officials contributed to the establishment of this new myth by using the term without quotation marks in their official addresses, as if insisting on its nonmetaphorical status. The battle for Donetsk airport went on for 242 days, and its "cyborg" mythology helped boost the morale of Ukrainian troops and media audiences alike.[2] As the conditions for the besieged fighters at the ruined airport grew more harsh and intolerable, their newly acquired status as "cyborgs" became helpful – despite the fact that their extremely poor-quality, scarce ammunition was a far cry from the cyborg-related technological imagery disseminated in mass culture.[3]

Let us rewind thirty years to the early 1980s, when the coal-mining area of Donbas was still part of Soviet Ukraine. The region was an experimental site for the attempt to create a pioneering cybernetic system that would automatically manage the economy and the infrastructure of the Soviet state. This experiment was called ASU-DO, or "Automated System of Control of the Donetsk Region." It relied on a local computing center to run a three-tiered hierarchy of command: at the regional level, the city level, and the district level. It oversaw functions as diverse as steel production and trolleybus traffic in Donetsk, in addition to financial accounting and information analysis on "labor quality." The Donetsk system was a pilot project for the Soviet Union's statewide computer-based information management system, designed by the computer engineer Viktor Glushkov, the founder and director of the Institute of Cybernetics in Kiev.

Viktor Glushkov's cybernetic system is now sometimes referred to as "the Soviet internet."[4] For some (in the post-USSR) it is a source of

these other planets as period-type reconstructions, essentially planetary museums, so that, for example, a resurrected Parthian peasant family would be housed on a planet that would reproduce the reality of their original time. And the whole thing can be managed by artificial intelligence.

When Arseny was talking about this, I had a thought that perhaps we are already living on one of these museum planets.

Regarding bodies with bullet holes, diseases, and other traumas – clearly it would be very cruel to bring people back in such a shape, and if there is going to be a technology to resurrect individuals who died hundreds and thousands of years ago, it will be sufficiently advanced to repair their bodies as well. The real question may be that, since the human form will continue evolving and changing, what body exactly is being resurrected – the old human or the contemporary one? In the writings of Fedorov and other cosmists, there are indications that we do need to evolve our bodies, at the very least to make the body strong enough to survive and live in space without oxygen and at extremely low temperatures. Some of the other ideas point to plant life as a better form, because plants are able to regenerate leaves, branches, and so forth, while we cannot regrow an arm or a leg. Yet other thinkers from this circle suggest that we should become self-feeding, so as not to kill and consume other organisms to stay alive – like some types of plankton that can derive sufficient energy from sunlight without the need to consume anything else. I think if I was resurrected as algae, I would be really shocked, because we are all so attached to our physical form. So it is an open question, how all these different forms of humans – the older ones and the future ones – could coexist and interact. There is a funny short story by Sorokin, a contemporary Russian writer that is influenced by cosmism, in which something goes wrong and people are being resurrected partly as household appliances: so someone is part human but they've got a fragment of a coffee maker stuck in their new body. That is also a possibility ...

As for Benjamin's fears for the dead if the enemy wins, for me this means that if the enemy wins there will be no resurrection. The dead are already unsafe because they don't have any rights in our society: they don't communicate, consume, or vote and so they are not political subjects. Their remains are removed further and further from places where most of the living are living, from the cities. Culturally, the dead are now largely pathetic comical figures: zombies in movies.

When we were filming the large ionizer dish in the cemetery in Kazakhstan, one of the

workers jokingly suggested that we should also build a big wall around us, because if we turned this device on, maybe it would make the dead rise from their graves and they would attack us like cinematic zombies. I was thinking that they would probably just want to go home, to their families and stuff. Financial capitalism does not care about the dead because they do not produce or consume. Fascism only uses them as a mythical proof of sacrifice. Communism also is indifferent to the dead because only the generation that achieves communism will benefit from it; everyone who died on the way gets nothing. It seems that only indigenous cultures at this point keep some reverence for the dead. Fedorov writes that a true religion is a cult of ancestors.

HS: I think we are getting to a place where a lot of this intersects in interesting ways with current mythology around AI, but also accelerationist lore – and this harks back to Peter Thiel, eventually.

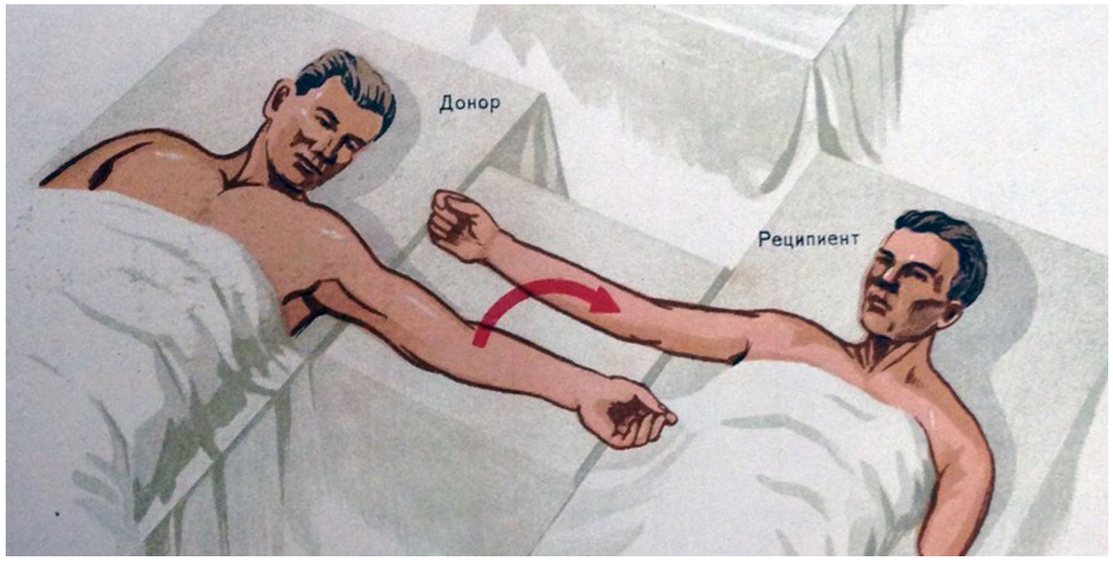
I think everything can be drawn from this paragraph:

> It would also not be a society of separate nation-states because all the resources of the planet and all productive forces will need to be pooled together in a kind of a planetary union. There will be no competition, no private property, no hierarchies, probably no ethnic or gender differences: nothing that can produce strife or war. Besides, everyone will be immortal so you couldn't kill anyone even if you wanted to.

So, the dangers emanating from the dead will be contained by a noncapitalist, non-national society? First one has to produce this society, and only afterward can one proceed to resurrect the dead because only at this point has one created the conditions to do it without further hardship for everyone. If this process is accelerated or bypassed, one will end up with a Peter Thiel–style vampire oligarchic resurrection, which will further exacerbate social inequality and tension.

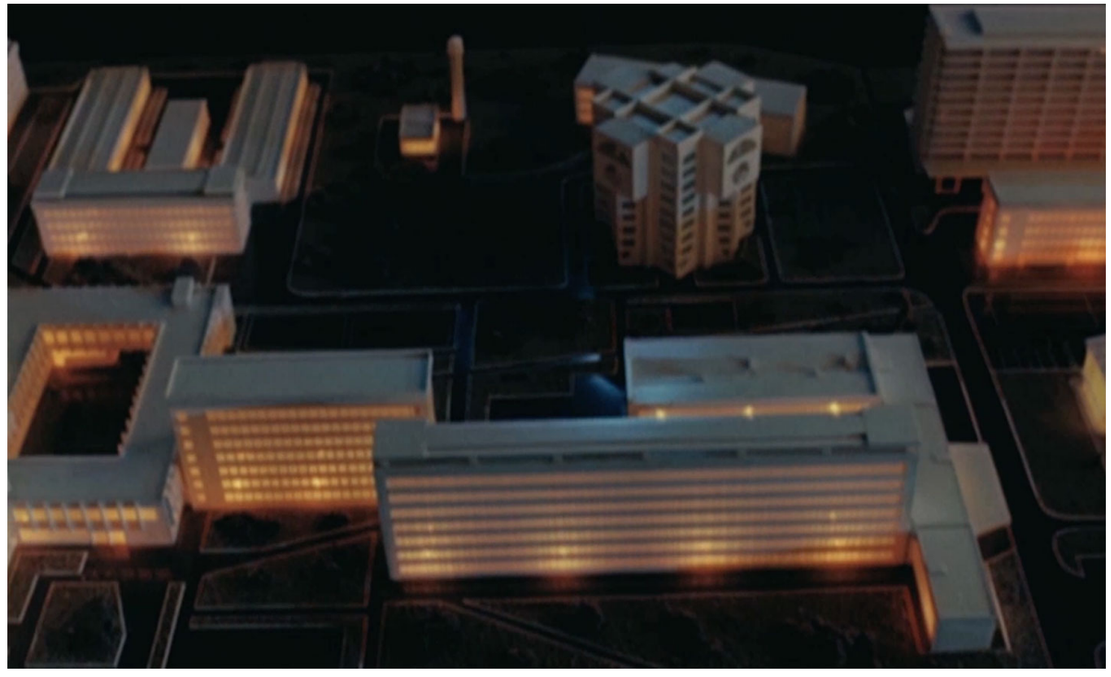
This intersects with thought experiments to contain the dangers of Artificial General Intelligences (AGI). People think AGI could be dangerous and override human control and even extinguish humans. Like the dead, AGIs are seen as potentially dangerous creatures and there are questions of timing or containment.

Within the AGI debate, several "solutions" have been suggested: first, to program the AGI so it will not harm humans, or, on the alt-right/fascist end of the spectrum, to just accelerate extreme capitalism's tendency to

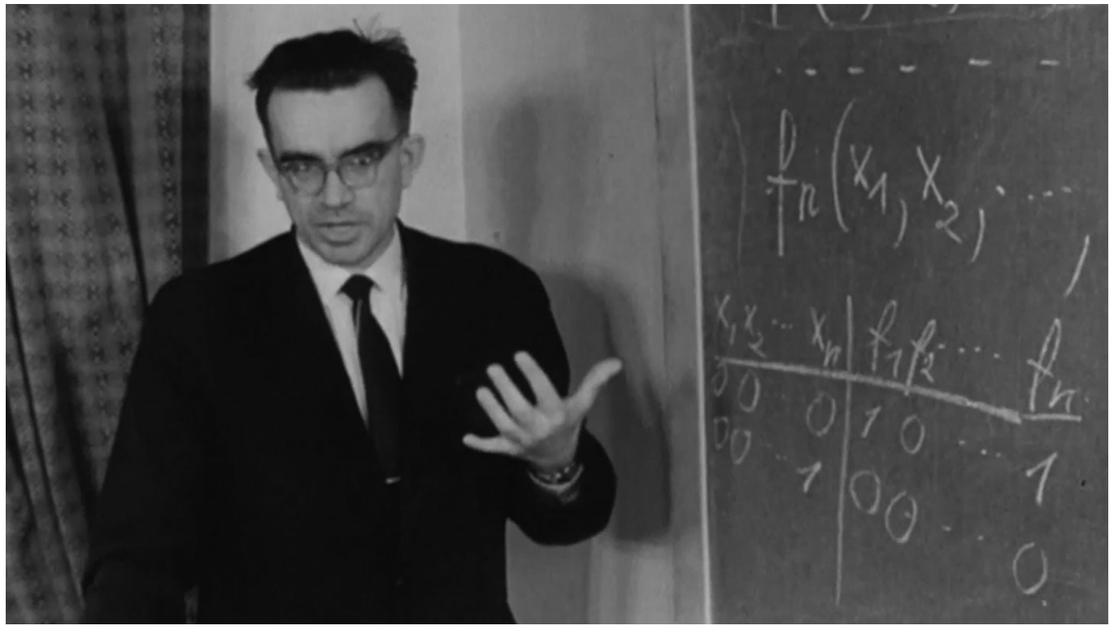


An illustration from a Soviet manual describes the setup for a blood transfusion.

Halyna Zubchenko and Hryhoriy Pryshedko, *Triumph of Cyberneticians*, c. 1970s. Mosaic on the facade of the Institute of Cybernetics in Kiev.



An architectural model of the entire campus project for the Institute of Cybernetics in Kiev, which was only partially built.



Viktor Glushkov at the Institute of Cybernetics in Kiev, date unknown.

refuge either. It's been depleted and sucked dry. You have to forgive me for being uncharacteristically pessimistic. There is too much past around these days and it is strong, smooth, and brutal. Let's keep trying.

AV: At first glance having Hitler, Stalin, Attila the Hun, or other mass murderers revived does sound absurd, and a more selective resurrection could be more appealing. Yet I think I understand Fedorov's conviction that nobody can be left behind in death, not even the monsters, because a universal project of this nature cannot be curated selectively, and present generations do not have the right to be such a curator. It's either everybody or nobody. There are several reasons for this.

First, nobody is evil from birth. This is what one can become under certain conditions over time, but no one is born a murderer. There is a really amazing document I came across recently, an eye-witness account of the execution of Eugenia Yaroslavsky-Markon in a labor camp in the early 1930s. She was married to one of the leading cosmist poets and tried to help her husband escape.[1] The attempt failed, and she was caught and sentenced to be shot. The commander of the camp wanted to kill her personally, because she was defiant and had publicly embarrassed him previously. But for some reason on the day of the execution he could not bring himself to shoot her and broke down. This event is described in detail in the diary of a camp guard who witnessed the executions. The guard writes that the commander had a nervous breakdown and could not pull the trigger, because even a person as evil as him was not a monster all of his life. In this way, perhaps nobody with a capacity for thought, memory, and feeling is totally beyond redemption?

Second, and to your technicality point, certainly a significant social restructuring has to take place before a project of universal immortality and resurrection can become possible. Technologically, scientifically, and economically, such a restructuring would result in a society in which historical villains could not do any damage. It would certainly not be a capitalist society, simply because the market economy is not efficient enough to generate the resources necessary for a task as enormous as resurrection for all. It would also not be a society of separate nation-states because all the resources of the planet and all productive forces will need to be pooled together in a kind of a planetary union. There will be no competition, no private property, no hierarchies, probably no ethnic or gender differences: nothing that can produce strife or war. Besides, everyone will be immortal, so you couldn't kill anyone even if you wanted to.

On the other hand, what is worrisome is that if a certain form of biological longevity or digital immortality becomes possible much sooner, in the current state of society, then we may end up with the worst kind of oppression of all: an elite of immortal billionaires staying perpetually alive at the expense of enslaving everyone else. Interestingly, Peter Thiel is already using some type of blood transfusions from teenagers to keep himself rejuvenated physically and mentally. Apparently, the technique is effective and there is a commercial clinic in California offering this very expensive treatment to the very rich. In the mid-1920s Alexander Bogdanov set up an institute in Moscow to do precisely this, not as a commercial venture but as plan for rejuvenating blood banks to be set up throughout the USSR, for the entire population. Ironically or otherwise, he accidentally killed himself when he exchanged blood with one of his students who was sick with malaria.

I understand what you say about the past entering the present and the future in damaging ways, but there are two kinds of past: a mythologized past that all sorts of despots and fascists tend to evoke, the golden age that never really happened – a fabricated, whitewashed, curated fantasy designed to capitalize on today's fears; and the actual past – the lives of people that came before us, with all their pain, disappointment, and suffering as much as joy, hope, and love. Now, if all these people suddenly started coming back with their knowledge and memories, the mythical past would have no chance because we would begin to know what really happened. Interestingly, Fedorov does not locate utopia in the past. For him it's clearly in the future, but a future that somehow manages to fully recuperate the totality of past lives.

Your question as to which historical period the resurrected people will enter – this is interesting. It's something I've spoken about with Arseny Zhilyaev a number of times, because of his interest in museology.[2] Obviously, someone who lived in 1275 AD or 634 BC is going to have a rather difficult time if they are brought back in 2037: they may find it stressful, alienating, incomprehensible, and so forth. The evolved humans capable of technological resurrection may have already changed significantly from what we accept as the human form: they may have different bodies, entirely different ways of communication, no gender distinction or differentiation, and so forth. Fedorov does not write much about this aspect of things, but he does advocate space exploration and the settlement of other planets to house resurrected people, because Earth is simply not big enough to sustain such an enormous population. Arseny thinks that the solution may be in setting up

knowledge. What appears to be a graveyard is in fact a field full of amazing potential.

Hito Steyerl: As a German person it's a bit hard for me to imagine a scenario in which all the old Nazis are brought back to life. There are enough new ones as it stands. Also, at what point would they be resuscitated? Would they walk around with a bullet in their heads? Okay, let's imagine everyone they killed is alive too. That's a plus. But what is the point one would bring them back to? Say, maybe 1932? But then the next batch, at which point would they be reanimated? 1943? How do we guarantee the Nazis don't just continue trying to kill everyone?

Probably these are technicalities. But the more general reason for my skepticism of the past's potential is that it keeps repeating anyways. Not in the same form, obviously, but in a different, sneaky form. Take Deutsche Bank. It is not the aryanized entity of the 1930s, which financed the Nazi regime. It is a conglomerate consisting of German and American banks plus Goldman Sachs and Qatari money. It financed the Trump campaign, which obviously is not a 1930s fascist entity either. Trump's "America First" slogan is not the same "America First" slogan that it was in the 1940s. But from my point of view none of these entities needed to be

rearticulated in the present at all – not even differently. I would very much prefer it if they hadn't been reincarnated – even imperfectly – and instead had remained in the past. As for Benjamin's angel: I think that the storm is no longer coming from the past. Today the storm is blowing from a future that has been depleted of resources and hope and it is driving people back into the past. People are driven towards the womb – or their assumed origins – not the grave. All these old people trying to look young and jaded are a sign that the storm is blowing from collapsing futures towards a fragmented past.

Benjamin also wrote something else. He said: "Even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy hasn't stopped winning." I had to think about this as the Turkish army bombarded my friend's grave in Turkish Kurdistan. They had already killed her twenty years ago. So this is her second death – because the civil war itself has been revived. How often can a person get "killed"? If anyone tried to reanimate her, she wouldn't be "herself" anymore, but all mixed up with the other guys in the grave. After all, these were her comrades. They would be a collective body, not individuals anymore. Maybe as such they are alive anyway.

On the other hand the future offers no

A portrait of Eugenia Yaroslavsky-Markon, date unknown.

nostalgic historical revisionism in the age of "Cold War 2.0"; for others (in the "post-West"), it is a geeky artifact from an alternative history in which the twenty-first century was not always doomed to resemble a dire cyberpunk novel. The problem with Glushkov's "internet" is obvious: it didn't exist. Moreover, it's not even clear if its alleged prototype – the Donetsk cybernetic system – was ever more real than the cyborgs of Donetsk airport. In fact, the only known description of this system comes from an obscure 1980s documentary film about Viktor Glushkov, unearthed in a film archive in Kiev. For sure, Soviet documentaries are not known for being the most reliable historical sources. Still, bearing in mind that those films were sometimes meant to construct reality rather than represent it, it's worth taking a critical look at the knowledge they might provide about the global significance that Glushkov's projects continue to have in our so-called post-truth era.

Born in 1923, Viktor Glushkov was raised in East Donbas. His talent for math and technology was evident from early childhood, but his scientific career was thwarted when Nazi Germany, on the day of his high-school graduation, invaded the USSR. Glushkov spent the war years under Nazi occupation and was only able to enter the academic world in the 1950s, when he proposed a solution to "Hilbert's fifth problem," one of the fundamental questions in mathematics at the time, which concerned the question of whether continuous groups are automatically differential groups. Glushkov then moved to Kiev, a city where the first computer in continental Europe was constructed in 1950, under the supervision of Soviet computer engineer Sergei Lebedev. Meanwhile, the de-Stalinization of Soviet science in the mid-1950s led to an increase in interest in cybernetics, which had previously been criticized under Stalin as bourgeois pseudoscience.[5] Viktor Glushkov was among those who saw in cybernetics a tool for transitioning to a real communist society, liberated from both the domination of capital and the overgrown Soviet bureaucracy. To that end, Glushkov believed that cybernetics had to be freed from the monopolistic control of the military, which tended to limit the scope of cybernetics to its original WWII task of calculating missile trajectories.[6]

In 1962, the same year Glushkov founded the Institute of Cybernetics in Kiev, he proposed the first model of what would later come to be known as "the Soviet internet"; in classic bureaucratese, he titled it the "National Automated System for the Administration of the Economy."[7] His idea was to link all Soviet regions and branches of industry via a network of computing centers that would program and manage the socialist economy. The assumption was that the possibilities opened up by cybernetic data management would serve the socialist economy much better than the capitalist one: in the latter, the free flow of economic information is constrained by competing private interests and intellectual property, which do not exist in the former. By 1964, Glushkov's proposal had reached the top levels of the Communist Party apparatus. With the Soviet economy in evident need of reform, it had a good chance of being implemented. Ultimately, the party leadership was deterred by the projected cost of Glushkov's system, which would consume, according to its author, more funds than the Soviet space and atomic industries combined. In 1965, Glushkov was outmaneuvered when the Soviet leadership adopted a liberalization plan pushed forward by the economist Yevsey Liberman, who insisted that his plan, unlike Glushkov's, would cost only as much as the paper it was printed on.

Glushkov's personal and professional trajectory was defined by the Cold War competition between superpowers. His network project was given a new life in 1968, when the Soviet leadership learned that the US had successfully deployed the first prototype of a computer network (ARPANET). Recalling the outspoken computer scientist from Kiev who five years earlier had suggested doing what the Americans had now done, the Politburo requested Glushkov's presence at a 1970 top-level meeting to consider the nation-wide implementation of his system. The meeting was a disaster.[8] The project of an all-encompassing system of information management was dropped, and Glushkov was advised to concentrate on smaller-scale "automated management systems" for particular branches of industry.

But Glushkov was always working on multiple side projects, and one of them turned out to be particularly fateful. Between 1964 and 1974, the Soviet Union had been constructing the world's longest oil pipeline, which would transport Siberian oil to East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. This was a project of utmost political importance, reflected in its straightforward title: Druzhba (Friendship). Glushkov was tasked with devising an automated system that would operate the pipeline; it turned out to be one of the largest networks ever created. Glushkov scholars usually overlook his work on the Druzhba network, regarding it as just one of the many mundane tasks that the great scientist was ordered to perform. In fact, it is where Glushkov's unrealized vision for a cybernetic network became a reality. Even though the Druzhba pipeline network was

A map of the projected OGAS (National Automated System for the Administration of the Economy) network shows its ambitious breadth and complexity.

Funeral ceremony in honor of Viktor Glushkov, 1982.

05.08.17 / 17:40:40 EDT

One of several sea slug species that sequester chloroplasts from the algae they eat. Scientists have been trying to determine whether the slugs can use the chloroplasts to derive food from the sun.

05.08.17 / 18:42:27 EDT

Anton Vidokle and Hito Steyerl

Cosmic Catwalk and the Production of Time

A painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus* depicts an angel moving backwards, away from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. This is how the Angel of History must look. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment to awaken the dead and piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, towards which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. This storm is what we call progress.
– Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

Anton Vidokle: I have been thinking about Benjamin's passage on Paul Klee's Angelus Novus – the Angel of History. For Benjamin, what the angel sees as he looks backwards is a pile of rubble: death, destruction, failure. Everyone dies, all projects fail in the end, cities and empires collapse and become ruins and dust. History is a graveyard, a genocide. It's hard to argue with this sublime spectacle: time conquers and kills all. Yet there is a very different view on history, on the past, developed in the nineteenth century by a little-known Russian philosopher, Nikolai Fedorov. Fedorov believed that death is not natural and is more like a flaw in our design. Like a disease, death is something to be fixed, cured, and overcome by technological, scientific means. This becomes the central point of his philosophy of the Common Task: a total reorganization of social relations, productive forces, economy, and politics for a single goal of achieving physical immortality and material resurrection. Fedorov felt that we cannot consider anyone really dead or gone until we have exhausted every possibility of reviving them. For him the dead are not truly dead but merely wounded or ill, and we have an ethical obligation to use our faculty of reason to develop the necessary knowledge, science, and technology to rescue them from the disease of death, to bring them back to life. From this point of view history and the past is a field full of potential: nothing is finished and everyone and everything will come back, not as souls in heaven, but in material form, in this world, with all their subjectivities, memories, and

smaller in scale than Glushkov's original idea for a statewide network, it was in this project that he came closest to implementing his ideas. Initially, Glushkov wanted to build a network through which information would circulate; instead, he built a network through which fossil fuel circulated.

Glushkov's work on the Druzhba network was depicted in a four-part TV series based on a novel by Soviet Ukrainian writer Pavlo Zahrebelnyi, which fictionalized Glushkov's life. In the film, titled *Acceleration*, the novel's plot was updated to portray a group of cyberneticists working on a gigantic pipeline network for natural gas. This network was indeed under construction in the Soviet Union starting in 1960s, and the gas pipeline was the subject of a major Cold War dispute for nearly two decades. Right after the USSR started negotiating with West Germany about the construction of the pipeline, the US tried to prevent the deal from taking place. Finally, in the early 1980s the pipeline network was completed with the help of loans from German and Japanese banks. To this day, this pipeline network brings natural gas from Siberia to Europe.

In the Soviet popular imagination, Glushkov became a hero, inspiring novels and feature films. The filmmakers at Kiev Scientific Film Studio produced numerous documentaries on Glushkov's work, many of which were directly commissioned by his Institute of Cybernetics. These works represented the scale of the Soviet scientific imaginary of the time, which was enthralled by the idea of technological acceleration and the merging of humans with machines. In an interview from the late 1970s, Glushkov spoke about a newly developed technology that could record the biocurrents of the human brain. He believed it would enable the creation of a new, cybernetic iteration of the human being, thus paving the way for human immortality. Together with renowned surgeon Mykola Amosov, he developed the discipline of biocybernetics. Glushkov boasted of taking the medical histories of staff members of the Institute of Cybernetics and feeding them into a machine that then offered a prognosis for their future health; in Glushkov's vision, this was cybernetic healthcare for the future.

But then something totally unexpected happened. Glushkov's own health started to fail. The best Soviet doctors tried to come to his rescue, but none of them could figure out what was going on. In early 1982 he was diagnosed with a rare form of brain cancer and died several weeks later, at age fifty-eight. Leonid Brezhnev, the head of the Soviet state for eighteen years, died later that same year. His successor, Yuri Andropov, passed away little more than a year later, and *his* successor, Konstantin Chernenko, died in early 1985. All three men were in their late seventies. For all the talk of accelerating technological progress, the Soviet Union was trapped in a dynamics of *deceleration* dictated by the ailing gerontocracy that ran the country.

Soviet society was hypnotized by the notion of technological acceleration at the same time as it was overwhelmed by frustration and boredom. The economy was weighed down by a constant state of crisis, yet no credible scenarios of reform were deemed acceptable in public discourse. The system seemed like it would last forever, even as it was becoming difficult to imagine what the future would look like if the status quo persisted.[9] The political system showed signs of imminent collapse, yet no viable alternative was anywhere in sight, apart from the idea of more of the same – more growth, more productivity, more speed.[10] In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, proposing a program to radically overhaul the economy and society. His plan was based on three notions: *perestroika, glasnost*, and *uskorenie*. *Perestroika* and *glasnost* have entered the English language as "restructuring" and "openness," respectively. But the third part of this triad, *uskorenie*, is not at all well known: it means "acceleration," which, according to Gorbachev, was a crucial counterpart to *perestroika* and *glasnost*.[11] Rather than accelerating "real existing socialism," Gorbachev's *uskorenie* furthered the sublation of Soviet communism into post-Soviet capitalism.

Historians like to talk about how the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989 coincided with the rise of the internet. But the implications of this coincidence are far from clear.

Some see it as an optimistic scenario in which information flows were liberated from the constraints of totalitarianism. For others, the egalitarian promise of the early World Wide Web constituted a novel and badly needed horizon of real democracy after the perceived failure of every alternative to Western capitalism. As the internet has become a competitive playground for libertarian monopolies, the idea of the web as an alternative to market society has been discredited. The former scenario – the internet as a counterforce to authoritarianism – though equally misleading, deserves more scrutiny. In their book *The Red Web* (2015), Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan describe the circumstances that led to the establishment of the first internet connection between the Soviet Union and the West. Soldatov and Borogan stress the importance of the fact that the first nonmilitary and nonacademic e-mail from Russia was sent on August 19, 1991, during the attempted military coup that ultimately led to the dissolution of the USSR.[12] What evades their

analysis, though, is that the discourse of this email, sent to the discussion list talk.politics.soviet, contains in a nutshell the political agenda of a resurgent nationalist Russia: the email said, "Communists cannot rape Mother Russia again!" The arrival of global information networks in the former USSR was far from ideologically neutral: it became a tool of neocapitalist restoration, accompanied by the rise of nationalism.

The epoch of Glushkov has ended, and the world looks radically different than anything the pioneering cyberneticist could've imagined. His name has fallen into oblivion – along with the particular philosophy of truth that he tried to apply in his scientific work. In numerous interviews, he formulated this philosophy as follows: "If you feed the truth into the machine, this truth will accelerate human capabilities. But if you feed deliberate lies into the machine, these lies will multiply and destroy the whole thing." Glushkov meant that his cybernetic network would function properly only if the economic information fed into it was accurate and not distorted by corrupt officials – which he knew was happening more often than not. But Glushkov was also trying to stress the idea that technology is not neutral and abstract. Rather, a certain kind of data – which he referred to as "the truth" – can animate it in almost miraculous ways, expanding human capabilities. But the same technology can also accelerate lies, leading to disasters on an unprecedented scale. This dichotomy has found a tragic application in Glushkov's own work. The networks of his design, originally intended to carry information, are now used to carry fossil fuels. Apart from leading to ecological disasters, these fossil-fuel networks have contributed greatly to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of kleptocratic Russian elites, who are using it to support the global rise of a nationalist, revisionist politics, with the help of information warfare made possible by cybernetic technologies. To dispel these "deliberate lies," we should start by feeding our machines the truth about how these technologies became what they are today. Otherwise, we will be caught in a vicious circle of dispossessed "cyborgs" annihilating each other with antediluvian weapons in wars provoked by hi-tech information flows.

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This essay is a loose synopsis of the film The Great Accelerator, *an in-progress documentary film about the life and work of Viktor Glushkov. All images are courtesy of the author and have been collected during research for the film. I'm indebted to Svitlana Matviyenko for sparking my interest in the subject and for her feedback on this essay. This research would not have been possible without the groundbreaking writing of Ben Peters, Andrei Soldatov, and Irina Borogan, to whom I'm thankful for feedback on my work. Many thanks to Boaz Levin, Hito Steyerl, and Vera Tollmann at the Research Center for Proxy Politics for the chance to present and discuss this research in its early stage. Thank you to Anton Vidokle, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Lev Manovich for the inspiring discussions, and to Stephen Squibb for the edit. Thanks to my comrades at Visual Culture Research Center, particularly Serhiy Klymko and Ruslana Koziyenko, for support and collaboration on parts of this research. Thanks to Lyuba Knorozok, Boris Mitić, and André Singer for helping to develop the concept of an upcoming film.*

1
Ettela'at newspaper, March 16, 1977, 41. All translations from Persian are mine, except when otherwise stated.

2
"Deductive structure" is a term first used by Michael Fried in his discussion of postwar American abstract painting. "One of the most crucial formal problems" of the postwar period, according to Fried, was "that of finding a self-aware and strictly logical relation between the painted image and the framing edge." Cited in Maria Gough, *Artist as Producer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 47.

3
Shahla Yeganeh, "A Painter with a New Message: Interview with Koorosh Shishegaran," *Roodaki* 19 (1973): 25.

4
Koorosh Shishegaran, artist's statement for the second installment of "Reproductive Art" at Mes Gallery, 1973.

5
Interview with Koorosh Shishegaran, *Ferdowsi* 1141 (December 1973): 18.

6
For a philosophical account of the ontology of technological print and its significance in art since conceptualism, see Peter Osborne, "Infinite Exchange: The Social Ontology of the Photographic Image," *Philosophy of Photography* 1, no. 1 (March 2010): 59–68.

7
Jalil Ziapour, "Painting," *Khoroos Jangi (The Fighting Cock)* 2 (1949): 12.

8
Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," *Artforum* 12, no. 1 (September 1974): 54–59; reprinted in *Journal of Art Historiography* 4 (June 2011).

9
Ziapour, "Painting," 13.

10
Smith, "The Provincialism Problem."

11
Karim Emami, "Saqqakhaneh School Revisited," *Saqqakhaneh* (exhibition catalogue), Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, 1977, reprinted in *Iran Modern* (exhibition catalogue), Asia Society Museum, 2014, 230. (Written originally in English by Emami.)

12
Shiva Balaghi, "Iranian Visual Arts in 'The Century of Machinery, Speed, and the Atom': Rethinking Modernity," in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*, eds. Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 24.

13
On the political construction of authenticity and Iranian-ness in the context of the 1960s and '70s, see Ali Mirsepassi, *Transnationalism in Iranian Political Thought: The Life and Times of Ahmad Fardid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming in 2017).

14
Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Neo-Traditionalism and Modern Iranian Painting: The Saqqa-khaneh School in the 1960s," *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 4 (December 2005): 613.

15
For a scathing contemporary critique of Pope's ahistorical approach to art history, see Meyer Schapiro's review of *A Survey of Persian Art: From Prehistoric Times to the Present* in *Art Bulletin* 23, no. 1 (March 1941): 82–86.

16
In his recent book *Tahavvolat-e Tasviri-e Honar-e Iran: Barrasi-e Enteghadi (Visual Transformations of Iranian Art: A Critical Survey)* (Tehran: Nazar Publishers, 2016), Siamak Delzendeh makes a point by trying to read major transformations of modern Iranian art as a derivative of Pope's theory of the "decorative" in the art of Iran. Despite his frequent references to interesting archival documents, Delzendeh nonetheless homogenizes a diverse history and leaves some ideological constructions unchecked.

17
For Corbin, Iran manifested an authentic mode of spirituality that he termed "Iranian Islam" – a transhistorical trajectory "reaching from the ancient Persian prophet Zoroaster through the gnostic prophet Mani and spanning the medieval philosophers Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra" (Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, 134). In the early 1970s, one of Corbin's chief disciples, Daryoush Shayegan, was a regular lecturer at Hunarkadeh, advising students on "spiritual" manifestations of "Iranian Islam" in the country's arts.

18
Negar Azimi, "Interview with Kamran Diba," *Iran Modern* (exhibition catalogue), Asia Society, 2013, 80.

19
There is no time and space here to go into detailed formal analysis of Saqqakhaneh artworks to demonstrate how identity politics is reflected formally at the level of picture plane in these works. That is a task I set out for myself in another article that is yet to published called "How Anti-Colonial Art Served Authoritarian Nationalism: Modernism, Vernacular Culture and the Iranian State."

20
Jalal Al-e Ahmad, "Tokhm-e Se Zarde-ie Panjom" (The Fifth Triple-Yolk Egg), in *Karname-ie Se Saleh (Three-Year Recapitulation)* (1968), reprinted in Al-e Ahmad, *Adab va Honar-e Emrooz-e Iran (Iran Contemporary Art and Literature)*, vol. 3, ed. Mostafa Zamaninia (Tehran: Mitra, 1994), 1386.

21
Ruin Pakbaz, *Talar-e Iran (Iran Gallery)* (Tehran: Ministry of Arts and Culture, 1976), 5.

22
Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 49.

23
Ayandegan newspaper, April 10, 1977, 6.

24
Rastakhiz newspaper, republished in *Pages* 6 (October 2007): 111.

25
Ayandegan newspaper, March 26, 1977, 6.

26
Ayandegan newspaper, April 10, 1977, 6.

Shishegaran opened for autonomous art in Iran was soon blocked off. A year later, independent art found itself in the throes of a revolution – a revolution that on the one hand officially welcomed kitsch as "the art of the people," and on the other hand ushered in a right-wing avant-garde obsessed with "the aestheticization of blood and martyrdom."

×

An earlier version of this essay was presented at the conference Artists' Critical Interventions into Architecture and Urbanism (University of Warwick, July 15–16, 2016). I would like to thank the organizers and participants, particularly David Hodge, whose comments were instrumental in the formation of this essay. I am also grateful to Nasrin Tabatabai and Babak Afrassiabi, who first unearthed ART+ART *in 2007 in the sixth volume of their publication* Pages. *Images of works by Koorosh Shishegaran and newspaper clippings are reproduced here courtesy of the artist.*

Hamed Yousefi is a filmmaker and cultural critic. He has made a series of essay-films about the aesthetic history of the Islamic Republic of Iran during and after the revolution of 1979. His 2015 film, *The Fabulous Life and Thought of Ahmad Fardid* (with Ali Mirsepassi), presents a comprehensive intellectual history of modern Iran, from the post-Constitutional (1906) to the post-Islamic Revolutionary periods, through the figure of Ahmad Fardid (1910–94), a self-styled Heideggerian philosopher of political Islam. Together with David Hodge, Yousefi is currently finalizing a coedited volume on the Iranian-American artist Siah Aramajani (*I Love People But Only Conceptually*, forthcoming).

Oleksiy Radynski is a filmmaker and writer based in Kiev. He is a participant in the Visual Culture Research Center, an initiative for art, knowledge, and politics founded in Kiev in 2008. His films have been screened at Oberhausen IFF, Dok Leipzig IFF, SAVVY Contemporary (Berlin), and other venues. He has recently given talks and presentations at Berlinale Forum Expanded, Shtab (Bishkek), Museum of Modern Art (New York), and the Institute for Contemporary Arts (London). His texts have been published in *e-flux journal*, *Political Critique*, *Regarding Spectatorship*, colta.ru, and other publications.

1
The original post, in Russian, is here http://obozrevatel.com/blogs/60943-donetskij-aeroport-za schischayut-kiborgi.htm ("The Donetsk Airport is Being Defended by the Cyborgs!"). This remains the only post ever published by its author, and no information on this person is available on the web.

2
The war in East Ukraine, sparked by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, generated a great deal of cyber-based mythology on both sides. The most significant example on the Russian side is probably CyberBerkut, a pro-Putin hacker group whose name glorifies the notoriously violent riot police that attempted to suppress the Maidan uprising in Kiev.

3
In his book *Cyber-Proletariat* (2015), Nick Dyer-Witheford describes "the coexistence in contemporary capitalism of extraordinary high technologies and workers who live and die in brutal conditions often imagined to belong in some antediluvian past. This coexistence is also a connection. Mines and artificial technologies seem to belong to different worlds, but they are strongly linked." The story of the "cyborgs of Donetsk airport" could expand this framework to include the ongoing militarization of the internet.

4
See Ben Peters's superb *How Not to Network a Nation: The Uneasy History of the Soviet Internet* (2016), the first book-length English-language account of Viktor Glushkov's computer network projects. The present essay owes a great deal to Peters's in-depth research in previously unavailable archives in Moscow and Kiev. Still, it must be noted that the term "Soviet internet" is as simplifying as it is eye-catching: it reduces Glushkov's pioneering research into what we now know as e-governance, artificial intelligence, and network theory to a retroactively imposed catchphrase. See also Slava Gerovitch, "InterNyet: Why the Soviet Union Did Not Build a Nationwide Computer Network," *History and Technology* 24, no. 4 (December 2008): 335–50 http://web.mit.edu/slava/homepage/articles/Gerovitch-InterNyet.pdf.

5
Peters, *How Not To Network a Nation*, 29–32.

6
The science of cybernetics emerged, to a large extent, from the military industries of WWII. Norbert Wiener, who is credited as the founder of cybernetics, worked on the automated aiming and firing of antiaircraft guns during WWII – research that helped him develop the new discipline of cybernetics. Soviet promoter of cybernetics, military officer, and engineer Anatoliy Kitov, who was the first to bring Wiener's theories to the USSR, had a background in artillery as well. The significance of wartime experience for the generation of scientists who developed cybernetics in the USSR cannot be overestated. When Svitlana Matviyenko and I asked Borys Malinovsky, one of the pioneers of Soviet cybernetics (and, lately, its leading historian), how he become interested in cybernetics, he replied with a lengthy account of his military service during WWII.

7
The proposed system was referred to in the Soviet Union by its abbreviated title – OGAS, for "Obschegosudarstvennaya Avtomatizirovannaya Sistema Upravleniya."

8
For a detailed account of this fateful event, see Peters, *How Not to Network a Nation*, 161–66. Long before the globe became more interdependent than ever due to overlapping information networks, the fate of the Soviet network was probably defined by an event that happened in a distant part of the world prior to the meeting: on September 28, 1970, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser died, and Leonid Brezhnev, who went to attend his funeral, had to miss the Politburo meeting where Glushkov's project was discussed. This emboldened the hardline critics of Glushkov, who used the meeting to ridicule and discredit his ideas.

9
Alexey Yurchak's *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (2005) analyzes this social condition in the late USSR. It is a frighteningly timely read today.

10
In the wake of Trump's election, the sinister implications of right-wing accelerationism are increasingly coming to light. See Yuk Hui, "On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries," *e-flux journal* 81 (April 2017) http://www.e-flux.com/journa l/81/125815/on-the-unhappy-c onsciousness-of-neoreactiona ries; and Shuja Haider, "The Darkness at the End of the Tunnel: Artificial Intelligence and Neoreaction," *Viewpoint Magazine*, March 28, 2017 https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/03/28/the-darkness-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel-artificial-intelligence-and-neoreaction/. At the same time, more and more parallels are being drawn between the final years of the USSR and the current state of Western societies. In light of this, it's definitely worth paying more attention to late-Soviet accelerationism, which is an illuminating analogue to modern-day affirmative accelerationism.

11

Yuk Hui may be right to call Deng Xiaoping the world's greatest accelerationist, but Mikhail Gorbachev is a close second. After all, his notion of acceleration brought down the Soviet Union in five short years. See Hui, "On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries."

12
Many thanks to Svitlana Matviyenko for drawing attention to this episode and to the work of Soldatov and Borogan in general.

for class revolution. One year after Shishegaran created this poster, a revolution stormed through Iran and toppled the old class structure. The fact that this revolution was mainly staged in Shahreza Avenue gives the work an uncanny prophetic quality. Shahreza Avenue was soon renamed Enghelab (Revolution) Street.

Nothing can demonstrate the sense of anxiety that Shishegaran's work caused amongst its audience better than a story published in the *Rastakhiz* daily newspaper in response to the work. The writer sets out on a journey to Shahreza Avenue to prove to his readers that it is absurd to claim that this street is in any sense a work of art. At times he uses strongly pejorative language, but in retrospect his prose becomes unintentionally funny because, in its attempted dismissal of the work, it reveals the work's startlingly avant-garde quality – the modern urban space aggressively crashing into the supposed tranquillity of autonomous art.

> Fouzieh Sq. In the long shot, half of the population of all provinces have flocked into the square. Medium shot, a bloke punches a poor guy in the guts (on the soundtrack, the guy moans). Close up, the poor guy's broken tooth a few meters away. Camera zooms in on a poster, "Shahreza Ave. is cinema," the text reads, "is theatre, is poetry … is art plus art." The loud sound of a car horn mixed with the excited commotion of passengers on a double decker bus cuts off this cinematic and theatrical scene.
>
> There is an abandoned gas station (probably a modern sculpture?) which was closed down by the union because the owner mixed the gas with cheap diesel. Was it closed down because it compromised the artwork? After all, this place is art + art, not gas + diesel or any other arbitrary sum or subtraction. Now that the gas station is closed, the art's purity and authenticity are restored.[24]

With Shishegaran's *ART+ART*, Iranian modernism finally acquires a belated avant-garde. As such, one can argue that a national modernism hitherto unable to internally address its own contradictions finally became, in a dialectical way, responsible for its own shortcomings – that is, a critique from within. *ART+ART* can thus be considered an act of institutional critique, so to speak. However, Shishegaran has always insisted that his main concern was not simply to criticize other people's art so much as to achieve a state of pure art, independent from social

conventions of art-making. When a critic claimed that *ART+ART* was a second-hand artwork because it was similar to works previously produced in the West – "for example, a long time ago Ad Reinhardt chose and presented a piece of gallery wall as 'a space chosen by the artist' and even sold that unmovable piece"[25] – Shishegaran responded by emphasising his attack on Iranian modernism. He said,

> If someone manages to rip off the hard shell that periodically forms around the "work of art," if they manage to open up new horizons, even minimally, their work has a much higher quality than the work of those who simply repeat traditional conventions and stay within the hard shell, no matter how good they at repeating those conventions.[26]

At first glance it might seem as if Shishegaran intended to replace autonomous modernism with a more committed and socially engaged art. However, as this statement suggests, he was primarily interested in critiquing a "traditionalism" disguised as modernism: that is, the uncritical reproduction of certain predefined conventions by artists who thought of themselves as independent modernist artists. In other words, Shishegaran's introduction of nonart (what Burger terms "life") into the realm of art was mainly aimed at liberating art's autonomy from the hard shell of "institutional autonomy." Instead of producing yet another work which would reproduce accepted standards of art-making, Shishegaran reintroduces art as a set of social relations, highlighted by his emphasis on mechanisms of socialization (through his use of the medium of poster) and institutionalization (by his persistent engagement with newspaper critics). It was through such an avant-garde call for a radical redefinition of art that Shishegaran managed to demonstrate a way out of the false binary between the "Western" and the "local," a false binary that had long stranded Iranian modernism.

On August 21, 1977, a few months after the production of *ART+ART*, *Young Ettela'at Weekly* published a short story titled "Free Wedding Card Design." It read: "Koorosh Shishegaran … has embarked on a new project: to design free wedding cards for people." The artist announced that the project would last for one year and that "this period of one year is itself a work of art by me." He also gave a telephone number. Like revolutions, weddings are about creating a new future, bringing about a new generation, and welcoming a new dawn – at least, that is the intention. However, the new horizon that

general knowledge and understanding of art.[21]

At Ghandriz Gallery, the gap between modernism and the public was translated into a gap between the advanced artist and the uncultivated viewer. The question of modernism's social relevance was thus transformed from a question of aesthetics (the artistic style and appearance of the work) and economics (class) into a question of culture. Culturalizing the crisis of art resulted in an even deeper gap between the public and modern art. With its attempt to educate the public up to a supposedly "appropriate" cultural level, the Ghandriz collective in fact reproduced the binary and ended up engaged in a vain attempt to make the public interested experts in autonomous modern art – while autonomous art, by definition, kept changing.

After fourteen years, the collective gradually became disillusioned about the prospect of reconciliation. It is therefore not surprising that as soon as the revolution started in 1978 and people took to the streets, the collective decided to close down the gallery and leave the public space of the city to the people. Politics had rendered the cultural question redundant.

Modern Art and Common Space: Reform and Revolution

It is important to see Shishegaran's *ART+ART* in the context of these institutional debates around modernism's social relevance. His work offered a radical alternative to the common practices of autonomy. He tried neither to bring elements of street life into the gallery space (Saqqakhaneh) nor to take his art into the street (Ghandriz). Instead he declared the dissolution of art and street into one another: "Kourosh Shishegaran's works: Shahreza Ave. itself." This was a strong self-criticism of the art scene – a criticism that radically negated the abiding preoccupations of that art regarding the disengagement of art and life. According to Shishegaran, the street itself is *already* art. Shahreza Avenue *is* painting, Shahreza Avenue *is* sculpture, Shahreza Avenue *is* architecture, Shahreza Avenue *is* graphic design, Shahreza Avenue *is* cinema, Shahreza Avenue *is* theater, etc.

In his *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* Peter Burger famously argues that "the avant-gardistes proposed the sublation of art – sublation in the Hegelian sense of the term: art was not to be simply destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be preserved, albeit in a changed form."[22] A reintegration of art into the praxis of life is exactly what Shishegaran pursued. He asked people to take to the street and consider the bustling Shahreza Avenue as a work by Kourosh Shishegaran. "A street, or a slice of our lived life," Shishegaran wrote in response to a critic, "is a monumental and extraordinary work of art that encapsulates all known arts. Maybe I could have called this poster *Living Art*."[23]

But there is more to Shishegaran's attempted sublation of art than mere admiration of urban life. By specifically choosing Shahreza Avenue in particular as the site of "life," Shishegaran reintroduced political economy into an otherwise culturalized domain. Ghandriz Gallery was also located in Shahreza Avenue. For the collective, Shahreza Avenue represented a generic public space, a geographically central street that marked the south-north divide but was also home to the university campus and major bookshops that attracted the intelligentsia. As liberal modernists who envisaged crossing the gap between art and the people by making their art available to a generic, class-blind conception of the public, the collective found Shahreza Avenue a perfect location for their gallery space. At the same time, Saqqakhaneh artists were only interested in the two opposing ends of the class gap: the working-class south and the bourgeois north. They did not mind exhibiting in Shahreza Avenue, but rarely looked for inspiration there. For their kind of class consciousness, Shahreza Avenue was too ambiguous: instead of representing any clear class character, it was the crossing point between opposing groups and thus impossible to pin down. More importantly, Saqqakhaneh artists were stylistically prone to naturalizing the class gap and creating aesthetically unified objects as undistinguishable syntheses between plebeian motifs and patrician media. Shahreza Avenue did not allow such aesthetic normalization because it was precisely the site in which different classes exhibited their differences. In Shishegaran's avant-garde work, these class antagonisms take center stage and become not only the subject of art but the site of its dissolution.

The compositional symmetry of Shishegaran's poster along both the horizontal and the vertical divides, facilitated by the bilingualism of the text, mirrors the doubling of the title, *ART+ART*. It also indicates the difficulty of a resolved sublation and of transferring art into the praxis of life. Art and life are added together, but that arithmetic somehow returns a non-unity of the two halves, as if any possibility of sublation had to be mediated through a reconciliation of class antagonisms. That is in some ways what the work also points towards. *ART+ART* is a call to take to the street – a particular street where these antagonisms are best demonstrated. Therefore, it is equally a call

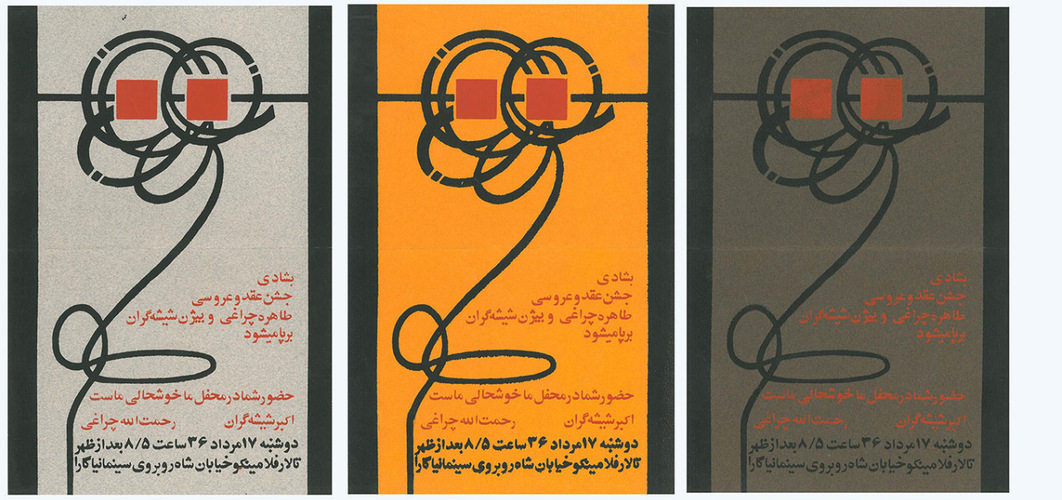
Jasper Bernes

The Poetry of Feedback

Today, outside of a few specialized applications, the would-be metascience of cybernetics is remembered, if at all, only as a hazy prelude to modern computing and information technology. But in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s cybernetics was popular on a scale that might be difficult to appreciate today and enjoyed a nonspecialist audience that extended far and wide from the academic centers and military-industrial research centers where it was born. Books like Norbert Wiener's *The Human Use of Human Beings* and Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* sold hundreds of thousands of copies, while cybernetic theorizations made plausible and significant contributions to economics and anthropology, business management theory and art criticism, psychoanalysis and linguistics, as well as core areas in the applied and theoretical sciences, which everyone expected would soon be completely transformed by such research. The status of cybernetics as the overarching future framework of not only the natural but also the social sciences (and even the arts) seemed virtually assured, even to its enemies. Martin Heidegger, for instance, thought this product of Anglo-American technocracy, born from the crucible of World War II and its rationalized barbarism, threatening enough that he would answer curtly with the single word "cybernetics" when asked by a *Der Spiegel* reporter in 1966, "And what takes the place of philosophy?"[1]

American literature during this period was saturated with cybernetic metaphors, concepts, and themes. In fact, many of the novels that would later come to form the canonical instances of postmodern literature are essentially built around cybernetic concepts such as information, entropy, feedback, and system – from the allegories of control in William Burroughs's Nova trilogy and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, to the melodramas of heat death and entropic decay in Philip K. Dick's *Ubik* and *A Scanner Darkly* and J. G. Ballard's short stories (to name a British writer); from the paradoxes of information and entropy in William Gaddis's *JR* and Thomas Pynchon's 1960s novels, to the thought of feedback and system in John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, and, later on, Don DeLillo.[2] If you were a white man and interested in experimentation in prose fiction in the 1960s and 1970s, then you were probably writing about machines, entropy, and information. Beyond the domain of the novel, the breakdown and efflorescence of neo-avant-garde art in the late 1960s was in some sense superintended by a popular reception of cybernetic ideas as well as a more general worrying about media and medium. The 1970 "Information" show at MoMA, including work by

Installation view of the exhibition “Hannah Weiner (1928–1997),” Kunsthalle Zürich, 2015. Photo: Gunnar Meier Photography.



Koorosh Shishegaran, *Tahereh Cheraghi and Bijan Shishegaran Wedding Card* (1977).

Corbin and art historian Arthur Upham Pope. According to Pope, Persian art, from prehistoric times to the present, has been consistently concerned with the "decorative" as the site of "pure form."[15] Influenced by Pope's understanding of Iranian art, students at Hunarkadeh were encouraged to investigate the "decorative" qualities of traditional art – whether in "elite" historical artifacts or in the "primitive" common culture – and incorporate these qualities in their modernist works.[16] Moreover, the Hunarkadeh curriculum reflected a philosophical narrative of Iranian identity that Henry Corbin had articulated.[17]

While the Pahlavi government strived for an eternal narrative of Iranian identity, Pope and Corbin offered metahistorical visions of Islam which granted Pahlavi's secular and military outlook a spiritual dimension. It is therefore not surprising that the Iranian government enthusiastically supported Saqqakhaneh artists; the director of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art at the time referred to the movement as "a spiritual Iranian version of Pop Art because it involved the nonmaterial consumption of traditional Iranian mass culture – like folk art or talismans."[18]

Inasmuch as Saqqakhaneh derived from an ideologically conservative understanding of local identity, the work made by its artists also reflected and reproduced Orientalist tropes rather than resisting them, despite the artists' insistent locality.[19] In 1966, the charismatic public intellectual Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–69) charged that the emerging taste was being constructed for the Western gaze. The problem, for Al-e Ahmad, was that the appropriation of calligraphy and traditional talismans served to remystify popular culture, whereas, he argued, "the task of the artist is to unravel the relationship between people and things and to demystify their spell."[20] Although Al-e Ahmad did not offer any detailed formal analysis of these works, for him, decontextualizing local elements and treating them as purely aesthetic motifs was reminiscent of colonial arrogance. After all, Saqqakhaneh involved expropriating themes originating in working-class and popular culture and turning them into highly unified, monumental, elite works of art, primarily executed in the noble media of oil paint and bronze sculpture and shown in the gallery spaces of Tehran's affluent neighborhoods, particularly the art gallery at Iran-America Society.

The geopolitics of this national modernism can be mapped onto the distribution of wealth in the city. It entailed a movement from the downtrodden south (Shahr Rey), where the raw material and sources of inspiration lay, to artists' studios and galleries in the north. Although Saqqakhaneh brought the public into the space of art, the works themselves covered up the class divisions that were constitutive of both the public and Saqqakhaneh – the divisions between the north and the south, and between the middle-class artist and the working-class craftsman. These slick artworks reproduced the nation at the level of an image, but one devoid of the historical and material tensions of the "real" nation *out there*. In that sense, Saqqakhaneh was complicit in the Shah's ideology of "official nationalism," itself based on a naturalized and ahistorical notion of "authentic" Iranian identity. It is therefore not surprising that Saqqakhaneh failed to overcome the public's age-old alienation from modern art.

Attempts to reconcile the public with art were not limited to creating images of reconciliation. There were also artists who actively engaged with the city. In 1964 a collective of painters, sculptors, graphic designers, and architects established a gallery in central Tehran, opposite the main university campus on Shahreza Avenue. Ghandriz Gallery (inaugurated as Iran Gallery) opened new pathways in addressing the public's alienation from art. First, it was an artist-run space, class-neutral in appearance, with most of its members coming from humble backgrounds. Although the gallery received a small monthly subsidy from the government to help pay the rent, it was more or less economically independent. More importantly, the gallery experimented with new and more engaging approaches to art. Over the next fourteen years, it dedicated its central location not only to showing the works of younger artists with no other platform, many of whom would become defining figures in the coming years; it also vigorously explored potential continuities between modernism and nineteenth-century Iranian art. Apart from solo and group shows of new works by Iranian artists, popular exhibitions at Ghandriz included record sleeves, nineteenth-century Persian prints, reproductions of works by European masters, and exhibitions of Iranian and international poster design. These exhibitions were commonly accompanied by low-cost educational publications. According to Ruin Pakbaz, a prominent member of the collective,

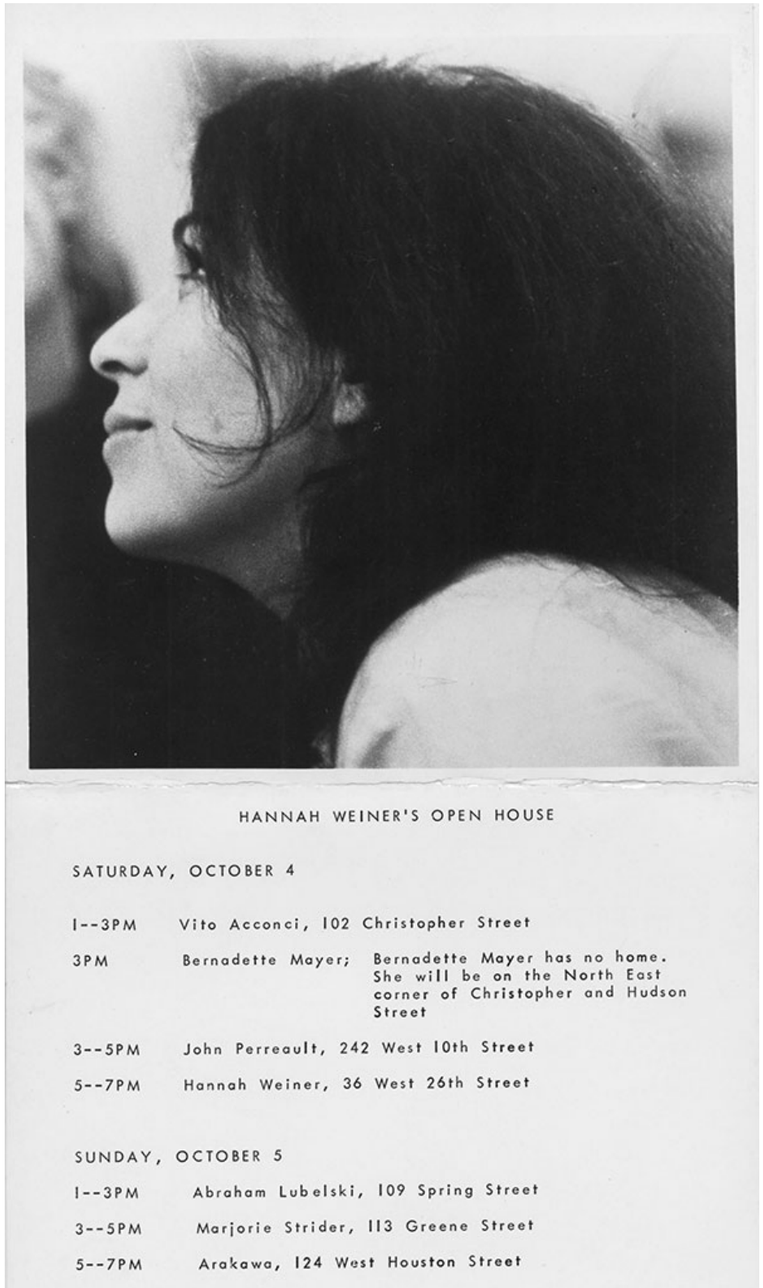
> The viewers expected the artist to explain their work and clarify its ambiguities. That was a reasonable request, because there was a huge gap between the artists' personal experiences in the realm of modern art and the viewers hackneyed conception of visual arts … As well as exhibiting artworks, we had to improve

many of the most recognizable figures of this period, is an index of the broad distribution of the cybernetic imaginary, which provided a primary conceptual framework for Robert Smithson, Hans Haacke, and Dan Graham; Vito Acconci, Allan Kaprow, Adrian Piper, Hélio Oiticica, and Yvonne Rainer, to name just a few, as well as the poets and writers of the period who were, in some sense, understood as conceptual and performance artists: Hannah Weiner, Madeline Gins, and Bernadette Mayer.[3] Charles Olson made "feedback" a guiding metaphor for his compositional process, as did A. R. Ammons. Beyond the American literary and art scene, French structuralism and poststructuralism were, in many regards, elaborated through a reception of Anglo-American cybernetics – Jacques Lacan writes famously about cybernetics in his second seminar, as do Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, and as would Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari later on.[4] Indeed, as Bernard Geoghegan notes, one of the explanations for the precipitous disappearance of cybernetics as a referent was its replacement by a set of poststructural concepts that were, to some extent, its progeny.

In a section of the *The Human Use of Human Beings*, Norbert Wiener bemoans the lack of a contemporary humanistic and scientific lingua franca of the sort that Latin once provided. The implication, throughout the book, is that cybernetics might provide this new common tongue for the complex, technological societies of the twentieth century. And although this vision never came to pass, among the conceptual artists, performers, poets, musicians, and dancers of downtown New York in the late 1960s and 1970s, cybernetic concepts functioned as a kind of lingua franca and were, in part, what enabled a person to write a poem one day, make an installation the next, and design a performance the day after that. Just as cybernetic concepts emerged at the boundaries of mathematics, physics, engineering, and biology – from the common efforts of various researchers brought together in government-sponsored research programs and conferences – cybernetically inflected concepts such as "system," "process," and "information" provided an interart grammar that allowed conceptual artists, musicians, dancers, and poets to engage in common projects, developing new aesthetic categories, such as "the happening" or "environment," by which these projects could be received.

Strange Bedfellows

How do we explain this development? How do we understand the broad appeal for artists of this "science of everything," gaining in popularity and clout such that, by the mid-1960s, it provided key conceptual frameworks for both the counterculture and the corporate, political elite, for neo-avant-garde artists, and government technocrats? Cybernetics is, in the formulation Norbert Wiener gives it, defined as the scientific study of "control and communication in the animal and machine."[5] Its central concepts emerge, in part, from attempts by Wiener and others to develop self-correcting antiaircraft guns – in other words, guns that could track the movement of a plane and predict where it would be by the time an artillery shell reached it. This required a certain form of feedback whereby information received from an object – in this case, the target – produced a self-adjustment and a change in the "behavior" of the gun.[6] Although the techniques for mechanical self-regulation date from the invention of the water clock and feature in devices as familiar as the household thermostat, one of the best examples of the servomechanical union of communication and action is cybernetician W. Ross Ashby's "homeostat." This is a device made from four interconnected electrical transistors such that the electrical output from one transistor becomes the electrical input of the other three. Each one of the four transistors has a number of settings that determines how it modulates inputs and turns them into outputs, and thus the number of possible combinations of inputs and outputs the machine can produce is exceedingly complex, yielding up tens of thousands of results. Despite their complexity, the results divide rather simply into either stable or unstable patterns. The input voltages for each transistor either settle around a single value or, alternately, fluctuate back and forth wildly, producing fluctuating outputs and a chaotic set of feedbacks between transistors. What makes this machine seem a plausible model for homeostasis and self-regulation, however, is that the thousands of possible unstable states lead, by design, to a stable one. If after a period of time the input voltages fail to settle on a single value, the transistor resets and randomly tries a new setting. It continues to reset until it finds a setting that leads to a stable input voltage. All of the transistors continue to reset until they find a range of settings that leads to stable inputs and outputs for each other. Thus, this is a self-stabilizing machine, what cyberneticians call a "hyperstable" device, capable of self-modulating through the mechanism of feedback, in response to changing inputs. Such devices provided, for many cyberneticians, a plausible portrait of how the body regulates its own temperature, how an animal learns from its behavior, how a



HANNAH WEINER'S OPEN HOUSE

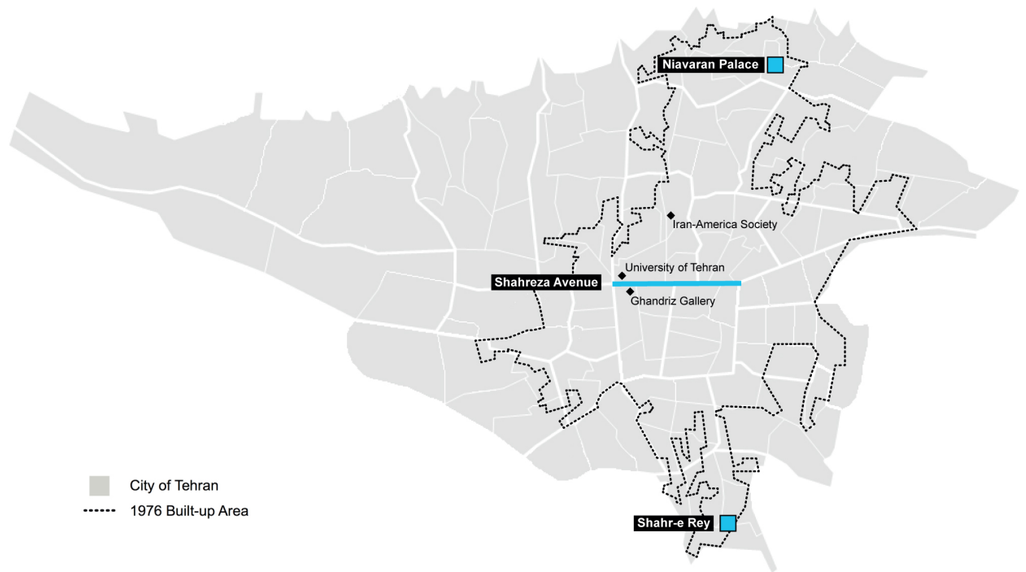
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4

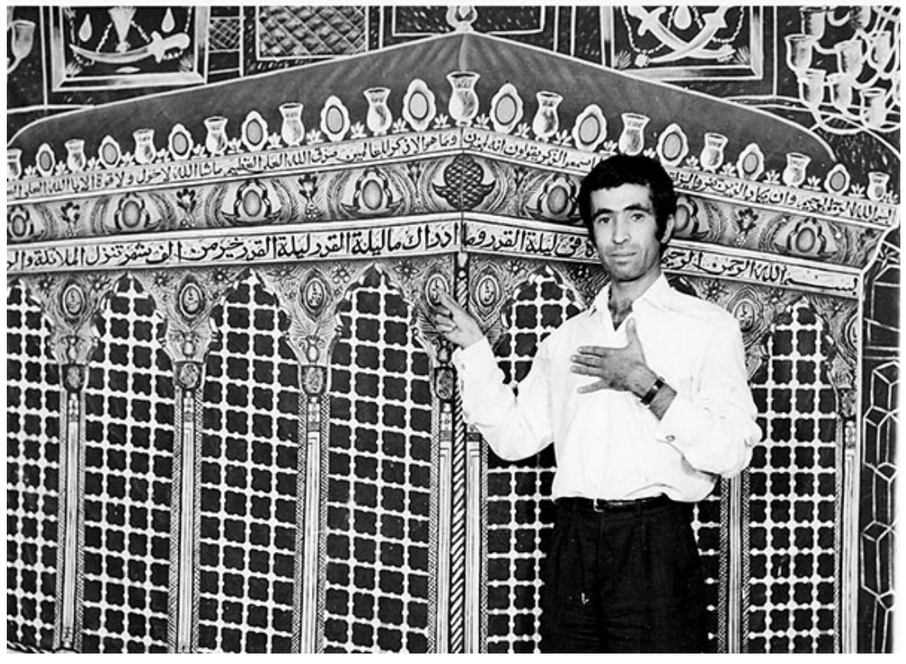
1--3PM	Vito Acconci, 102 Christopher Street	
3PM	Bernadette Mayer;	Bernadette Mayer has no home. She will be on the North East corner of Christopher and Hudson Street
3--5PM	John Perreault, 242 West 10th Street	
5--7PM	Hannah Weiner, 36 West 26th Street	

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 5

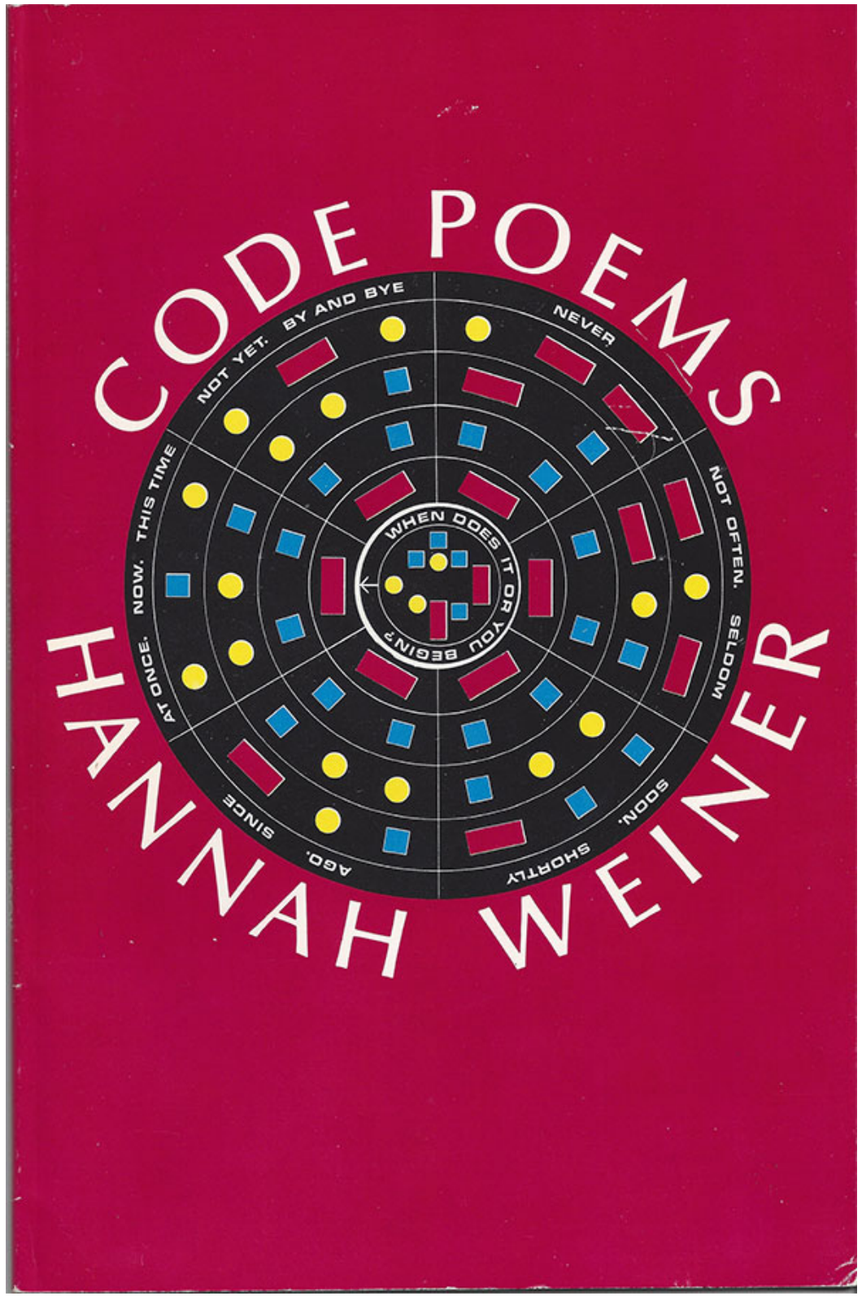
1--3PM	Abraham Lubelski, 109 Spring Street
3--5PM	Marjorie Strider, 113 Greene Street
5--7PM	Arakawa, 124 West Houston Street

Printed pamplet for *Hannah Weiner's Open House*. Charles Bernstein for Hannah Weiner in Trust.





Artists Parviz Tanavoli (top) and Hossein Zendehroodi (bottom) pose in front of a painting in a photographer's studio in the religious city of Mashhad, were Imam Reza's Shrine is located (1965). Photographs like these were a standard memento from a kind of pilgrimage that was most popular amongst the lower classes. Images from the memoirs of Parviz Tanavoli, *Kabood Atelier*.



Cover of Hannah Wiener's poetry book *Code Poems* (1982).

Installation view of “Hannah Weiner (1928–1997),” Kunsthalle Zürich. 2015. Photo: Gunnar Meier Photography.

> criteria for standards of “quality,” “originality,” “interest,” “forcefulness,” etc., are determined externally.[10]

In the context of Iran, this double bind helped create a new *national* style of modernism, but it also internalized some structural problems of colonialism within the local context.

Modernism, Identity Politics, and Administration of the Public Space

The second defining moment in the history of Iranian modernism came in the early 1960s, with the emergence of a group of young artists who valorized the binary divide between the universal language of modernism and the particularity of their own situation. These artists gained recognition for exploring a “modernism with local content,” appropriating and incorporating Persian painting and calligraphy and traditional craft motifs into the media of easel paint and bronze sculpture, resulting in iconographically Iranian yet formally modern artworks. Hossein Zenderoudi, a paragon of such work, incorporated traditional practices of *siahmashgh* and talisman-making into his painting. *Siamashgh* is a working method in which artists write quite indiscriminately across any and all parts of their paper in order to practice their technique, without any concern for the overall composition. Zenderoudi took up this all-over aesthetic but organized it according to the edges of a canvas, producing extremely sophisticated but essentially unified compositions and thereby mediating between a traditional Iranian practice and Western easel painting. Another classic example would be Parviz Tanavoli’s cage-like sculptures, created by combining the form of the mausoleums found in most Iranian neighborhoods with his own versions of objects that he saw in old-fashioned markets – locks, tools, etc. – which viewers would have associated with old-fashioned crafts and an eternal sense of Iranian-ness. Ultimately, what the viewers found in these works was a mixture of Islamic and pre-Islamic images, all linked to a sense of national identity. However, their compositions were mostly adapted from European examples, albeit in a particular and idiosyncratic way. This new approach in modernism was soon given a name – Saqqakhaneh, after the traditional art of water-fountain making – and its artists received considerable support from the government.

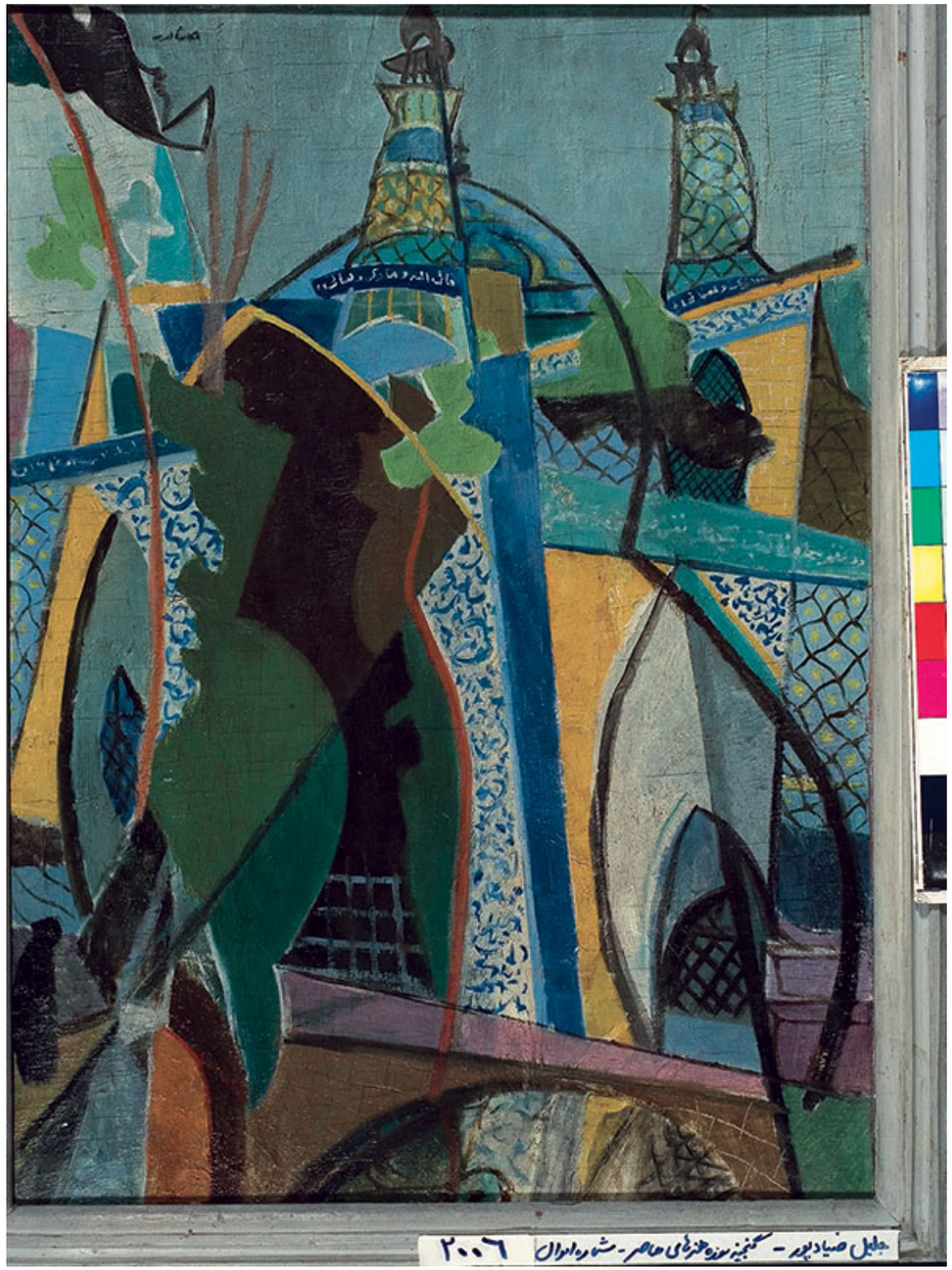
The two champions of Saqqakhaneh, Tanavoli and Zenderoudi, came up with their idea after a trip to the working-class neighborhoods of southern Tehran. Art critic Karim Emami’s account of that trip in a lecture in the early 1960s signifies a critical moment in the relationship between modern art and the public in Iran, and is therefore worth quoting at length:

> Tanavoli recalled how one day he and Zenderoudi had together made a trip to Shahr Rey, and there had been struck by the Moslem posters displayed for sale. They had both been looking for local materials that they could use and develop in their work, and these posters appeared like a godsend to them, he said.
>
> The copies they bought and took home fascinated them with their simplicity of form, use of repeated motifs and bright, almost gaudy colors. The first sketches that Zenderoudi made on the basis of these posters, Tanavoli said, constitute the earliest Saqqakhaneh works.[11]

With Saqqakhaneh it seemed that the nation had finally managed to bridge the colonial gap and invent its own modernism. By adopting elements borrowed from working-class neighborhoods and transforming them into works of modern art, the new art seemed to have managed to combine the “Iranian,” the “common,” and the “modern.” According to Shiva Balaghi, the work of Saqqakhaneh artists demonstrated a resistance against colonial modernity, by manifesting “at once a mode of appropriation and of resistance.”[12] However, what Balaghi fails to discuss is the genealogy and geopolitical constitution of the notion of Iranian-ness upon which the Saqqakhaneh school was based. In the context of the early 1960s, authentic Iranian identity was an ideological cornerstone of the Pahlavi government and, despite its anticolonial appearance, was deeply rooted in the conceptions of Iranian-ness articulated in the work of Western Orientalists.[13]

Saqqakhaneh artists were first exposed to the ideology of “Iranian authenticity” through art schools. As the art historian Hamid Keshmirshekan has noted, “one of the common characteristics of most members of the [Saqqakhaneh] group was that they had studied at the Tehran Hunarkadeh-i hunar-hay-i taz’ini,” or School of Decorative Arts.[14] Hunarkadeh, which opened in Tehran in 1961, was established by the first generation of Iranian modernists to counter the dominance of academism in the educational field. Its curriculum, however, was not simply adapted from European schools; it also incorporated courses on the history of Iranian philosophy and Iranian design.

Interestingly, this shift towards Iranian history was influenced by the ideas of two giant Orientalists of the time, philosopher Henry



Jalil Ziapour, *Kaboud Mosque,* late 1940s. Oil on canvas. Collection of Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.

corporation adapts to changing market conditions, and how a national economy corrects itself in the face of trade imbalances.[7]

Cybernetics was, of course, closely connected to technological developments in computing and telecommunications that were extremely important to the course of postwar society. In many ways, its ambition to unify the natural and social sciences, and even the humanities and the arts, is a relic of the massive cross-scientific endeavors of the war effort – the Manhattan Project, first and foremost – which organized disjointed university research studies into structures more common to the military and industry and which gave rise to numerous technologies with social and commercial applications. It is not surprising, then, that for many this science of control and communication promised a response to social and economic issues that seemed especially pressing. "Control" and "communication" were, of course, central preoccupations for societies whose economic policies were based on Keynesian "social planning," whose hierarchical, multilayered corporations raised new problems of management, and whose deskilled manufacturing system put control over the content and pace of production in the hands of a professional-managerial class. Cybernetics, unsurprisingly, appealed to corporate management, military engineers, or government technocrats, as it promised a more efficient and less violent means of managing complex processes.

What is more surprising, however, is the way that cybernetics appealed to the hippies, leftists, counterculturals, and bohemian artists of the period, whose ostensibly libertarian and communalist politics would put them in direct conflict with the managers and technocrats who were reading the same books. Despite its origins in military research and its ominous self-description as a science of control, cybernetics could often present itself as a holistic, organic mode of social regulation in line with fundamentally democratic values and premised on the empowerment and participation of all. As Fred Turner writes in his study of the cybernetic counterculture, it provided "a vision of a world built not around vertical hierarchies and top-down flows of power, but around looping circuits of energy and information."[8] Cybernetics was therefore the lingua franca of people who thought the problems of the age arose from too much control as well as those who thought it arose from too little. While seen from the standpoint of the counterculture and certain parts of the New Left, cybernetics suggested the organizational form of a future postcapitalist society no longer based on domination and exploitation; to much more decidedly pro-capitalist elements it offered a set of mechanisms through which techniques of domination and exploitation could be perfected and rendered palatable. The power of cybernetics lay in its ability to dissolve oppositions, to transform a contest between opposed entities into the internal self-regulation of some larger entity that included both sides. As an example of the holistic view of cybernetics, Turner quotes the title poem of Richard Brautigan's *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, a book whose fifteen hundred copies were distributed for free on the streets of Haight-Ashbury in 1967, describing "a cybernetic ecology / where we are free of our labors / and joined back to nature." With the homologies that it establishes between human, animal, and machine, cybernetics provides the dissolution of conventional oppositions between labor and leisure, nature and culture, such that the poem can imagine "a cybernetic meadow / where mammals and computers / live together in mutually programming harmony."[9]

As a form of opposition to the organization of postwar societies that, paradoxically, would dissolve all opposition into "mutually programming harmony," the cybernetic imaginary in its countercultural setting was particularly appealing to corporate managers looking to allay the dissatisfactions and rebellions of their workers through the incorporation of worker-manager feedback loops. But cybernetic models were also appealing in their own right, beyond questions of morale, especially once conditions of profitability eroded in the 1960s and, seeking a way to cut costs, firms began to look for ways to trim the various managerial layers that had emerged as corporate structures became more elaborate and complex. Cybernetics seemed as if it would provide the solution to the inefficiencies and violence of autocratic management, shearing needless management and making "control" a technical rather than personal matter. This was the function not only of the specifically cybernetic management theories of people like Jay Forrester and Stafford Beer but, as Michael C. Jackson summarizes in a book on the topic, a general category of "systems thinking" within business management that "gave birth to strands of work such as 'organizations as systems,' general system theory, contingency theory, operational research, systems analysis, systems engineering and management cybernetics," all of which shared with cybernetics a tendency to view firms as adaptive, equilibrium-seeking entities.[10]

Cybernetics and the related disciplines it influenced therefore provided models of streamlining while responding positively, rather

than merely repressively, to the newly prevalent critiques of capitalist work that emerged in the late 1960s, critiques that focused on qualitative rather than quantitative demands, targeting in particular the alienating, machinic, rote, and routinized character of deskilled blue-and white-collar labor. Visible already within influential books of the 1950s such as William Whyte's *The Organization Man* or Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, such critiques were something of a commonplace by the middle of the 1960s, and as Thomas Frank and others have shown, you might encounter such views within the so-called establishment as well as on the countercultural margins.[11]

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello call this qualitative challenge to work "the artistic critique" (as opposed to the wage-oriented "social critique") precisely because it percolates outward from the counterculture and the artistic avant-garde.[12] Faced with the combination of the social and artistic critiques epitomized by the rebellion of May 1968 but in evidence throughout the period, firms sought to pit the two critiques against each other, engineering a form of pseudo-empowered, "flexible," and "self-managing" work that met the demands of the artistic critique (for authenticity, creative expression, diversity of tasks, participation in decision making, flexible hours, etc.) in a manner that allowed for a newly intensive exploitation, effectively eroding the previous gains of the workers' movement with regard to wages, workday length, and benefits. In short, the new self-directed employees would work much harder and longer than their predecessors. The meeting between cybernetics and the neo-avant-garde complicates this story slightly, since what we note is not the recuperation by capitalist firms of a set of purely external values, concepts, or ideas but rather a contest over the meaning of a set of ideas. Though cybernetics emerges with the military-industrial complex, it is transformed and put to new uses by artists and countercultural figures in the 1960s, who elaborate entirely new meanings within this field, meanings that eventually become the focus of corporate attempts to restructure in the face of the critical challenges raised by these meanings. In this sense, the artists and writers who participated in elaborating these cybernetic ideas did not simply share an elective affinity with the technocrats that they imagine themselves opposing. Rather, they were responding critically and correctively to the technocratic visions they encountered and imagining how those visions might provide the material for another social arrangement. Along with the various Pentagon-sponsored think tanks and university research programs, the art and writing of the period are one site where cybernetic ideas are elaborated, contested, transformed. Art and writing, in this sense, are experimental and speculative processes. They are laboratories of a sort, a "counter-laboratory," if you will. As we will see in the subsequent discussion of Hannah Weiner, by focusing on the interaction between artist and audience, writer and reader, or on the process rather than the object of art making, many of these works take as their vocation the active modeling of potential social relations, relations that both prefigure and contribute to the actual restructuring of the labor process that begins in the 1970s and intensifies during the 1980s.

The relationship is a bit more than prefiguration pure and simple and a bit less than direct causation, since the means of uptake by employers is complex and indirect, mediated in this case by the counterculture and the mass media and mass cultural forms that were fascinated by it. The political models of holistic collaboration, mutability, and participation elaborated by the love-ins, be-ins, and politicized festivals of the counterculture were based quite directly on the precedent set by the postwar neo-avant-garde, with its happenings, chance-based compositions, interventions into daily life, and ecstatic forms of derangement. And while it is true, for instance, as Thomas Frank has argued, that the "co-optation" theory that sees the mass culture lagging behind and eventually recuperating an original, revolutionary movement fails to acknowledge the presence of dissident, critical voices within the so-called establishment, voices that also bemoaned the rigid, bureaucratic, and authoritarian character of work life – though with entirely different ends in mind – I think the evidence is clear that, for the most part, these critical enunciations remained in an entirely theoretical register, oriented largely toward attitudes rather than concrete practices.[13] Outside the avant-garde, first, and the counterculture, second, there were few practical examples of these participatory modes. For instance, although Douglas McGregor had written as early as 1957 about the need for a new "Theory Y" of management based on "job enlargement," "decentralization," and "participation and consultative management," he was intentionally vague about what this Theory Y might look like if implemented, suggesting that it was no more possible at that time than it was possible to build a nuclear power plant in 1945.[14] Like nuclear power, Theory Y was foreseeable but not implementable. But at that very moment artists such as Allan Kaprow, Carolee Schneeman, and John Cage were already implementing their own Theory Y in the arts. It is notable that Fred Turner, in his study of

radical response to this tired debate; as such, it directs us to revisit the history of Iranian modernism in light of this declaration.

From its inception in the late 1940s, Iranian modernism constantly found itself facing an indifferent public that considered modern art socially irrelevant. In retrospect, the history of modernism in Iran looks like a history of artistic attempts to overcome this sense of alienation from the public. But the more art tried to bridge the gap, the deeper the gap between art and the public grew. In this context, *ART+ART* came less as a new response than as a radical negation of the presuppositions of the question itself. Shishegaran's work turned the question of the art-public relationship on its head and dissolved the binary between art and life altogether. To understand the significance of this gesture we must discuss Iranian modernism further.

Iranian Modernism: Provincial Liberation from the Academy

Social relevance was a constitutive question in Iranian modernism. The first artists who advocated modernism articulated their position primarily as an attack on academicism's social irrelevance. They introduced modernism as the language of the day, while holding academicism's inadequacy responsible for people's indifference to art. As early as 1948, when Jalil Ziapour (1920–99), one of the first Iranian graduates of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, returned to Tehran, he joined forces with three others – a musician, a novelist, and a playwright – to form a collective called the Fighting Cock. His intention to champion cubism as "the most recent and most successful" development of art in Europe was slightly out of key – in Europe and many other places cubism was already considered an accomplished mission of the past. Nevertheless, Ziapour's intervention considered a shift in the ontological concept of painting from academicism to modernism. His call to arms, a four-part essay published in the collective's journal, placed the blame for the public's disengagement with art on an outdated academy. "Our artists often complain that our society is not welcoming to artists and people do not understand art," Ziapour asserted,

> but they fail to realize that … most of our artists, young and old, only create portraits of dead kings or landscapes around Tehran, yet – just because their so-called *naturalist* paintings demonstrate technical proficiency – they expect people to appreciate them, while in fact, they are copycat imitators of hackneyed conventions from previous centuries.[7]

Ziapour claimed that unless Iranian artists embraced modernism, art would not become relevant to their society. However, modernism could not fully solve this presumed split between art and the public, because it was often seen as alien to the lived culture of Iranian people. Because modernism had been codified in Paris before being exported elsewhere, it always carried implications of cultural imperialism. As the art historian Terry Smith has put it, outside Western Europe, modernism has always been characterized by "an attitude of subservience to an externally imposed hierarchy of cultural values."[8] Ziapour himself demonstrated a similar attitude when he went on to say,

> When a person with good taste enters the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris and encounters the magnitude of conflicts between divergent schools of painting, this experience is so unsettling that it raises various questions … These questions are so powerful that in themselves they can make a curious mind understand the real meaning of art and painting. We should confess that our painters are centuries apart from the real meaning of art.[9]

Nonetheless, despite modernism's European derivation, for Ziapour and his cohort it amounted to a *universal* language. In his paintings, Ziapour adopted Cubist innovations to create an art that was more or less his own; this put him in the first generation of artists opening a route that would define Iranian modernism for years to come. Ziapour's adaptation of the language of modernism was perhaps a sign of confidence rather than subservience, because he and those who followed him saw themselves as being in a position to ignore modernism's historical construction and claim it as their own, in an act of appropriation. In reality, however, considering modernism as a *universal* form resulted in a binary opposition between the presumed universality of modernism as a language and a search for *particular*, locally specific content with which to fill that form. This binary, which would haunt Iranian modernism for many years, was exactly what Smith termed "provincialism." According to Smith, provincialism was not simply a result of peripheries imitating the center; rather, modernists from outside the international centers were constantly pulled between

> two antithetical terms: a defiant urge for localism (a claim for the possibility and validity of "making good, original art right here") and a reluctant recognition that the generative innovations in art, and the

Left: Koorosh Shishegaran, sketches for *Postal Art: For Peace in Lebanon* (1976). Right: *Postal Art: For Peace in Lebanon* as it appeared in the *Ettela'at* newspaper, December 5, 1976.

counterculture and cyberculture, begins the story of Stewart Brand and the Whole Earth Network – so influential to the course of development of information technology and corporate structure – with Brand's involvement in the happenings of the Lower Manhattan art scene of the early 1960s.[15] To be clear, I am not arguing that artists and writers are the source of the dissatisfactions at the root of the artistic critique; such experiences of alienation and anomie were widespread and well documented. Artists and writers provided a conceptual grammar and vocabulary – a set of reference points or coordinates with respect to which these dissatisfactions could be articulated – but they certainly did not create them.

Cybernetics at Work

For an example of this incipient cybernetic grammar as one might have encountered it in the 1960s, consider the text Hannah Weiner wrote for her first "one-man show," *Hannah Weiner at Her Job*:

> My life is my art. I am my object, a product of the process of self-awareness. I work part-time as a designer of ladies underwear to help support myself. I like my job, and the firm I work for. They make and sell a product without unnecessary competition. The people in the firm are friendly and fun to work with. The bikini pants I make sell for 49¢ and $1.00. If things can't be free, they should be as cheap as possible. Why waste time and energy to make expensive products that you waste time and energy to afford?
>
> Art is live people. Self-respect is a job if you need it.[16]

This show took place in March 1970, among hundreds of similar happenings and performances. Best known for her later "clairvoyant" or "clair-style" poems, composed from the words that she began to see everywhere – on walls, on people's faces, in the air – Weiner was at the time of this show a poet associated with Fluxus and the downtown New York art scene. The quotation demonstrates one surprisingly anti-utopian consequence of the neo-avant-garde project of "art into life"; under conditions in which "art" has become synonymous with "life," then it has also become synonymous with "work," since most of life, for most people, means working.[foonote See Peter Bürger on the double bind of the avant-garde "art into life" thematic. For Bürger, if the avant-garde succeeds in merging art and life, it loses the very critical distance from which it mounted its critique of the abstraction of art from life.[17] Going to work, then, counts as art, and making things or laboring becomes a secondary effect of the fundamentally artistic work of self-making and self-fashioning, where product and process are one. The gambit of such a project is that the merger of art and work will humanize and aestheticize the space of labor, here become a place where making and selling take place "without unnecessary competition."

The notion of self-production and self-objectification that we encounter in *Hannah Weiner at Her Job* – "I" as "object" – is very much a figuration of the cybernetic concept of "feedback." In cybernetics, any entity that regulates itself through the "circular causality" of feedback, where outputs produce inputs that subsequently modulate new outputs, can be thought of as self-aware at some basic level, even if it is a simple mechanical device or electrical circuit. In cybernetics, the very definition of an adaptive organism is that it can become its "own object," "a product of the process of the self-awareness." The statement could have been written by either Norbert Wiener or Hannah Weiner.

As discussed previously, cybernetics bases its notion of self-regulation on the mechanical devices called servomechanisms or, alternatively, "governors." Wiener coins the term "cybernetics" from the Greek word for "steersman" or "pilot," *kybernetes*, which is the root of "govern" in English.[18] But what has not yet been adequately examined is the relationship posited between communication and these mechanisms of control. For cybernetics, there is essentially no difference between communication and control: "When I control the actions of another person, I communicate a message to him, and although this message is in the imperative mood, the technique of communication does not differ from that of a message of fact."[19] To return to the example of the artillery guns, the action of the gun is itself an act of communication; it communicates (to itself) the degree to which its aim is correct or incorrect and modulates its own actions accordingly. Communication is not a disembodied system of signs but a performative and materialized chain of causes and effects. Indeed, communication is the very coherency of the organism itself. As Wiener writes in a chapter of *The Human Use of Human Beings* where he discusses the possibility of teleporting a person, organisms are fundamentally messages. It is the self-regulating pattern of information that gives them their identity, not the material of which they are composed, which is constantly switched out through various metabolic processes.[20] One

could therefore, at least hypothetically, duplicate a person through duplication of these information patterns. Communicable information is essence, for Wiener, a fact that might explain the appeal of these ideas to poets and others who worked with signs and symbols of one sort or another.

In the text that Weiner wrote for her next production – a collaborative, happening-like "Fashion Show Poetry Event" – communicable information is very much a formal essence, here identified with poetry, that ricochets back and forth between writers and artists, between makers of language and makers of things:

> We communicated to the artists our generalized instructions. They translated instructions into sketches, models, and finally actual garments. The feedback (i.e., the garments) was then translated by us into fashion language. We have also translated this information into the language of press releases aimed at both the general and the fashion press and into the language of this theoretic essay.[21]

Weiner's contribution to the project was, as described by John Perreault, "a cape with hundreds of pockets proclaiming 'one should wear their own luggage.'"[22] But the materialized "instructions" of the poets bore within them numerous pores or holes that emblematized the "difference between a description and that which this description appears to describe … the difference between a real fashion show and the imitation of a fashion show."[23] This final turn of phrase indicates Weiner's uneasiness with or perhaps skepticism about perfect communicability. The pores of noise inside the message indicate its natural degradation, its tendency toward entropy, but also create a margin of error in which creative interpretation and misinterpretation might thrive.

First as salesperson, then as manager, Weiner during this period remains preoccupied with labor as much as with the mundane, everyday activities that fill up our waking hours. Weiner, it is clear, aims to bring the special resources of art to bear on labor in a way that humanizes it, makes it seem more tolerable and pleasant, based on cooperation rather than competition, abundance rather than scarcity, participation rather than hierarchy: for example, her piece *World Works*, where she modified a shop sign by writing "the word THE over WORLD WORKS."[24] The addition of the article changes "works" from noun to verb, suggesting the presence of unnamed agents, workers. It thus demystifies the impersonal "works," but it also presents a certain assurance that things function as they should, that there is an invisible order that equilibrates the functioning of things:

> I wanted to do World Works because I wanted to create the feeling that people all over the world were doing a related thing at a related time, although they would be doing it individually, without an audience and without knowledge of what others were doing. It is an act of faith. We have unknown collaborators.[25]

Weiner's description of her intentions with regard to this act of *détournement* is oddly reminiscent of contemporaneous descriptions of the powers of the market and the price mechanism, which in the formulations of a thinker like Friedrich Hayek effects a decentralized system of coordination, through which, without knowing it, private producers and workers together plan for the optimal allocation of scarce resources. "The marvel" of the price mechanism, writes Hayek,

> is that in a case like that of a scarcity of one raw material, without an order being issued, without more than perhaps a handful of people knowing the cause, tens of thousands of people whose identity could not be ascertained by months of investigation, are made to use the material or its products more sparingly; i.e., they move in the right direction.[26]

For Hayek, the price mechanism is fundamentally a form of information distribution – he compares it to a "system of telecommunications" – that enables everybody to have the information they need under conditions in which it would be impossible for any one person to have all the information everyone needs, as in a command economy. The important difference is that for Hayek the coordinating information functions through competition, because each private producer is trying to minimize costs and earn the highest profit. *World Works*, on the other hand, imagines the coordination as collaborative rather than competitive.

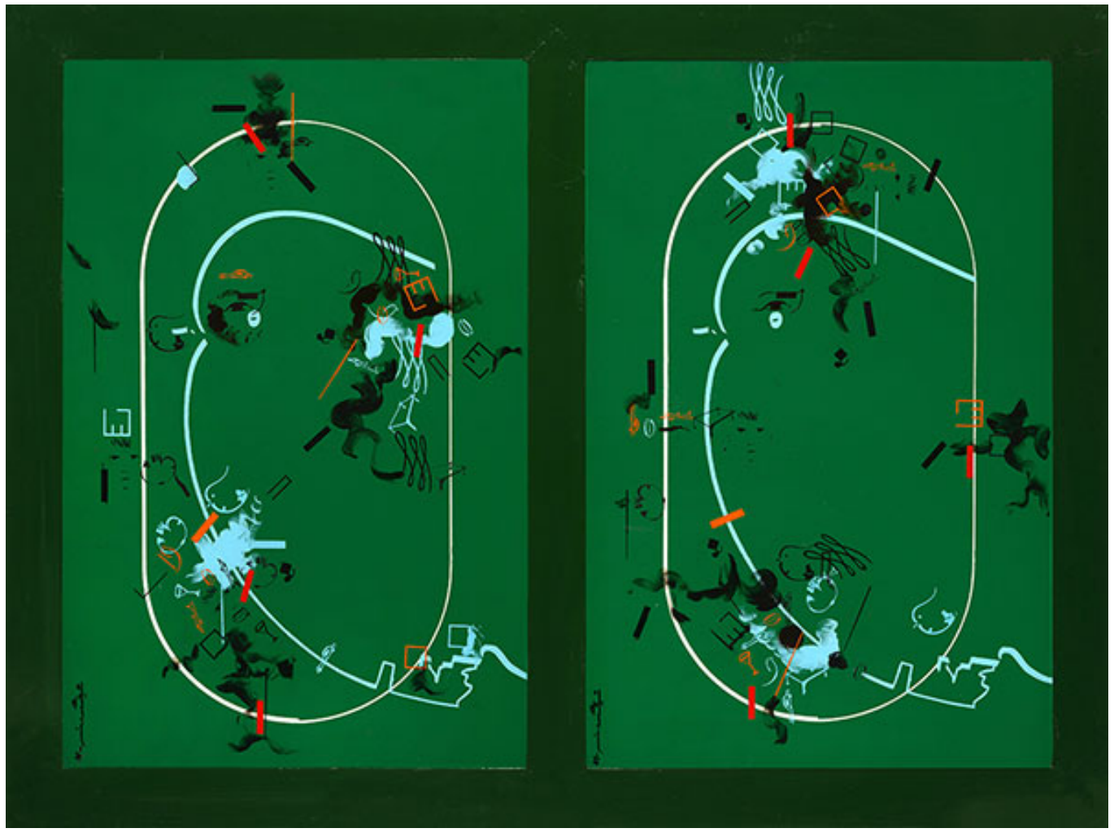
In other conceptual and performance pieces from the same period, a different, much less positive "feeling" about labor emerges. This is especially true of Weiner's contribution to *Street Works*, a series of street exhibits put together by the Architectural League of New York. In *Street Works IV* (October 1969), for instance, Weiner hires a frankfurter wagon and distributes free wieners (a pun on her name). Although she intends to continue with the idea, established with *Hannah Weiner at Her Job*, that art is a form

through Shishegaran's choice of the medium of poster design, which has a peculiar trajectory in the history of Iranian modernism.

In Iran, exhibitions are often advertised with posters by designers whose work is held in equally high regard, to the extent that some galleries occasionally hold exhibitions dedicated to such posters. These announcements are therefore an integral part of the institution of art but have always remained separate from the art itself, which was considered beyond such institutional dependencies. The posters were a part of the exhibition that was not recognized as being constitutive of it. By reducing the materiality of his work to one such poster, Shishegaran occupies a position which is immanent to the institution of art, yet he subverts this position by using it to declare art to be elsewhere.

ART+ART itself did not come out of nowhere. Since the beginning of his artistic career, Shishegaran, who was born in 1944 and studied interior design at Tehran University of Art, had sought to break through what he called "the hard shell surrounding our understanding of art." His main concern was that "art is treated separately from society" and that "obstacles are placed between people and art."[3] Shishegaran envisaged artworks that could be reproduced or even transmitted on radio and television. His first solo exhibition, in 1973, consisted of a series of paintings (single and diptych) made using car paint on wood panel. Each work was dominated by its distinctive, flat background color; in their foreground, Shishegaran arranged alternating compositions using a pool of shared elements, including everyday objects such as tables, chairs, glasses, birds, cars, and fruit. These elements were schematically drawn with simple lines, juxtaposed with casual abstract motifs, and organized around a unifying oval or rectangular form that dominated the composition. Seen together, the series appeared as as collection of dispassionate studies on a single theme, whose mechanical nature was emphasized through the artist's reference to industrial production (particularly car paint and identical, serial framing), as well as his employment of the logic of architectural floor plans (each work seemed to be an arrangement of objects on a floor plan, while little details of drawing reproduced the conventional lexicon of floor-plan drawings). Out of the fifty works presented in the show at Mes Gallery, thirty were given away for free to be exhibited in places accessible to the public, from the University of Tehran to a regular high-street shop. The artist was happy for the works to have a reproducible grammar, to the extent that a few months later he made another exhibition of "the second execution" of these works. He termed them "reproductive art" and asserted that their aim was "to grant social power to the work and to open the way for the artwork to get out and into society at large."[4] This practice was inspired by Shishegaran's education in interior design, but it also took cinema as its model. According to Shishegaran, "For painting, like cinema, we must have a producer/investor" so that "the work does not end up only in one person's hands."[5] Taking Shishegaran's logic one step further would mean that the condition for painting's sustained social relevance would be for painting to give in to print.[6]

This is the position Shishegaran arrived at in 1976. He made a simple postcard entitled *For Peace in Lebanon* and mailed copies to various newspapers and magazines, independent artists and intellectuals, as well as people on the gallery's mailing list. The back explained that the card was "Postal Art" by Koorosh Shishegaran, and that it had a "producer." It also announced a gallery presentation taking place in November at Iran Gallery (later known as Ghandriz Gallery). It was in this work that Shishegaran, for the first time, turned to graphic design, further distancing himself from the tradition of painting; the decision to erase the artist's hand from the final work seems to have been deliberate. As Shishegaran's sketches for this work show, he specifically moved towards a formulaic arrangement of elements, with final images appearing schematic, simplified, and machine-made. In "Postal Art" Shishegaran took the critically pressing question of art's social relevance to another level. If, in "Reproductive Art," painting is dissolved into industrial and mechanical modes of (re)production to maintain its social relevance, in "Postal Art" the artist forgoes the idea of painting altogether, yet maintains an ambiguously expanded notion of "art" – one that includes neologisms such as "postal art" – with the hope that the form of the work will reflect its socially urgent subject matter, that is, peace in Lebanon. It is in this context that Shishegaran's next major work, *ART+ART* (1977), emerges as the radicalization of the artist's own practice. In his attempt to bridge the gap between art and society, the two entities become one; all that is left for art is to simply announce this unification – "K. Shishegaran's works: Shahreza Ave. itself." Nonetheless, there was another aspect to Shishegaran's provocative gesture. Since the beginning of his career, he had been engaged in a critical dialogue with the Iranian art scene. What Shishegaran identified as the gap between art and society was not so much his own discovery as a predicament in which generations of visual artists in Iran had hitherto been trapped. *ART+ART* can be best seen as a



Koorosh Shishegaran, *Bird*, 1973. From the "Reproduction Art" series, car paint on panel, diptych, 94 x 127 cm.

of self-distribution, a way of making the self available, and thereby transforming the self through a process of free giving and receiving, here the fact that "anything or anybody can have anything or anybody's name" takes on a sinister character.[27] The gift economy made possible through the sharing of the product – the wiener that is a stand-in for Weiner herself – is troubled by the consequences of that very objectification, which she characterizes in her description of the project as embalmment: "Unfortunately wieners (and pastrami, bologna, preserved meats) contain sodium nitrite and sodium nitrate; one a coloring agent for otherwise gray meat, one an embalming fluid. Both have a depressing effect on the mind." Finally, in *Street Works V* (Dec. 21, 1969), Weiner cements the foregoing negative associations by playing the role of another type of street worker: "I stood on a street corner, or in a doorway, as if I were soliciting. Women do that in that neighborhood (3rd Ave & 13 St to 3rd Ave & 14th St). It is not a nice feeling at all."[28]

What distinguishes the first few examples, with their positive images of "fun and friendly" labor, from the latter examples, based on the unpleasant affects she associates with prostitution? One answer might lie in the term "self-respect." In the first examples, "the art" of "live people" allows for "self-respect," which means, I think, less a way of appreciating the self than a way of distinguishing it, making it into something unique and specific. There are forms of interaction between selves that deepen their self-respect or singularity, and then there are interactions that mean a loss of self and the total fungibility of all individuals, the reduction of individuals to a situation where "anything or anybody can have anything or anybody's name," where there is no difference between Wiener and Weiner, between Norbert, Hannah, or a slab of pastrami.

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This text is an excerpt from chapter three of The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization *by Jasper Bernes, published in May 2017 by Stanford University Press.*

Jasper Bernes is author of two volumes of poetry, *Starsdown* (2007) and *We Are Nothing and So Can You* (2015), and a scholarly book, *The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization* (Stanford UP, 2017). Poems, essays, and other writings can be found in *Modern Language Quarterly*, *Radical Philosophy, Endnotes, Lana Turner, The American Reader, Critical Inquiry,* and elsewhere. Together with Juliana Spahr and Joshua Clover, he edits Commune Editions. He lives in Berkeley with his family.

1
Martin Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us: The Der Spiegel Interview," in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. Thomas Sheehan (Chicago: Precedent, 1981), 45–67.

2
Writing in the 1980s, Tom LeClair will describe these books as "the systems novel," whereas David Porush, gathering together a similar pantheon, describes the books as "cybernetic fiction." Both writers emphasize the connection between self-reflexivity and feedback. Tom LeClair, *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); David Porush, *The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1985). Mark McGurl's recent book returns to this terrain and dubs it "technomodernism," producing what is probably the most interesting discussion of feedback and the related concept of "autopoiesis" in relation to post–World War II fiction. Like the earlier writers, McGurl links cybernetics to the emphasis on self-consciousness and self-reflexivity in postwar fiction, from metafictional cleverness to the abundant stories and novels that take the writerly self as object. Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 48–49, 80–86.

3
Kynaston McShine, *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970).

4
Bernard Geoghegan, "From Information Theory to French Theory: Jakobson, Lévi- Strauss, and the Cybernetic Apparatus," *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 1 (Autumn 2011): 123–26.

5
Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics; Or, Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1948).

6
See Peter Galison for a discussion of the wartime origins of cybernetics. Peter Galison,"The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision," *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 1 (October 1994): 228–66.

7
For an early "social" application of cybernetics, see the essays collected in Gregory Bateson. Cybernetics becomes a robust science of all social systems – the state, the economy, the family, "culture" – with its passage into "second-order cybernetics" and finally, from there, into Niklas Luhmann's phenomenologically inflected extension of cybernetics, called "systems theory." Jameson links Luhmann's systems theory with the ideology of neoliberalism itself and sees it as a naturalization of market relations. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (Writing Science) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 283–87; Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (New York: Verso, 2002), 92.

8
Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 38.

9
Quoted in ibid., 38–39.

10
Michael C. Jackson, *Systems Approaches to Management* (Berlin: Springer, 2000), 3. For examples of management cybernetics, see Stafford Beer, *Brain of the Firm* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 1994); Jay W. Forrester, *Industrial Dynamics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961).

11
Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1–34.

12
Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, (New York: Verso, 2005), 167–217.

13
Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 7–8.

14
Douglas McGregor, "The Human Side of Enterprise," *Management Review* 46, no. 11 (November 1957): 170–71; Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 73.

15
Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 46–47.

16
Hannah Weiner, *Hannah Weiner's Open House* (Berkeley, CA: Kenning Editions, 2007), 23.

17
Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984), 47–54.

18
Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988), 15.

19
Ibid., 16.

20
Ibid., 95–111.

21
Weiner, *Hannah Weiner's Open House*, 57.

22
John Perreault, "Street Works in Colorado; Libeskind and Kirkland in Outer Space," *Artopia*, October 6, 2008, 6.

23
Weiner, *Hannah Weiner's Open House*, 57.

24
Ibid., 24.

25
Ibid.

26
Friedrich Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," *American Economic Review* 35, no. 4 (September 1945): 527.

27
Weiner, *Hannah Weiner's Open House*, 25.

28
Ibid., 25.

Koorosh Shishegaran, *ART+ART* ,1977. Silk screen print on paper, 80 x 60 cm.

Hamed Yousefi

ART+ART: The Avant-Garde in the Streets

In March 1977, Koorosh Shishegaran created *ART+ART*, a poster he mailed to several recipients including major newspapers in Tehran. The bilingual poster asserts that "K. Shishegaran's works" are "Shahreza Ave. itself." The design consists of a thick black line, reminiscent of a road but winding in swirls and tangles, marked as "Shahreza Ave."; the bilingual text on both sides of the spiral says that Shahreza Ave. "is painting," "sculpture," and "architecture," as well as various other artistic media, including writing and dance. The public's reaction was one of confusion and, at times, hostile dismissal. In response, Shishegaran wrote replies to the newspapers to clarify his intention: "Some people think that I am showing my works in Shahreza Ave.," he wrote, "but I am, in fact, introducing the street itself, the people in the street and the good and bad that happens there, as a work of art."[1]

Compositionally and aesthetically, Shishegaran's design was unusually minimalist. While other Iranian designers of the time commonly demonstrated their artistic authorship through their palettes – their use of original illustrations and creative combinations of type and image – Shishegaran's work consisted of plain colors, conventional fonts, and a deductive structure dictated by the limits of the rectangular frame, internally divided into further symmetrical rectangular sections.[2] The drawing in the middle, presumably indicating the movement of a viewer along Shahreza Avenue and connecting the two edges of the frame, eliminates any element of handicraft and conveys a mechanical mode of image-making. The intertwined movement of the spiral and the smooth changes in its thickness convey a sense of dynamism, yet this animation is curbed by the text's matter-of-fact mode of interpellation and by the jaded symmetry of the overall composition. Shishegaran clearly distanced himself from the "expressive" approach of most other Iranian designers. However, it was less his critical engagement with conventions of graphic design than his radical negation of art as such that made *ART+ART* striking. By inviting people to see an art exhibition which was nothing more than the street through which many of them passed on a regular basis, Shishegaran launched a campaign against institutionalized modernism, which had been flourishing in Iran for almost two decades. As such, the poster's reduction of the author's function reflected multiple textual iterations in the body of the work: that is, that the real artwork is Shahreza Avenue.

In order to assume such a subversive position, *ART+ART* situates itself somewhere on the borderline of institutional modernism, both within and without it. This is partly negotiated

Gilbert Simondon

The Genesis of Technicity

1. The Notion of the Phase Applied to Coming-into-Being: Technicity as a Phase

This study postulates that technicity is one of the two fundamental phases of the mode of existence of the whole constituted by man and the world.[1] By phase, we mean not a temporal moment replaced by another, but an aspect that results from a splitting in two of being and in opposition to another aspect; this sense of the word phase is inspired by the notion of a phase ratio in physics; one cannot conceive of a phase except in relation to another or to several other phases; in a system of phases there is a relation of equilibrium and of reciprocal tensions; it is the actual system of all phases taken together that is the complete reality, not each phase in itself; a phase is only a phase in relation to others, from which it distinguishes itself in a manner that is totally independent of the notions of genus and species. The existence of a plurality of phases finally defines the reality of a neutral center of equilibrium in relation to which there is a phase shift. This schema is very different from the dialectical schema, because it implies neither necessary succession, nor the intervention of negativity as a motor of progress; furthermore, opposition, within the schema of phases, only exists in the particular case of a two-phased structure.

The adoption of such a schema founded upon the notion of the phase aims to put into play a principle according to which the temporal development of a living reality proceeds through a split on the basis of an initial, active center, then through a regrouping after the furtherance of each separated reality resulting from this split; each separated reality is the symbol of the other, just as each phase is the symbol of the other phase or phases; no phase, as a phase, is balanced with respect to itself, nor does it contain a complete truth or reality: every phase is abstract and partial, untenable; only the system of phases is in equilibrium in its neutral point; its truth and its reality are this neutral point, the procession and conversion in relation to this neutral point.

We suppose that technicity results from a phase shift of a unique, central, and original mode of being in the world: the magical mode; the phase that balances out technicity is the religious mode of being. Aesthetic thought appears at the neutral point, between technics and religion, at the moment of the splitting of the primitive magical unity: it is not a phase, but rather a permanent reminder of the rupture of unity of the magical mode of being, as well as a reminder of the search for its future unity.

Each phase in turn splits into a theoretical mode and a practical mode; there is thus a practical mode of technics and a practical mode

of religion, as well as a theoretical mode of technics and a theoretical mode of religion.

In the same way as the distance between technics and religion gives rise to aesthetic thought, the distance between the two theoretical modes (the technical one and the religious one) gives rise to scientific knowledge, as a mediation between technics and religion. The distance between the practical technical mode and the practical religious mode gives rise to ethical thinking. Aesthetic thought is thus a more primitive mediation between technics and religion than science and ethics, since the birth of science and of ethics requires a prior splitting between the theoretical and the practical mode at the heart of technics and of religion. Out of this arises the fact that aesthetic thought is indeed really situated at the neutral point, prolonging the existence of magic, whereas science on the one hand and ethics on the other oppose each other with respect to the neutral point, since there is the same distance between them as there is between the theoretical and practical mode in technics and religion. If science and ethics could converge and reunite, they would coincide within the axis of neutrality of this genetic system, thereby providing a second analog to the magical unity, above and beyond aesthetic thought, which is its first analog, and which is incomplete since it allows for the phase shift of technics and religion to subsist. This second analog would be complete; it would at once replace magic and aesthetics; but it is perhaps nothing more than a mere tendency playing a normative role, since nothing proves that the distance between the theoretical mode and the practical mode can be completely overcome: this direction defines philosophical research.

In order to indicate the true nature of technical objects, it is thus necessary to resort to a study of the entire genesis of the relations of man and the world; the technicity of objects will then appear as one of two phases of man's relation with the world engendered by the splitting of the primitive magical unity. Must one then consider technicity as a simple moment of genesis? – Yes, in a certain sense, there is indeed something transitory in technicity, which itself splits into theory and praxis and participates in the subsequent genesis of practical and theoretical thought. But in another sense, there is something definitive in the opposition of technicity to religiosity, for one can think that man's primitive way of being in the world (magic) can inexhaustibly furnish an indefinite number of successive contributions capable of splitting into a technical phase and a religious phase; in this way, even though there is effectively a succession in genesis, the successive stages of different geneses are simultaneous within culture, and there exist relations and interactions not only between simultaneous phases, but also between successive stages; not only can technics encounter religion and aesthetic thought, but also science and ethics. Now, if one adopts the genetic postulate, one notices that a science or an ethics can never encounter a religion or a technics on a truly common ground, since the modes of thought are at different levels (for example a science and a technics) and exist at the same time, and they neither constitute a single genetic lineage nor arise from the same sudden outpouring of the primitive magical universe. True and balanced relations only exist between phases of the same level (for example between a technical ensemble and a religion) or between successive degrees of genesis that are part of the same lineage (for example between the stage of technics and religions in the seventeenth century and the contemporary stages of science and ethics). True relations only exist in a genetic ensemble balanced around a neutral point, envisioned in its totality.

This is precisely the goal to be attained: the mission of reflexive thought is to lift upright and perfect the successive waves of genesis through which the primitive unity of man's relation with the world splits in two and comes to sustain both science and ethics through technics and religion, between which aesthetic thought develops. In these successive splits, the primitive unity would be lost if science and ethics could not come back together at the end of genesis; philosophical thinking inserts itself between theoretical thought and practical thought by way of an extension of both aesthetic thought and the original magical unity.

Now, in order for the unity of scientific knowledge and ethics to be possible in philosophical thought, the sources of science and ethics must be at the same level, contemporary to each other, and have arrived at the same point of genetic development. The genesis of technics and of religion conditions that of science and of ethics. Philosophy is itself its own condition, for as soon as reflexive thinking has begun, it has the power to perfect whichever of the geneses that has not fully accomplished itself by becoming aware of the sense [*sens*] of the genetic process itself. Hence, in order to be able to pose the philosophical problem of the relations between knowledge and ethics in a profound way, one would first have to complete the genesis of technics and the genesis of religious thought, or at the very least (for this task would be infinite) to know the real direction [*sens*] of these two geneses.

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1
Cristina Rivera Garza, *Había mucha neblina o humo o no sé que* (México DF: Random House, 2017)

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"Talpa" was originally published in *Revista de América*, January 1953.

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Elaine Scarry, *Thermonuclear Monarchy: Choosing Between Democracy and Doom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 377–78.

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Rolando Vázquez, "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene: Decolonizing Design," *Design Philosophy Papers*, March 24, 2017 http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/AxcZMjzCZbkTvgSjM7R8/full.

5
See, for example, Luke Taylor, "Canada's Gran Colombia Gold files $700 million lawsuit against Colombia over Marmato project," *Financial Post*, April 10, 2017 http://business.financialpost.com/news/mining/canadas-gran-colombia-gold-files-700-million-lawsuit-against-colombia-over-marmato-project.

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Mina Lorena Navarro, "Luchas por lo común contra el renovado cercamiento de bienes naturales en México" *Bajo el volcán* 13, no. 21 (September 2013-–February 2014).

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See Noam Chomsky, "Activismo ambiental indígena latinoamericano," *Ecoosfera*, Marzo 2017 http://ecoosfera.com/2017/03/noam-chomsky-activismo-ambiental-indigena-latinoamericano-video/.

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See Robert Melchior Figueroa, "Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Losses," *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, eds. John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlossberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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See Margarita Warnholtz Locht, "Represión en Michoacán," *Animal Político*, April 7, 2017 http://www.animalpolitico.com/blogueros-codices-geek/2017/04/07/represion-en-michoacan/.

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Claudia Composto and Mina Lorena Navarro, "Claves de lectura para comprender el despojo y las luchas por los bienes comunes naturales en América Latina," in *Territorios en Disputa: Despojo capitalista, luchas en defensa de los bienes comunes naturales y alternativas emancipatorias para América Latina*, eds. Claudia Composto and Mina Lorena Navarro (Mexico City: Bajo Tierra Ediciones, 2014).

11
See Santiago Arboleda Quiñonez, "Plan Colombia: Descivilización, genocidio, etnocidio y destierro," in *Territorios en Disputa.*

12
See Vázquez, "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene."

13
Eyal Weizman, *Erasure: The Conflict Shoreline* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2016).

14
See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (New York: Zed Books, 1999), 27.

15
See Achille Mbembe, "Difference and Self-Determination," *e-flux journal* 80 (March 2017) http://www.e-flux.com/journal/80/101116/difference-and-self-determination/.

16
See T. J. Demos, "The Great Transition: The Arts and Radical System Change," e-flux architecture, April 2017 http://www.e-flux.com/architecture/accumulation/122305/the-great-transition-the-arts-and-radical-system-change/.

17
Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 66.

18
Vazquez, "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene."

original epoch of colonization is over, colonizing relationships persist. Government and corporate projects to transform indigenous territories into profitable markets bring indigenous groups into contact with NGOs, researchers, and development agencies that view these projects not only as emancipating oppressed communities from "underdevelopment," but serving the greater good of humanity as a whole. This is why indigenous knowledges, cultures, and languages remain sites of anticapitalist struggle – albeit struggle that is culturally specific and territorially bound, and thus unable to build bridges to struggles elsewhere. For instance, the inhabitants of Cherán, Michoacán dismantled state political institutions complicit with the deforestation of their territories. A new precarious politicized subject emerged, but one that was still perceived as other, non-modern, foreign, and unrepresentable. This failure of representation is closely bound up with the habit of coloniality.

A recent version of the double bind of modernity has posited design and the arts as the means to reinvent life, defend autonomous zones, and protect the environment. In this framework, cultural transformation is thought to direct new forms of political organization and bridge the gap between grassroots action and government policy. As T. J. Demos has written recently: "Creative ecologies of collective resistance [can create] new combinations of images and stories, music and participation, solidarities and sacrifices … [enabling] a 'Great Transition.'"[16] The problem with this approach is that it remains confined to cultural representation (as opposed to political representation) and is thus prone to the fascist essentializing of culture. Moreover, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith has argued, if the West's concept of culture remains the only legitimate form of emancipatory politics – easily universalized and not really "owned" by anyone – it will merely reaffirm the West as the center of all legitimate knowledge and action.[17] This idea of culture will lead to a new imposition of Western authority over all aspects of indigenous struggle.

In the face of the urgent need to neutralize the extractive model, block accumulation by dispossession, and end environmental degradation and the destruction of human beings, liberals still navigate the double bind of modernity in the melancholy style of Juan Rulfo; we are just as sad, just as beautiful, just as ineffective. We must break out of this trap and realize that modernity's way of worlding the world is to annihilate worlds. A non-fascist, anticolonial form of aesthetico-political representation would encompass the counter-knowledges produced in indigenous struggles,

and would ultimately lead to the dissolution of representation in favor of relation. Following Rolando Vazquez, relationality is a mode of realization that recalls and foregrounds, that sustains and gives, that is before the before. It is a coming-into-presence grounded in precedence, as opposed to representation (which always has a blind spot). Non-colonial representation acknowledges the other of modernity and colonization, and challenges the tenets of modernity itself.[18] This is the aesthetic, political, and intellectual task at hand.

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This text is indebted to Eric Cazdyn's Blind Spot Machine*, a film/project/lecture/performance that he presented at La Esmeralda in Mexico City in April 2017. Cazdyn's piece addressed issues of representation and legibility, critically questioning how modern epistemology works in film and language. I am also grateful for the feedback I received from peers at "The Political Lives of 21st Century Culture," a workshop held at the Center for US and Mexico Studies at the University of California, San Diego, especially Paloma Checa-Gismero and Tania Islas Weinstein, who organized the workshop.*

2. The Phase Shift from the Primitive Magical Unity

It is therefore necessary to begin with the primitive magical unity of the relations of man and the world in order to understand the true relation of technics to the other functions of human thought; it is through this examination that it is possible to grasp why philosophical thought must realize the integration of the reality of technics into culture, which is possible only by revealing the sense of the genesis of technics, through the foundation of a technology; it is only then that the disparity between technics and religion will be attenuated, which is detrimental to the intention of a reflexive synthesis of knowledge and ethics. Philosophy must found technology, which is the ecumenism of technics, for the sciences and ethics to be able to meet in reflection, a unity of technics and a unity of religious thought must precede the splitting of each of these forms of thought into a theoretical mode and a practical mode.

The genesis of a particular phase can be described in itself; but it cannot really be known along with its sense, and consequently grasped in its postulation of unity, unless it is placed back into the totality of the genesis, as a phase in relation with other phases. This is why it is insufficient, for understanding technics, to start from constituted technical objects; objects appear at a certain moment, but technicity precedes them and goes beyond them; technical objects result from an objectivation of technicity; they are produced by it, but technicity does not exhaust itself in the objects and is not entirely contained within them.

If we eliminate the idea of a dialectical relation between successive stages of the relation of man and the world, then what could be the motor of the successive splits in the course of which technicity appears? It is possible to appeal to Gestalt theory, and to generalize the relation it establishes between figure and ground. Gestalt theory derives its basic principle from the hylomorphic schema of ancient philosophy, supported by modern considerations of physical morphogenesis: the structuration of a system would depend on spontaneous modifications tending toward a state of stable equilibrium. However, in reality it seems that it would be necessary to distinguish between a stable equilibrium and a metastable equilibrium. The emergence of the distinction between figure and ground is indeed the result of a state of tension, of the incompatibility of the system with itself, from what one could call the oversaturation of the system; but structuration is not the discovery of the lowest level of equilibrium: stable equilibrium, in which all potential would be actualized, would correspond to the death of any possibility of further transformation; whereas living systems, those which precisely manifest the greatest spontaneity of organization, are systems of metastable equilibrium; the discovery of a structure is indeed at the very least a provisional resolution of incompatibilities, but it is not the destruction of potentials; the system continues to live and evolve; it is not degraded by the emergence of structure; it remains under tension and capable of modifying itself.

If one agrees to accept this corrective and replaces the notion of stability with that of metastability, it seems that Gestalt theory can account for the fundamental stages of the coming-into-being of the relation between man and the world.

Primitive magical unity is the relation of the vital connection between man and the world, defining a universe that is at once subjective and objective prior to any distinction between the object and the subject, and consequently prior to any appearance of the separate object. One can conceive of the primitive mode of man's relation to the world as prior not only to the objectivation of the world, but even to the segregation of objective units in the field that will be the objective field. Man finds himself linked to a universe experienced as a milieu. The emergence of the object only occurs through the isolation and fragmentation of the mediation between man and the world; and, according to the posited principle, this objectivation of a mediation must have as correlative, with respect to the primitive neutral center, the subjectivation of a mediation; the mediation between man and the world is objectivized as technical object just as it is subjectivized as religious mediator; but this objectivation and subjectivation, which are opposition and complementarity, are preceded by an initial relation to the world, the magical stage, in which the mediation is not yet either subjectivized or objectivized, nor fragmented or universalized, and is only the simplest and most fundamental of structurations of the milieu of a living being: the birth of a network of privileged points of exchange between the being and the milieu.

The magical universe is already structured, but according to a mode prior to the segregation of object and subject; this primitive mode of structuration is one that distinguishes figure and ground by marking key-points in the universe. If the universe were devoid of all structure, then the relation between the living being and its milieu could take place in a continuous time and a continuous space, without any privileged moment or place. In fact, preceding the segregation of units, a reticulation of space and time that highlights privileged places and

moments institutes itself, as if all of man's power to act and all the world's ability to influence man were concentrated in these places and in these moments. These places and these moments keep hold of, concentrate, and express the forces contained in the ground [*fond*] of reality that supports them. These points and these moments are not separate realities; they draw their force from the ground they dominate; but they localize and focalize the attitude of the living vis-à-vis its milieu.

According to this general genetic hypothesis, we suppose that the primitive mode of existence of man in the world corresponds to a primitive union, prior to any split, of subjectivity and objectivity. The first structuration, corresponding to the appearance of a figure and a ground in this mode of existence, is the one that gives rise to the magical universe. The magical universe is structured according to the most primitive and meaningful of organizations: that of the reticulation of the world into privileged places and privileged moments. A privileged place, a place that has a power, is one that drains from within itself all the force and efficacy of the domain it delimits; it summarizes and contains the force of a compact mass of reality; it summarizes and governs it, as a highland governs and dominates a lowland; the elevated peak is the lord of the mountain, [2] just as the most impenetrable part of the woods is where all its reality resides. The magical world is thus made of a network of places and of things that have a power and that are bound to other things and other places that also have a power. This path, this enclosure, this τέμενος [*temenos*] contains all the force of the land, the key-point of the reality and the spontaneity of things, as well as their availability.

In such a network of key-points, of high-places, there is a primitive lack of distinction between human reality and the reality of the objective world. These key-points are real and objective, but they are that by which the human being is immediately bound to the world, both in order to be influenced by it and in order to act upon it; they are points of contact and of mutual, mixed reality, places of exchange and of communication because they are formed from a knot between the two realities.

And magical thought comes first, since it corresponds to the simplest and most concrete, the most vast and flexible structuration: that of reticulation. Within the totality constituted by man and the world a network of privileged points actualizing the insertion of human effort appears as an initial structure, and through which the exchanges between man and the world take place. Each singular point concentrates within itself the capacity to command a part of the world that it specifically represents and whose reality it translates, in communication with man. One could call these singular points the key-points commanding over the man-world relation, in a reversible way, for the world influences man just as man influences the world. Such are the peaks of the mountains or certain, naturally magical, mountain passes, because they govern a land. The heart of the forest, the center of a plain are not only metaphorically or geometrically designated realities: they are realities that concentrate the natural powers as they focalize human effort: they are the figural structures in relation to the mass that supports them and constitutes their ground.

When seeking to identify the remnants of magical thought in the context of the current conditions of life, we usually look at superstition as an example of the schemas of magical thought. Superstitions are, in fact, merely a degraded vestige of magical thought, and can only mislead the search for its true essence. One ought, on the contrary, to refer to high, noble, and sacred forms of thought, requiring a fully enlightened effort in order to understand the sense of magical thought. Such is, for example, the affective, representative and voluntary foundation that supports an ascent or an exploration. The desire for conquest and a sense of competition are perhaps a part of the motivation that enables one to go from common existence to these exceptional acts; but what is mostly at stake, when one invokes the desire for conquest, is to legitimize an individual act for a community. In fact, the thought at work in the individual or the small group of those who realize an exceptional act is much more primitive and far richer.

The ascent, the exploration, and more generally any pioneering gesture, consists in connecting with the key-points that nature presents. To climb a slope in order to go toward the summit, is to make one's way toward the privileged place that commands the entire mountain chain, not in order to dominate or possess it, but in order to exchange a relationship of friendship with it. Man and nature are not strictly speaking enemies before this connection at this key-point, but are simply strangers to each other. For as long as it hasn't been climbed, the summit is merely a summit, a place that is higher than the others. The ascent gives it the character of a place that is richer and fuller, and not abstract, a place through which this exchange between the world and man comes to pass. The summit is the place from which the entire mountain chain is seen in an absolute manner, whereas all the sights from all the other places are relative and incomplete, arousing the desire for the view from the summit. An

gendered violence. The group Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra (FPDT) gained international visibility for its fight against the Atenco airport, but the struggle and its repression have since been forgotten. The creative class is lobbying Foster to consult FPDT as he develops his plan for the airport, and the privileged sector of the population rejoices at how the airport will make life easier for everyone in the city. But the airport will inflict heavy human and environmental "collateral damage" – especially on indigenous groups – and this is conveniently forgotten in the rush to praise the project. In its neoliberal manifestation, coloniality embodies a new cycle of dispossession in Latin America, based on the belief that the lands where indigenous peoples live are more valuable than the labor their inhabitants can provide.

For Eyal Weizman, climate change has never been an unintended side effect of colonization, but rather its declared goal. In his important recent book *Erasure: The Conflict Shoreline*, he develops a hypothesis that connects colonialism to environmental changes. Weizman's chief case study is the "battle for the Negev," in which the Israeli state has sought to uproot Bedouins from the Negev desert in order to plant forests and expand the forestation line. Weizman studies the Negev's movable frontier as it advances and recedes in response to colonization, displacement, urbanization, agricultural trends, and climate change, all phenomena intrinsically tied to dispossession. In the Negev, "making the desert bloom" is, in effect, changing the climate.[13] In Mexico, Lake Chalco exemplifies a similar historical link between displacement and global warming. In the nineteenth century, under the regime of Porfirio Díaz, Spanish entrepreneur Iñigo Noriega Lasso sought to expand arable land by draining Xico, the lake adjacent to Chalco and Xochimilco on the outskirts of Mexico City. Similar to Israel's displacement of the nomadic Bedouins, Noriega Lasso forced the lake's originary peoples to work as peasants in his hacienda. In the Negev, as in Chalco and Atenco, climate change and the displacement of originary populations go hand in hand.

In 2003, Juan Rulfo's Instituto Nacional Indigenista became the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples), or CDI, premised on the idea that indigenous groups have the right to preserve their ethnic identity and should participate in the planning of development projects. Although CDI's task is to recognize indigenous cultures and the plurality of Mexico (correcting for INI's homogenization of Mexico's ethnic groups), the organization only undermines the cultures and bodies of indigenous peoples, insofar as it reinforces their status as beings apart. In the eyes of CDI, indigenous peoples "have things of their own" – like traditional customs, religious beliefs, and medical remedies – that need not only to be recorded and admired, but mined for corporate patents. Difference is relativized and continues to justify a relationship of inequality. Having been made vulnerable by neoliberal international agreements, how can indigenous peoples protect themselves, their lands, and their knowledges?[14]

If modernity figured indigenous peoples and their lands as the foundational (re)source of nation-states, neoliberal common sense has turned them into maquiladora laborers, *sicarios*, kidnappers, and "illegals" deported from the US. In this schema, the local bourgeoisie functions as the broker between transnational corporations and the natives as resources to be exploited. Here equality means inclusion as debtors and consumers, and those who remain outside circuits of consumption and debt – the "other" of *homo economicus* – are systematically criminalized. New versions of the 1950s *reacomodo* have emerged in the form of efforts to displace indigenous peoples to "sustainable rural cities."

From literature and philosophy to politics and the arts, discourses about Mexico's native populations are still dominated by a mentality of colonization, slavery, and dispossession. This means that indigenous populations continue to appear as other, as spectacle, as subjects of anthropology and ethnography, and more recently, as markets to be exploited.[15] With the rise of neoliberal globalization, indigenous peoples have passed from being a "problem" that must be dealt with through modernization and civilization, to redundant populations that must be managed through repression, displacement, and genocide. They are still targeted for elimination, but less through physical death (although this is still tragically common) than through exclusion, confinement, and resource extraction. The war against "underdevelopment" is a war against the redundant populations of twenty-first-century capitalism.

Toward Relational, Decolonizing Representation?

It is telling that in their struggles against "projects of death" – i.e., extraction and infrastructure projects – indigenous peoples are figured as faceless. Recall the iconic balaclava of Subcomandante Marcos, who declared: "We are all behind the mask." This facelessness makes clear that the disappeared indigenous body is only visible through capitalist colonialist relationships. We must remember that while the

Documentation of protests against the "Highway of Death" in Texcoco-Teotihuacán, Mexico. "Highway of Death" is a term coined by indigenous struggles or struggles opposing megaprojects or resource extraction corporations because often it literally means death to these populations. The "Highway of Death" connecting the City to the airport means displacement of hundreds of families and the destruction of their lands.

expedition or a navigation allowing one to reach a continent by a definite route do not conquer anything; and yet they are valid according to magical thought, because they allow one to make contact with this continent in a privileged place that is a key-point. The magical universe is made of a network of access points to each domain of reality: thresholds, summits, limits, and crossing points, attached to one another through their singularity and their exceptional character.

This network of limits is not only spatial, but also temporal; there are remarkable dates, privileged moments to begin this or that action. Moreover, the very notion of a beginning is magical, even if all particular value is denied to the date of the beginning; the beginning of an action that is meant to last, the first act in a long series of actions, would not in themselves have any majesty or any particular power of direction, if they weren't considered as governing the duration of the action as well as the rest of the successful or unsuccessful efforts; dates are privileged points in time allowing an exchange between human intention and the spontaneous unfolding of events. Man's insertion into natural coming-into-being is carried out by way of these temporal structures, just as the influence of natural time is exerted on every human life as it becomes a destined end.

In current civilized life, vast institutions are concerned with magical life, but they are hidden by way of utilitarian concepts that justify them indirectly; in particular official holidays, celebrations, and vacations which compensate, with their magical charge, for the loss of magical power that civilized urban life imposes on us. Thus, holiday trips or vacations, which are considered ways for procuring rest and distraction, are in fact a search for old or new key-points; these points can be the big city for the country-dweller, or the countryside for the urbanite, but it is more generally not just any point of the city or countryside; it is the shore or the high mountain, or else the border one crosses in order to arrive into a foreign land. The dates of public holidays are relative to privileged moments in time; sometimes, there can be an encounter between the singular moments and the singular points.

Everyday time and space, in turn, serve as the ground to these figures; dissociated from the ground, the figures would lose their signification; holidays and celebrations are not simply a time of rest with respect to current life, through a halting of current life, but rather a search for the privileged places and dates in relation to the continuous ground.

The figural structure, in primitive magical thought, is inherent to the world, it is not detached from it; it is the reticulation of the universe into privileged key-points through which the exchanges between the living thing and its milieu come to pass. Now, it is precisely this reticular structure that is phase-shifted when one passes from the original magical unity to technics or religion: figure and ground separate by detaching themselves from the universe to which they adhered; the key-points objectivize themselves and only retain their functional characteristics of mediation, they become instrumental, mobile, capable of efficacy in any place and in any moment whatsoever: as a figure, the key-points, detached from the ground whose key they were, become technical objects, transportable and abstracted from the milieu. At the same time, the key-points lose their mutual reticulation and their power of influence from a distance on the reality that surrounded them; as technical objects they have action only through contact, point by point, instant by instant. This rupture of the network of key-points frees the characteristics of ground which, in their turn, detach themselves from their own narrowly qualitative and concrete ground in order to hover over the whole universe, the entirety of space and throughout all of duration, in the form of detached powers and forces, above the world. While the key-points objectivize themselves in the form of concretized tools and instruments, the ground powers subjectivize themselves by personifying themselves in the form of the divine and the sacred (God, heroes, priests).

The primitive reticulation of the magical world is thus the source of opposing objectivation and subjectivation; at the moment of rupture of the initial structuration, the fact that the figure detaches itself from the ground is translated by another detachment: figure and ground detach themselves from their concrete adherence to the universe and follow opposite paths; the figure fragments itself, while the qualities and forces of the ground universalize themselves: this parceling out and this universalization are, for the figure, ways of becoming an abstract figure, and for the ground, a unique abstract ground. This phase shift of mediation into figural characteristics and characteristics of ground translates the appearance of a distance between man and the world; the mediation itself, rather than being a simple structuration of the universe, takes on a certain density; it objectivizes itself in technics and subjectivizes itself in religion, leading to the appearance of the first object in the technical object and of the first subject in divinity, when there was hitherto only a unity of the living and its milieu: objectivity and subjectivity appear between the living and its milieu, between man and the world, at a moment when the world does not yet have a complete status of object nor man

a complete status of subject. One can furthermore note that objectivity is never completely coextensive with the world, any more than subjectivity is completely coextensive with man; it is only when the world is viewed from a technicist perspective and man from a religious perspective that it appears that one can be said to be entirely object, and the second entirely subject. Pure objectivity and pure subjectivity are modes of mediation between man and the world, in their initial form.

Technics and religion are the organization of two symmetrical and opposed mediations; but they form a couple, because they are each only a phase of the primitive mediation. In this sense, they possess no definitive autonomy. What is more, even taken in the system they form, they cannot be considered as enclosing all of the real, since they are between man and the world, but do not contain all of the reality of man and world, and cannot apply to it in a complete way. Directed by the gap that exists between these two opposite aspects of mediation, science and ethics deepen the relation between man and the world. With respect to science and ethics, the two primitive mediations play a normative role: science and ethics are born in the space defined by the gap between technics and religion, following a median direction; the direction exercised by the precedence of technics and of religion before science and ethics is of the same order as that exerted by the lines limiting an angle on the bisector of that angle: the sides of the angle can be indicated by short segments, while the bisector can be indefinitely extended; in the same way, on the basis of the gap between very primitive technics and religion, a very elaborate science and ethics can progressively be constructed, that is guided rather than limited by the basic conditions of technics and religion.

The origin of the split that has given rise to technical thought and religious thought can be attributed to a truly functional primitive structure of reticulation. This split has separated figure and ground, the figure giving the content of technics, and the ground that of religion. While, in the magical reticulation of the world, figure and ground are reciprocal realities, technics and religion appear when figure and ground detach themselves from one another, thereby becoming mobile, fragmentable, displaceable, and directly manipulable because they are not bound to the world. Technical thought retains only the schematism of structures, of that which makes up the efficacy of action on the singular points; these singular points, detached from the world whose figure they were, also detached from one another, losing their immobilizing reticular concatenation, become capable of being fragmented and

available, as well as reproducible and constructible. The elevated place becomes an observation post, a watchtower built on the plain, or a tower placed at the entrance of a gorge. Often, a nascent technics need go no further than modifying a privileged place, as when constructing a tower on the summit of a hill, or by placing a lighthouse on a promontory, at the most visible point. But technics can also completely create the functionality of privileged points. It merely retains the figural power of the natural realities, not the placement and natural localization on a ground that is determined and given prior to any human intervention. Fragmenting the schematisms more and more, it turns the thing into a tool or an instrument, in other words a detached fragment of the world, capable of operating efficiently and in any place and under any conditions, point by point, according to the intention directing it and the moment man wants it. The availability of the technical thing consists in being liberated from the enslavement to the ground of the world. Technics is analytical, operating progressively and through contact, setting aside the liaison through influence. In magic, the singular place enables action on a domain in its entirety, just as it suffices to speak to the king in order to win over an entire people. On the contrary, in technics the whole of reality must be traversed, touched, and treated by the technical object, detached from the world and applicable to any point and at any moment. The technical object distinguishes itself from the natural being in the sense that it is not part of the world. It intervenes as mediator between man and the world; it is, in this respect, the first detached object, since the world is a unity, a milieu rather than an ensemble of objects; there are in fact three types of reality: the world, the subject, and the object, which is intermediary between the world and the subject, whose initial form is that of the technical object.[3]

3. The divergence of technical thought and of religious thought

Technical thought – resulting from the rupture in the primitive structure of the magical world's reticulation, and retaining the figural elements that can be deposited in objects, tools, or instruments – gains an availability from this detachment that enables it to apply itself to every element of the world. However, this rupture also produces a deficit: the technical tool or instrument has only retained figural characteristics detached from the ground to which they were once directly attached since they arose out of an initial structuration that provoked the emergence of figure and ground within a reality that had been one and

they remain *other,* either because the habit of coloniality perceives them as non-modern, as stubborn remnants of a residual world, or – in what is the opposite valence of the same judgement – because they are romanticized and identified with the "noble savage" by way of this same projection of "prior-ness." From the romantic point of view, indigenous struggles are regarded as "a road to the future" because, in fighting corporate-led environmental catastrophe, indigenous people are fighting on behalf of all of us.[7] But this picture of originary peoples helping to "save the future" and shape new forms of worldly cohabitation is highly problematic. Part of the problem is that "environmental justice" struggles remain localized and culturally specific. Connections among and between them are precarious. As a result, to the extent that environmental struggles are grounded in "environmental identities," environmental injustice goes hand in hand with cultural loss. Because the prevailing counterhegemonic framework amalgamates cultural identities, ways of life, and self-perception into a metaphysical connection between given communities and their physical environment, environmental struggles remain unlinked to the responsibilities that privileged inhabitants of urban areas have as the main consumers of "resources" such as real estate, food, and fossil fuel.[8] The result is a revived pastoralism, where these same communities are used as prestige resources available for exploitation, and as a salve for colonial guilt. Perversely, the "enlightened" metropolitan subject uses those most victimized by the historical Enlightenment to reconfirm their commitment to those same values of freedom, justice, and equality.

However, what is at stake in indigenous peoples' struggles is decidedly not freedom, equality, or justice, but rather the short-to-medium term survival of their communities and of humanity at large. This is what makes these struggles so difficult to represent outside of their own local specificities. When indigenous communities mobilize to defend their lands from narco-exploitation or from megaprojects like mining and hydroelectric plants, repression and killing are the rule. The state has beaten, tortured, imprisoned, and murdered many of those who have fought against pollution, land theft, deforestation, and the destruction of rivers.[9] As I write, there is a report in the news about state police in the municipality of Nahuatzen, Michoacán murdering five people in Arantepacua. In the territories of indigenous people – regarded by neoliberal common sense as "markets" – an apparatus of dispossession and a state of exception are imposed. Lorena Navarro writes that this apparatus is built on institutional consensus and legitimacy, cooptation and capture, disciplining and normalization, and criminalization and counterinsurgency. The apparatus operates on a continuum of material and representational violence that crescendos as the state becomes the guarantor of the accumulation of capital.[10] The apparatus is accompanied by transnational legitimization tools like NAFTA, and US-led antidrug campaigns like "Plan Colombia" and "Plan Mérida," which are really just forms of neocolonial war, genocide, and ethnocide.[11] The habit of coloniality lurks behind the symbolic and discursive efficacy of the apparatus of dispossession.[12]

The A-representability of Originary Peoples' Struggles

Climate change is generally understood as an unintended effect of modernity. Modernity is blind to its colonial habit, and this is one reason why most environmental struggles lack a framework that connects coloniality to the Anthropocene. For instance, members of the Mexico City–based collective Cooperativa Cráter Invertido have done counter-information work in solidarity with the community of Ostula, in the state of Michoacán. The inhabitants of Ostula are currently defending their sovereignty and way of life against narcos, the military, and illegal deforestation. Symptomatically, the young artists of Cooperativa Cráter Invertido have been unable to draw a link between their political activism in Ostula and political work in the city or a project of decolonization. And yet, the struggles in which the collective has engaged remain present in their fanzines, posters, and drawings. In 2015, a Communality Congress took place at a university in Puebla, gathering academics from all over Latin America to discuss the links between decolonization, environmental struggles, and new forms of community organization. Somehow, the word "communality" was substituted for "socialism" as the new politically correct ideology to which progressive researchers must now subscribe. The obvious question – how to translate "communality" into urban contexts – was absent from the discussion.

Another example of the blind spot inherent to the double bind of modernity is the celebratory conversation taking place around Norman Foster's Mexico City airport project. The airport is being built in Atenco, an expropriated *ejido* (plot of communal land) where local resistance has been taking place since president Vicente Fox announced the project in 2006. That year, resistance was followed by massive repression, including the pervasive use of

were seen as primitive and thus nonexistent. Their territory was officially qualified as "virgin" (or empty). Describing the living conditions of Chinantecos and Mazatecos in the Soyaltepec Valley region, Rulfo took an active, first-hand role in their *reacomodo,* helping to justify the government's efforts to displace and dispossess them. Nevertheless, Rivera Garza also portrays Rulfo as an advocate working in solidarity with indigenous communities, looking melancholically at their ruin and misery though his photographs that document the imminent loss of vital, indigenous material culture.

This tension is apparent in Rulfo's other works as well, such as his short story "Talpa" (1953) and in the script for *La fórmula secreta (Coca Cola en la sangre)* (The secret formula: Coca-Cola in the blood, 1965), and *El despojo* (The plunder, 1976).[2] "Talpa" is a confessional monologue that describes the narrator's travels with his brother, Tanilo, and his wife, Natalia, to see the legendary Virgin of Talpa in the hopes that she will heal Tanilo's terminal illness. The narrator describes Tanilo's mutilated body in detail as it disintegrates during the pilgrimage through arid, hot, and dusty land. The trip becomes an aimless voyage toward nothing but guilt: the narrator and Tanilo's wife are in love, and both know that Tanilo will not survive the trip. Yet they press him onwards, secretly desiring to "finish him off" forever. Tanilo's death march in search of the savior Virgin becomes an allegory for indigenous *reacomodo*. The displacement justified by the "progress" of modernity and the benefits of a nation-state is in fact an aimless, self-destructive trip towards annihilation.

In a sequence from *La fórmula secreta*, we see indigenous people in three distinct contexts: first as peasants; then in the baroque Santa María Tonanzintla church in San Andrés Cholula, Mexico (alluding to the hybridity of pre-Hispanic and Spanish culture in the country); and then wearing modern clothes and suspended from a ceiling. The sequence poses a question: How will originary peoples be figured or represented by the modernizing process? How will they be figured, that is, once they have "Coca-Cola in the blood"? What place or role will modern Mexico offer them? The film ends with a long list of transnational companies that were besieging Mexico in the 1960s. Although animated by a belief in a modern future for all, Rulfo's literary and cinematic work depicts the suffering and abjection of indigenous peoples' social and cultural deaths.

The double bind of modernity officially conceals the colonial carnage necessary for modern progress even as it strategically reveals this same carnage for the purpose of accruing

cultural capital. The modern *worlding of the world* – which includes the production of objective reality by experimental science, knowledge, and design – coincides with the ruthless elimination and instrumentalizaton of certain creatures by others. This blind spot is the "habit" of coloniality. Habit, according to Elaine Scarry, either closes down sensation entirely or builds up perception as its own interior. Habit creates sentience either by opening or closing the world.[3] The habit of coloniality is ingrained in the Western unconscious, predicating universality, progress, betterment, and growth on the eradication of alterity. This is the condition of modernity itself, even as it furnishes the resources for a critique of such systemic destruction. As Rolando Vázquez argues, "The narrative of salvation of modernity was built on the denial of the genocidal violence of colonialism." The first mass colonial genocide was the early expression of a system geared towards the consumption of human and nonhuman life – that is, the consumption of the earth.[4]

In Mexico and Latin America, the ordeals of indigenous peoples are known as "environmental conflicts." Their source is the neoliberal strategy of expropriating "natural resources," or rather, "the commons." This strategy has been implemented through the introduction of industrialized agriculture, a system that excludes small producers and destroys sustainability. Such extraction and exploitation of the commons is evident, for example, in mining concessions and in the construction of infrastructure projects like highways, ports, tourist enclaves, trash dumps, and dams designed to centralize energy in big cities and to connect territories rich in "resources" and "cheap labor" to the flows of global exchange. In the past fifteen years alone, the Mexican government has granted twenty-four thousand concessions for open-pit mining. Under agreements such as NAFTA, transnational corporations are entitled to file lawsuits against local governments who fail to stop local interference with their "resource"-extraction efforts.[5] To block these neoliberal processes of capital accumulation, new forms of resistance are emerging. These seek access to and control of the means of subsistence (like land and seeds), and are accompanied by new forms of communal recomposition. Mina Lorena Navarro explains these efforts to defend territory across Latin America as a new sensibility of peoples and their environment, and as the actualization of "non-predatory" lifeworlds against capitalist and extractivist relationships.[6]

These forms of political subjectivation stand in direct opposition to capitalism. Still,

continuous. In the magical universe, the figure was the figure of a ground and the ground, ground of a figure; the real, the unity of the real, was at once figure and ground; the question of a possible lack of the figure's efficacy on the ground or of the ground's influence on the figure could not arise, since ground and figure merely constituted a single unity of being. Conversely, in technics, after the rupture, what the technical object retained and maintained of figural characteristics will henceforth encounter any ground whatsoever, an anonymous, foreign ground. The technical object has become a bearer of form, a remnant of figural characteristics, and it seeks to apply this form to a ground that is now detached from the figure, having lost its intimate relation of belonging, and capable of being informed by whichever form it encounters, but in a violent, more or less imperfect manner; figure and ground have become foreign and abstract in relation to each other.

The hylomorphic schema doesn't describe only the genesis of living beings; perhaps it doesn't even essentially describe it. Perhaps it does not even come from the reflected and conceptualized experience of technics: before the knowledge of the living being and before the reflection on technics, there is this implicit adequation of figure and ground, ruptured by technics; if the hylomorphic schema appears to emerge from technical experience, it is as a norm or as an ideal rather than as an experience of the real; technical experience, putting into play vestiges of figural elements and vestiges of the ground characteristics gives new life to the primary intuition of a mutual belonging of matter and form, of a coupling preceding all splitting. In this sense, the hylomorphic schema is true, not because of the logical use that has been made of it in ancient philosophy, but as an intuition of a structure of the universe for man prior to the birth of technics. This relation cannot be hierarchized, there cannot be more and more abstract successive stages of matter and form, since the real model of the relation of matter and form is the first structuration of the universe into ground and figure; indeed, this structuration can only be true if it is not abstract, if it is on a single level; the ground is really ground and the figure is really figure, it cannot become ground for a higher figure.

The manner in which Aristotle describes the relations between form and matter, in particular the supposition that matter aspires to form ("matter aspires toward form as the female to the male"), is already far from primitive magical thought, for this aspiration can exist only if there is a prior detachment; but here, there is just one being, which is both matter and form.

Furthermore, perhaps it should not be said that the individual being alone has form and matter; since the appearance of a figure-ground structure is prior to any segregation of units; the mutual relation of correspondence of such a key-point and of such a ground neither presupposes this key-point to be isolated from the network of other key-points nor this ground to be without continuity with the other grounds: a universe is what is structured in this way, and not a set [*ensemble*] of individuals; after the rupture of the primitive reticulation the first detached beings to appear are technical objects and religious subjects, and they are charged either with figural characteristics or with characteristics of ground: hence they do not fully possess form and matter.

The dissociation of the primitive structuring of the magical universe entails a series of consequences for technics and religion, and through them, conditions the subsequent coming-into-being of science and ethics. Unity belongs to the magical world. The phase shift opposing technics and religion irreducibly leaves the content of technics with a status lower than unity and that of religion with a status higher than unity. This is where all the other consequences come from. In order to fully understand the status of the technicity of objects, one must grasp this coming-into-being that puts the primitive unity out of phase.

Religion, retaining its ground-characteristics (homogeneity, qualitative nature, lack of distinction of elements within a system of mutual influences, long distance action through space and time, engendering ubiquity and eternity), represents the putting into play of these functions of totality. A particular being, a defined object of attention or effort, is always considered, in religious thought, to be smaller than the real unity, inferior to the totality and included in it, surpassed by the totality of space and preceded and followed by the immensity of time. The object, the being, the individual, subject or object, are always grasped as less than unity, dominated by a sensed totality that infinitely surpasses them. The source of transcendence lies in the function of totality that dominates the particular being; according to the religious view, this particular being is understood with reference to a totality in which it participates, on which it exists, but which it can never completely express. Religion universalizes the function of a totality, which is dissociated and consequently freed of all figural attachment limiting it; the grounds related to the world in magical thought, and consequently limited by the very structuration of the magical universe, become in religious thought a limitless spatial as well as temporal background; they retain their positive qualities of ground (the forces, the

powers, the influences, the quality), but rid themselvesof their limits and of their belonging which attached them to the *hic et nunc*. They become absolute ground, a grounding totality [*totalité de fond*]. The universe is promoted on the basis of these freed up and, to a certain extent, abstract magical grounds.

After the disjunction of ground and figure, religious thought preserves the other part of the magical world: the ground, with its qualities, tensions, and forces; but, like the figural and technical schemas, this ground itself also becomes something detached from the world, abstracted from the primitive milieu. And in the same way that figural schemas of technics, once freed from their adherence to the world, fix themselves onto the tool or instrument by objectivizing themselves, so too the ground qualities, made available by the mobilization of figures through technicity, fix themselves onto subjects. The technical objectivation that leads to the emergence of the technical object, mediating between man and the world, has religious subjectivation as its counterpart. In the same way that technical mediation establishes itself by means of a thing that becomes the technical object, religious mediation appears by virtue of the fixing of the characteristics of ground onto real or imaginary subjects, divinities or priests. Religious subjectivation normally leads to mediation through of the priest, while technical mediation leads to the mediation through the technical object. Technicity retains the figural characteristic of the primitive complex of man and the world, while religiosity retains the character of ground.

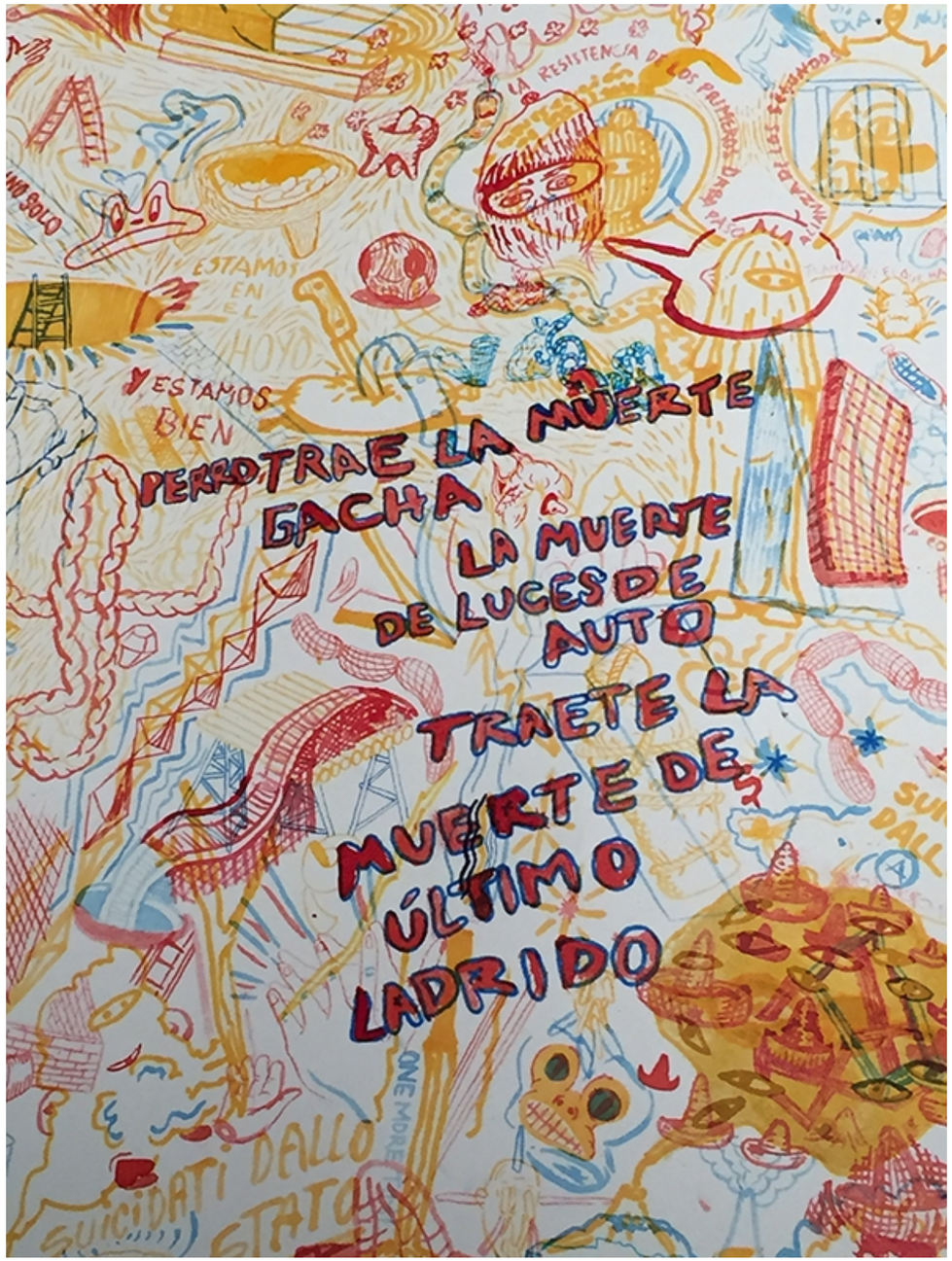
Technicity and religiosity are not degraded forms of magic, or relics of magic; they come from the splitting in two of the primitive magical complex, the original reticulation of the human milieu, into figure and ground. It is through their coupling, and not in and of themselves, that technics and religion are the heirs of magic. Religion is not more magical than technics; it is the subjective phase of the result of a split, while technics is the objective phase of this same split. Technics and religion are contemporaries of one another and, considered on their own, they are impoverished with respect to the magic from which they come.

Religion thus has by nature the vocation to represent the demand for totality; when it splits into a theoretical mode and into a practical mode, it becomes by way of theology the demand for a systematic representation of the real, according to an absolute unity; through morality, it becomes the demand, from the ethical point of view, for absolute norms of action, justified in the name of totality, superior to any hypothetical, i.e., particular imperative; to both science and ethics it brings a principle of reference to totality, which is the aspiration to the unity of theoretical knowledge and to the absolute character of the moral imperative. The religious inspiration constitutes a permanent reminder of the relativity of a particular being with respect to an unconditional totality, going beyond all objects and subjects of knowledge and of action. Conversely, technics receive content that is always below the status of unity, because the schemas of efficacy and the structures that result from the fragmentation of the primitive network of key-points cannot apply to the totality of the world. Technical objects are multiple and fragmentary by nature; technical thought, enclosed within this plurality, can progress, but only by multiplying technical objects, without being able to recapture the primitive unity. Even by infinitely multiplying technical objects, it is impossible to recover an absolute adequation with the world, because each of the objects attacks the world only in a single point and at a single moment; it is localized, particularized; by adding technical objects to one another, one can neither recreate a world, nor recover the contact with the world in its unity, which was the goal of magical thought.

In its relation to a determined object or to a determined task, technical thought is always at a level inferior to that of unity: it can present several objects, several means, and choose the best; but it nevertheless always remains inadequate to the whole of the unity of the object or of the task; each schema, each technical object, each technical operation is dominated and guided by the whole from which it derives its means and its orientation, and which provides it with a never attained principle of unity that it translates by combining and multiplying its schemas. The vocation of technical thought is by nature representing the point of view of the element; it adheres to the elementary function. Technicity, by introducing itself into a domain, fragments it and leads to the appearance of a chain of successive and elementary mediations, governed by the unity of the domain and subordinated to it. Technical thought conceives of an overall functioning [*fonctionnement d'ensemble*] as a series of elementary processes, acting point by point and step by step; it localizes and multiplies the mediation schemas, always remaining below unity.

The element, in technical thought, is more stable, better known, and in a certain way more perfect than the ensemble; it is really an object, whereas the ensemble always remains to a certain extent inherent in the world. Religious thought finds the opposite balance: for religious thought, totality is that which is more stable, stronger, and more valid than the element.

Juan O'Gorman, *Mexico City,* 1949. Tempera on masonite.



Detail of collective drawing by Cráter Invertido as shown at the Arsenale, Venice Biennale, 2015.

Technics bring, as much in the theoretical domain as in the ethical domain, a concern for the element. In the sciences, the contribution of technics has consisted in allowing a representation of phenomena taken one by one according to a decomposition into simple, elementary processes comparable to the operations of technical objects; such is the role of the mechanistic hypothesis that enables Descartes to represent the rainbow as the overall result of the point by point trajectory of each luminous corpuscle in each droplet of water in a cloud; it is according to the same method that Descartes explains the functioning of the heart, decomposing a complete cycle into simple successive operations, and showing that the functioning of the whole is the result of the play of elements necessitated by their particular disposition (for example that of each valve). Descartes doesn't ask himself why the heart is madein this way, with valves and cavities, but how it functions given that this is how it is made. The application of schemas drawn from technics does not account for the existence of the totality, taken in its unity, but only for the point by point and instant by instant functioning of this totality.

In the ethical domain, technical thought not only introduces means of action, which are fragmentary and tied to the capacities of each object becoming a utensil, but also a certain duplication of the action by technicity; a definite human action, considered in its result, could have been accomplished by a determinate technical functioning going through different stages; elements and moments of action have their technical analog; an effort of attention, of memory, could have been replaced by a technical operation; technicity provides a partial equivalence of the results of an action; it accentuates the awareness of the action by the being who accomplishes it in the form of results; it mediates and objectivizes the results of the action by comparison with those of the technical operation, performing a decomposition of the action into partial results, into elementary accomplishments. In the same way that in the sciences, technicity introduces the search for a howthrough the decomposition of an overall phenomenon [phénomène d'ensemble] into elementary operations, so too in ethics, technicity introduces the search for a decomposition of a global action into elements of action; the total action being envisaged as that which leads to a result, the decomposition of the action called for by technics considers the elements of an action as movements obtaining partial results. Technicity presupposes that an action is limited to its results; it is not concerned with the subject of the action taken in its real totality, nor even with an action in its totality, insofar as the totality of the action is founded on the unity of the subject. The concern with the result in ethics is the analog of the search for a howin the sciences; result and process remain below the unity of action or of the whole [ensemble] of the real.

The postulation of an absolute and unconditional justification that religion directs at ethics translates into the search for intention, as opposed to the search for the result that is inspired by technics. In the sciences, religious thought introduces a quest for absolute theoretical unity, rendering necessary a search for the sense of the coming-into-being and of the existence of given phenomena (hence answering a why?), while technical thought brings with it an examination of the how? of each of the phenomena.

In possessing a content that is at a lower level than unity, technical thought is the paradigm of all inductive thinking, whether in the theoretical order, or in the practical order. It contains this inductive process within itself, prior to any separation into a theoretical mode and a practical mode. Induction, in fact, is not only a logical process, in the strict sense of the term; one can consider as inductive any approach whose content has a lower status than that of unity, and which strives to attain unity, or which at least tends toward unity on the basis of a plurality of elements where each is lower than unity. What induction grasps, what it starts from, is an element that is not in itself sufficient and complete, that does not constitute a unity; it thus goes beyond each particular element, combining it with other elements that are themselves particular in order to attempt to find an analog of unity: within induction there is a search for the ground of reality on the basis of figural elements that are fragments; to want to find the law beneath phenomena, as with the induction of Bacon or J. S. Mill, or to seek only to find what is common to all individuals of a same kind, as with Aristotle's induction, is to postulate that beyond the plurality of phenomena and individuals, a stable and common ground of reality exists, which is the unity of the real.

It is no different for any ethics that would come directly from technics; to want to compose the whole of the duration of life from a series of instants, extracting from each situation what is pleasant in it and to want to construct the happiness of life from the accumulation of these pleasant elements, as is done in ancient Eudemonism or in Utilitarianism, is to proceed in an inductive manner, by trying to replace the unity of life's duration and the unity of human aspiration with a plurality of instants and with the homogeneity of all successive desires. The elaboration to which Epicureanism submits

desires has as its sole aim to achieve the incorporation into the continuity of existence by proceeding in a cumulative manner: for this purpose, each of the desires must be dominated by the subject, enveloped in it, smaller than unity, so as to be able to be treated and manipulated as a true element. This is why the passions are eliminated, since they cannot be treated as elements; they are larger than the unity of the subject; they dominate it, come from further afield than it does and tend to advance further than it does, obliging it to go beyond its limits. Lucretius tries to destroy the passions from within, by showing that they are based on errors; he does not, in fact, take into account the element of tendency in passion, in other words, this force that inserts itself into the subject, but that is vaster than it, and in relation to which it appears as a very limited being; tendency cannot be considered as being contained in the subject understood as unity. Wisdom, having reduced the forces at the origin of action to a lower status than that of the unity of the moral subject, can organize them as elements and reconstruct a moral subject within the natural subject; this moral subject, however, never completely reaches the level of unity; between the reconstructed moral subject and the natural subject, there remains a void that is impossible to fill; the inductive approach remains within plurality; it constructs a bundle of elements, but this bundle cannot be equivalent to a real unity. Every ethical technique leaves the moral subject dissatisfied, because they do not grasp its unity; the subject cannot content itself with a life that would be a sequence of happy instances, even an interrupted one; a life that is perfectly successful, element by element, is not yet a moral life; it lacks unity, which is what makes it the life of a subject.

But religious thought, inversely, which is the foundation of obligation, creates a search in ethical thinking for an unconditional justification that makes each act and every subject appear as inferior to real unity; related back to a totality that dilates infinitely, the moral act and subject derive their meaning only from their relation with this totality; the communication between the totality and the subject is precarious, because at every instant the subject is brought back to the dimension of its own unity, which is not that of the totality; the ethical subject is de-centred by the religious requirement.

3. Technical Thought and Aesthetic Thought

According to a genetic hypothesis such as this one, it would be best not to consider the different modes of thought as parallel to one another; thus, one cannot compare religious thought and magical thought because they are not on the same level; but on the contrary it is possible to compare technical thought and religious thought, because they are contemporary to each other; in order to compare them, it is not enough to determine their particular characteristics, as if they were the species of a genus; one must return to the genetic realization of their formation, for they exist as a couple, resulting from the split in primitive complete thought, which was magical thought. As for aesthetic thought, it is never characteristic of a limited field or of a determinate species, but only of a tendency; it is that which maintains the function of totality. In this sense, it can be compared to magical thought, provided however that one specifies that it does not contain, as magical thought does, the possibility of splitting into technics and religion; indeed, far from going in the direction of a split, aesthetic thought is what maintains the implicit memory of unity; from one of the phases of splitting, it calls upon the other complementary phase; it seeks totality in thought and aims at recomposing a unity through an analogical relation where the appearance of phases could create the mutual isolation of thought in relation to itself.

Such a way of approaching aesthetic effort would undoubtedly be untenable if one thus wanted to characterize works of art such as they exist in their institutional state in a given civilization, and even more so, if one wanted to define the essence of aestheticism. But, in order for works of art to be possible, they must be made possible by a fundamental tendency in the human being, and by the ability to experience the aesthetic impression in certain real and vital circumstances. The artwork that is part of a civilization uses aesthetic feeling and satisfies, sometimes artificially and in an illusory manner, man's tendency to seek a complement with respect to a totality, when he exerts a certain type of thought. It would be insufficient to say that the work of art manifests the nostalgia for magical thought; the work of art, in fact, grants us the equivalent of magical thought, since it recovers – on the basis of a given situation, and according to an analogical structural and qualitative relation – a universalizing continuity with respect to other situations and to other possible realities. The work of art re-establishes a reticular universe at least for perception. But the work of art doesn't really reconstruct the primitive magical universe: this aesthetic universe is partial, integrated, and contained in the real and actual universe that has emerged from the split. In fact, the work of art above all sustains and preserves the ability to experience aesthetic feeling, just as language sustains the

Rubén Gámez, *La fórmula secreta (Coca Cola en la sangre),* 1965. 42", film. The movie's script is based on a text by Juan Rulfo.

Irmgard Emmelhainz

Fog or Smoke? Colonial Blindness and the Closure of Representation

Earlier this year, the Juan Rulfo Foundation withdrew from its plan to participate in the 9th annual Book and Rose Fair at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. The Foundation objected to Cristina Rivera Garza's scheduled presentation of her new book on Rulfo, *Había mucha neblina o humo o no sé que* (There was a lot of fog or smoke or I do not know), which it considered to be "defamatory."

Garza's book offers Juan Rulfo as an embodiment of modernity's double bind. Known primarily for *El Llano en Llamas* (The Plain in Flames) a short story collection from 1953 and his novel *Pedro Páramo* from 1955, Rulfo worked also for Goodrich-Euzkadi, a transnational company responsible for expanding the tourism industry in Mexico. He was also an advisor and researcher for the Papaloapan Commission, the state organization charged with extracting "natural resources" from Southern Mexico; most notably, the commission installed the Miguel Alemán Dam in Nuevo Soyaltepec in Oaxaca. Rulfo legitimized the emblematic projects of Mexican modernity in the mid-twentieth century even as he memorialized the very peoples that his work risked erasing in his writing and photography.[1] Rivera Garza compares Rulfo's vision to that of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History: a retrospective gaze that observes – even relishes – all the details of the disaster caused by the winds pulling it toward the future.

Modernization and memorilization coincided in Rulfo's position as head of publishing at the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), a state institution created to look after the needs of all indigenous Mexicans. Founded in 1948 with the goal of integrating indigenous peoples into "national" culture by "acculturating them," and thus "elevating their condition," INI's policies were characterized by a homogenization of Mexico's "ethnic groups. This understanding of indigenity as a problem to be solved is what links Goodrich-Euzkadi, the Papaloapan Commission, and the INI, which combined to threaten autonomous life and community work in the name of development and modernization. In the 1950s, the euphemism "*reacomodo*," which means "rearrangement" or "reshuffling," was coined to designate indigenous extermination while obscuring the colonial matrix.

That Rivera Garza's contradictory portrait of Rulfo would be considered defamatory is itself representative of modernity's colonial blind spot, which, like Freud's neurotic, cannot bear to hear its past openly or honestly discussed. An active agent of the Mexican state's modernization project and a passionate believer in progress, Rulfo's reports to the Papaloapan Commission amplified 1950s attitudes about Oaxaca as one of Mexico's "backwards" regions, whose natives

ability to think, without nevertheless itself being identical to thought.

Aesthetic feeling is not relative to an artificial work; it signals, in the exercise of a mode of thinking that is subsequent to the split, a perfection of completion that makes the ensemble of acts of thought capable of surpassing the limits of its domain so as to evoke the completion of thought in other domains: a technical work perfect enough to be equivalent to a religious act, a religious work perfect enough to have the organizational and operational force of a technical activity give off a feeling of perfection. Imperfect thought stays within its domain; the perfection of thought allows the μετάβασις είς άλλο [*metábasis eis állo*] that gives the fulfillment of a particular act a universal significance through which an equivalent of the magical totality, which had been abandoned at the origin, is recovered at the end of human effort; and the world itself must be present and authorize this achievement after a long detour. The artistic impression implies the feeling of the complete perfection of an act, a perfection that objectively gives it a radiance and an authority through which it becomes a remarkable point of lived reality, a knot of experienced reality. This act becomes an outstanding point of the network of human life integrated within the world; from this outstanding point a higher kinship with others is created, reconstituting an analog of the magical network of the universe.

The aesthetic character of an act or a thing is its function of totality, its existence, both objective and subjective, as an outstanding point. Any act, any thing, any moment has in itself the ability to become an outstanding point of a new reticulation of the universe. Every culture selects the acts and situations that are apt to become outstanding points; but culture is not what creates the aptitude of a situation to become an outstanding point; it only forms a barrage against certain types of situations, leaving narrow straights for aesthetic expression with respect to the spontaneity of the aesthetic impression; culture intervenes as limit rather than as creator.

The destiny of aesthetic thought, or more precisely of the aesthetic inspiration of all thought tending toward its own completion, is to reconstitute, within each mode of thinking, a reticulation that coincides with the reticulation of other modes of thinking: the aesthetic tendency is the ecumenism of thought. In this sense, beyond even the maturity of each of the genera of thought, there occurs a final reticulation that once again brings the separate types of thought which emerged from the shattering of primitive magic closer together. The

first stage of each type of thought's development is isolation, non-adherence to the world, abstraction. Then, through its very development, each type of thought, which initially rejected what is not itself and behaved as a species, after having affirmed itself according to the unconditional monism of principles, pluralizes itself and widens according to a principle of plurality; one could say that each thought tends to become reticular and once more to adhere to the world after having distanced itself from it. After having mobilized and detached the schematic figures of the magical world from the world, technics return to the world to ally itself with it through the coinciding cement and rock, of the cable and the valley, the pylon and the hill; a new reticulation establishes itself, chosen by technics, privileging certain places of the world, in a synergetic alliance of technical schemas and natural powers. This is where aesthetic feeling appears, in this agreement and this surpassing of technics once more becoming concrete, integrated, and attached to the world through the most outstanding key-points. The mediation between man and the world becomes itself a world, the structure of the world. In the same manner, religious mediation accepts concretizing itself, after a dogmatism that was detached from the concreteness of the universe and having mobilized every dogma to conquer every representative of humankind, in other words religious mediation accepts attaching itself to each culture and to each human group according to relatively pluralistic modalities; unity becomes the unity of a network rather than being a monist unity of a single principle and a single faith. The maturity of technics and of religions tends toward re-incorporation into the world, the geographical world for technics, the human world for religions.

To this day, it does not appear possible for the two reticulations, that of technics within the geographical world and that of religions in the human world, to analogically encounter each other in a real, symbolic relation. And yet only in this way could the aesthetic impression state the rediscovery of the magical totality, by indicating that the forces of thought have once again found one another. Aesthetic feeling, common to both religious thought and technical thought, is the only bridge that could allow for the linking of these two halves of thought that result from the abandonment of magical thought.

Philosophical thought, in order to know how to deal with the contribution of technics and religion at the level of the distinction between the theoretical and practical modalities, can thus ask itself how aesthetic activity deals with this contribution at the level prior to the distinction of these modalities. What is broken in

the move from magic to technics and religion, is the first structure of the universe, in other words the reticulation of key-points, which is the direct mediation between man and the world. And aesthetic activity preserves precisely this structure of reticulation. It cannot really preserve it in the world, since it cannot substitute itself for technics and religion, which would be to recreate magic. But it preserves it by constructing a world in which it can continue to exist, and which is at once technical and religious; it is technical because it is constructed rather than natural, and because it uses the power of applying technical objects to the natural world in order to make the world of art; it is religious in the sense that this world incorporates the forces, the qualities, the characteristics of ground that technics leave out; instead of subjectivating them as religious thought does by universalizing them, instead of objectivating them by enclosing them in the tool or instrument, as technical thought does when it works on the basis of dissociated figural structures, aesthetic thought limits itself to concretizing the ground qualities via technical structures, staying in the space between religious subjectivation and technical objectivation: it thus makes the aesthetic reality, which is a new mediation between man and the world, an intermediate world between man and the world.

Aesthetic reality in fact cannot be said to be either properly object or properly subject; there is, of course, a relative objectivity to the elements of this reality; but aesthetic reality is not detached from man and from the world like a technical object; it is neither tool nor instrument; it can stay attached to the world, for instance by being an intentional organization of a natural reality; it can also stay attached to man, by becoming a modulation of the voice, a turn of phrase, a way of dressing; it does not have this necessarily detachable character of the instrument; it can remain integrated, and normally it does stay integrated within human reality or the world; a statue is not placed just anywhere, a tree is not planted just anywhere. There is a beauty of things and of beings, and a beauty in the ways of being, and aesthetic activity starts by experiencing it and by organizing it, by respecting it when it is naturally produced. Conversely, technical activity constructs separately, detaching its objects, and applying them to the world in an abstract and violent way; even when the aesthetic object is produced in a detached way, as a statue or a lyre, this object remains a key-point of a part of the world and of human reality; the statue thus placed before a temple is what makes sense for a defined social group, and the mere fact that it is

placed, in other words that it occupies a key-point that it uses and reinforces but does not create, shows that it is not a detached object. One can say that a lyre is an aesthetic object, insofar as it produces sounds, but the sounds of the lyre are aesthetic objects only to the extent that they concretize a certain mode of expression, of communication, that already exists in man; the lyre can be carried like a tool but the sounds it produces and which constitute the true aesthetic reality are integrated into human reality and the reality of the world; the lyre can only be listened to in silence or with certain determinate sounds like that of the wind or the sea, and not with the noise of the voice or the murmur of a crowd; the sound of the lyre must integrate itself into the world, in the same way the statue becomes integrated. Conversely, the technical object, insofar as it is a tool, does not become integrated because it can act and function anywhere.

It is indeed this integration that defines the aesthetic object, and not imitation: a piece of music that imitates noise cannot become integrated into the world, because it replaces certain elements of the universe (for instance the noise of the sea) rather than completing them. A statue, in a certain sense, imitates a man and replaces him, but this is not why it is an aesthetic work; it is an aesthetic work because it becomes integrated into the architecture of a town, marks the highest point of a promontory, forms the endpoint of a wall, or sits atop a tower. Aesthetic perception senses a certain number of requirements: there are empty spaces that need filling, rocks that need to bear a tower. There are a certain number of outstanding places in the world, exceptional points that attract and stimulate aesthetic creation, as there are a certain number of particular, radiant moments in a human life, that distinguish themselves from others, that call for a work of art. The work, resulting from this requirement of creation, from this sensitivity to places and moments of exception, does not copy the world or man, but rather extends them and becomes integrated with them. Even if it is detached, the aesthetic work does not arise from a rupture in the universe or in the life time of man; it comes as a surplus of already given reality, bringing it constructed structures, but constructed on foundations that are a part of the real and which become integrated into the world. The aesthetic work thus makes the universe bud, extending it by establishing a network of works, in other words by establishing radiating realities of exception, key-points of a universe that is at once human and natural. More detached from the world and from man than the magical universe's old network of key-points, the spatial

Dena Yago is an artist who was born in 1988. Dena Yago has had numerous gallery and museum exhibitions, including at The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and at the Bodega. Articles about Dena Yago include "Flash Art International no. 311 November – December 2016," written for Flash Art (International Edition) in 2016.

1
Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 198.

2
Dimes and Mission Chinese Food are fashionable eateries on the Lower East Side, New York.

when posted on social media these brand and consumer good laden images function as user-generated content (UGC), authentic marketing material being promoted by the coveted creative class. Art that incorporates brands and readymade branded products has become earned media. Earned media is free advertising; it's what news outlets provided for Trump, which would have otherwise been regulated and campaign financed. Paid media is publicity gained through paid advertising, while owned media refers to branded platforms, websites, social media accounts.

This brand inclusive art is user generated content. It is not even sponsored content, in which the artist would be paid for posting images of the brand to social media, or paid to incorporate the brand into the artwork itself. Any critique is sublimated, and the artist, like Leslie in season 19 of South Park, doesn't even know she's an ad.

Taking on the role of Patron of the Arts, Red Bull Studios provides resources and physical space for artists and musicians to create and exhibit their work. They are facilitating the creation of work that an artist may otherwise lack resources for, but that work must now be understood as sponsored content. While artists and musicians stage exhibitions in Red Bull branded spaces, the brand's CEO, Dietrich Mateschitz is launching his own Breitbartian conservative new media platform, *Näher an die Wahrheit*, or "Closer to the Truth." While there are artists exploring the potential of this role as content creator, and artwork as sponsored or user generated content, this is not something I would like to explore to my own practice. There is no critique, no position of power for the artist in this exchange. We must shift our understanding of this form of work and acknowledge the way that it is being instrumentalized by brands on the other side of the feed. Having influential creatives touting the brand's products on social media and in the work itself is their goal.

Artists who participate in this might feel that their radicality lies in goes against a culture of liberal critique, that they are being "anti" by embracing the commercial. But it becomes a question of scale, of knowing one's own insignificance and finding a form of resistance that doesn't start to feel like reactionary consumerism. One form of resistance is to go dark, to stop making artwork that can in any way be represented on the platforms that facilitate these forms of recuperation. But even if you as an artist don't post images of your work on social media, other people might. You could institute a Berghain rule and administer stickers over phone's camera lenses upon entering an exhibition, but then, hashtags are indexable forms of language that don't require images and are still a useful metric for brands. You could literally never show your work to anyone. You could embrace chaos and illegibility, creating visual or written work that is non-instrumentalizable, but legible across many parts over a longer period of time. This might mean making work that operates at a different tempo than that of branding and social media, work that occupies multiple sites and forms, work that fights for the complexity of identity (as artist or otherwise) and form, and believes in a creaturely capacity for patience with a maximum dedication to understanding

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All images unless otherwise noted are courtesy of the author.

and temporal network of artworks is a mediation between man and the world which preserves the structure of the magical world.

It would, undoubtedly, be possible to affirm that there is a continuous transition between the technical and the aesthetic object, since there are technical objects that have an aesthetic value and that can be said to be beautiful: the aesthetic object can then be conceived as not being integrated into a universe, and thus like the technical object, can be considered as detached, since a technical object can be considered as an aesthetic object.

In fact, technical objects are not inherently beautiful in themselves, unless one is seeking a type of presentation that answers directly to aesthetic concerns; in this case, there is a true distance between the technical object and the aesthetic object; it is as if there were in fact two objects, the aesthetic object enveloping and masking the technical object; this is the case for instance when one sees a water tower, built near a feudal ruin, camouflaged by added crenels and painted the same color as the old stone: the technical object is contained in this fake tower, with its concrete tank, its pumps, its tubes: the hoax is silly, and seen as such from the very first glance; the technical object retains its technicity beneath its aesthetic cover, hence the conflict that arises which gives the impression of the grotesque. Every disguise of a technical object generally produces the uncomfortable impression of a fake, and appears like a materialized lie.

But in certain cases there is a beauty proper to technical objects. This beauty appears when these objects become integrated within a world, whether it be geographical or human: aesthetic feeling is then relative to this integration; it is like a gesture. The sails of a ship are not beautiful when they are at rest, but when the wind billows and inclines the entire mast, carrying the ship on the sea; it is the sail in the wind and on the sea that is beautiful, like the statue on the promontory. The lighthouse by the reef dominating the sea is beautiful, because it is integrated as a key-point of the geographical and human world. A line of pylons supporting the cables that traverse a valley is beautiful, whereas the pylons, seen on the trucks that bring them, or the cables, on the big rolls that serve to transport them, are neutral. A tractor, in a garage, is merely a technical object; however, when it is at work plowing, leaning into the furrow while the soil is turned over, it can be perceived as beautiful. Any technical object, mobile or fixed, can have its aesthetic epiphany, insofar as it extends the world and becomes integrated into it. But it is not only the technical object that is beautiful: it is the singular point of the world that the technical object concretizes. It is not only the line of pylons that is beautiful, it is the coupling of the lines, the rocks, and the valley, it is the tension and flexion of the cables: herein resides a mute, silent and ever continued operation of technicity applying itself to the world.

The technical object is not beautiful in every circumstance; it is beautiful when it encounters a singular and remarkable place in the world; the high voltage line is beautiful when it traverses a valley, the car when it turns, the train when it enters or exits a tunnel. The technical object is beautiful when it has encountered a ground that suits it, whose own figure it can be, in other words when it completes and expresses the world. The technical object can even be beautiful with respect to an object that is larger than itself serving as its ground, in some ways as its universe. The radar antenna is beautiful when it is seen from the point of view of a ship, sitting atop the highest super-structure; placed on the ground, it is nothing more than a rather crude cone, mounted on a pivot; it was beautiful as the structural and functional completion of this whole [*ensemble*] that is the ship, but it is not beautiful in itself and without reference to a universe.

This is why the discovery of the beauty of technical objects cannot be left to perception alone: the function of the object needs to be understood and thought; in other words, a technical education is needed if the beauty of technical objects is to appear as an integration of technical schemas into a universe, within the key-points of this universe. How, for instance, could the beauty of a radio relay placed on a mountain, and oriented toward another mountain where another relay is placed, appear to the one who only sees a tower of mediocre height, with a parabolic grid in which a very small dipole is placed? All of these figural structures need to be understood as emitting and receiving the bundle of directed waves that propagates from one tower to another, through the clouds and the fog; it is with respect to this invisible, imperceptible, and real, actual transmission that the whole [*ensemble*] formed by the mountains and the towers is beautiful, for the towers are placed at the key-points of the two mountains in order to constitute the wireless cable; this type of beauty is as abstract as that of a geometric construction, and the function of the object needs to be understood in order for its structure, and the relation of this structure with the world, to be correctly imagined, and aesthetically felt.

The technical object can be beautiful in a different way, through its integration into the human world that it extends; thus a tool can be beautiful in action when it properly adapts itself

so well to a body that it somehow seems to be a natural extension of it and whose structural characteristics it appears to amplify; a dagger is only beautiful in the hand that holds it; a tool, a machine or a technical ensemble, are equally beautiful when they become integrated within the human world and cover it over in expressing it; if the alignment of boards in a telephone center is beautiful, then it is not beautiful in itself or in its relation with the geographical world, since it can be anywhere; it is beautiful because these luminous flashes that trace the multi-colored and moving constellations represent instant by instant the real gestures of a multitude of humans, attached to one another through the crossing of these circuits. The telephone call center is beautiful in action, because at every instant it is the expression and realization of an aspect of the life of a city and of a region; a light is someone waiting, an intention, a desire, imminent news, a ringing telephone that one won't hear but that will resound far away in another house. Here we witness the beauty found within the action; it is not simply instantaneous, but is also made up of the rhythms of use in peak hours and evening hours. The telephone call center is beautiful not because of its characteristics as an object, but because it is a key-point in collective and individual life. In the same vein, a traffic light [*sémaphore*] on a train platform is not beautiful in itself, but is beautiful by way of its functioning as a traffic light, which is to say through its power to indicate, to signify a stop or a track to be left free. In the same way again the Hertzian modulation we receive, as a technical reality, from a different continent, barely audible, made momentarily unintelligible underneath the static and distortions, is technically beautiful, because it arrives charged with the overcoming of obstacles and distance, bringing us the testimony of a faraway human presence, whose sole epiphany it is. Hearing a nearby powerful transmitter is not technically beautiful, because its value is not transformed by this power to reveal man, to manifest an existence. And it is not only the overcoming of difficulty that makes the reception of a signal emanating from a different continent beautiful; it is the power that this signal has for making a human reality emerge for us, which it extends and manifests in actual existence, by rendering it perceptible for us, when it would have otherwise remained unknown despite being contemporary with ours. "White noise" has as much technical beauty as a meaningful signal, when it bears within itself witness to a human being's intention to communicate; the reception of background noise or of a simple continuous sinusoidal modulation can be technically beautiful when it becomes integrated into a human world.

One can thus say that the aesthetic object is not strictly speaking an object, but rather the extension of the natural or human world that remains integrated within the reality that bears it; it is an outstanding point in a universe; this point is the result of an elaboration and benefits from technicity; but it is not arbitrarily placed in the world; it represents the world and focalizes its ground forces and qualities, like a religious mediator; it keeps itself in an intermediary state between pure objectivity and subjectivity. When the technical object is beautiful, it is because it has been integrated into the natural or human world, just like aesthetic reality.

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This text is an excerpt from Part III, chapter one, and Part III, chapter two, part one of the book On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects *(2017), published by Univocal/University of Minnesota Press.*

artists – come from some kind of money. Genuine risk-taking is usually the mark of desperation, mental illness, or both. We were brought in as crisis control, for brands and agencies to prove both internally and externally that they were self-aware and not ready to die.

We were court jesters, hired to tell creative directors and executives about their follies. They were the masochistic kings paying to hear how their messy and often violent business of accumulation disgusted us. But, like the dominatrix or jester, we were still contract workers. Power likes to hear truth spoken in its presence rather than whispered in the shadows, as a substitute for seeing it acted upon by others. In our final report – K-HOLE #5, "A Report on Doubt" – we conceded that seeing the future ≠ changing it. Networks of power and influence remain the same. To quote Sun Tzu in *The Art of War*: "Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat." It was worse than I could have imagined.

For the past two years I have worked as a trends and strategy consultant for various creative agencies and media companies, and as a strategist for an advertising agency in Los Angeles. The LA agency's two primary offices are open plan and dog friendly. Like service animals, the office dogs are there to absorb the emotional trauma that their owners experience while they hash out content calendars and campaign strategies. These are positions that deal in pure affect, and I have become intimately familiar with the language through which corporations narrativize and justify their position and actions. It is a corporate logic that speaks in sweeping generalizations, thus erasing difference and constructing statements on human universal truths with ulterior motives. At no point in this work have I felt like I'm engaging in détournement. Any attempts to translate critique into tactics have been exercises in futility. I suggested that a light-beer brand address its role in rape culture and create a campaign supporting the implementation of Title IX on college campuses. I recommended that a bank divest from the Dakota Access Pipeline as a campaign strategy. I developed a strategy for a television show that dealt directly with issues of reproductive rights and used the show's platform to direct attention and resources to groups like Planned Parenthood and the Center for Reproductive Rights. Needless to say, these efforts did not result in bank divestments or brand-sponsored resources for victims of sexual assault. The television show opted for artist collaborations and a fashion capsule collection. I've witnessed how brands privilege the unquantifiable asset of cultural relevance precisely because of its slipperiness. It does not have to function to work.

My inability as an artist or simply an individual to effect change within corporate structures has not resulted in a radical turn towards art, or an essentialization of my identity as an "artist." Rather, I have been producing and exhibiting art and poetry concurrently with these experiences. While the economy of language and image and the specific language I've encountered permeate my writing, I do not directly make work "about" branding. The office is not a site of artistic production for me, and in this sense I am not wearing Certeau's wig as a diversionary tactic. The erasure of complexity in both thought and representation that I witness in my hired work has made me more idealistic about art as a space with the potential to embrace complexity, and to counter the on-demand speed mandated by our culture at large. It has allowed me to distinguish the making of art and a community of artists from the art market.

Art As UGC

Artists have traditionally included brands, logos, and readymade consumer goods into their work in order to mount critique on consumption, globalization, mass production, and art-as-commodity. Now you have works created with contemporary brands and products, be it Axe, Monster Energy, Doritos, Red Bull, images of which are then posted and shared on social media. On the other end, you have a social media manager with a liberal arts degree scanning hashtags and coming across their brands being worn and consumed by artists and appearing in the artworks themselves.

Of-the-moment consumerism rewards a level of complexity that answers the question "why not have it all?" You can like both Dimes and Doritos, sincerely and without irony. The mixing of "high and low" points both to self-awareness and being in the know. Lux T-shirts with licensed DSL logos, fashion presentations taking place in White Castle, Pop Rocks on your dessert at Mission Chinese.[2] This sincerity has taken precedence over critique or resistance. Somewhere along the line it became acceptable to be authentic, earnest, honest, and sincere, even if the object of this sincerity is a complete celebration of consumerism. The primacy of affect over rational thought has, in large part, led us to our current state of political affairs far beyond the realm of art. Subjective emotional truths are being taken as objective rationality-driven realities. With alternative facts, truth is malleable, and as we see with crime footage posted to social media, forensic visual evidence has not resulted in structural change.

Instead, in the realm of art and creativity,

where you could plot brands, presidential candidates, countries, celebrities, and your friends, along two axes: from legibility to illegibility, and from chaos to order. We used anxiety as a metric to identify larger behavioral shifts. We crafted a collective voice that made hyperbolic declarative statements such as "The job of the advanced consumer is managing anxiety, period," and "It used to be possible to be special – to sustain unique differences through time, relative to a certain sense of audience. But the Internet and globalization fucked this up for everyone."

But as with all well-compensated prophecy, trend forecasting isn't about seeing the future, not really; it's about identifying collective anxieties about the future operating in the present. We dedicated our fourth report, "Youth Mode," to generational branding. We described a crisis in individuality and a response to that crisis, which we saw as a rejection of the individual and an embrace of the collective, privileging communication and communities over individualist expression. We saw ourselves as living in Mass Indie times, with "Brooklyn" being arguably one of America's largest cultural exports. The endless list of signifiers pointing to unique individuation leads to isolation, and when no one gets your references, you're left alone and lonely. Instead of community building, the compulsion of individuation leads to "some Tower of Babel shit," where "you've been working so hard at being precise that the micro-logic of your decisions is only apparent to an ever-narrowing circle of friends."

We termed this approach "Normcore," which resonated with people experiencing signifier overload and the pressure to be unique. Where our hypothesis was off was that this trend was less a response to fear of isolation and lack of community, and more about exhaustion. The dominant narrative around Normcore is understood in terms of normalcy and sameness, not communication and community. It was equated to dad jeans, Birkenstocks, and sneakers, and was runner-up for the Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year. Our final report, released in 2015, was a report on doubt, magic, and the psychological trauma of collaboration.

After "Youth Mode," we were approached by brands and agencies to speak at corporate conferences, hold workshops, and create custom research reports. Asked about our methodology, our answer was something like "we just hang out a lot." In our workshops and brand audits, we told brands what they were doing wrong at a meta-institutional level. We were not brought in to provide tactics, just strategy. Or rather, we *were* the tactics: we were invited into the room so that strategists, creative directors, and work-for-hire creative agencies could signify to their C-suite executives and clients that the brand was engaging in radical strategery. They brought us in to provide cultural credibility, not to actually implement our work. MTV asked us to write a manifesto to inspire their employees about the brand. We delivered a "manifesto" that included what we imagined were harmlesss platitudes like "Breed unique hybrids," and "If we're for everyone, we're not for anyone." Even so, the most pointed suggestions in the document were edited to make it acceptable for upper management. Our demand for the cancellation of the *Real World*, for example, became a gentle suggestion that MTV "have the courage to put things to pasture."

The World Economic Forum sent a representative in a grey pantsuit to our fifth-floor Chinatown studio to invite only one of us to Dubai for the organization's "Global Agenda Council on the Future of Consumer Industries." We were told, in a tone of forced casualness, that entire phalanxes of corporate executives met at such councils to set an agenda for the coming year. A few years prior, the agenda had been entitled "Sustainability and Mindfulness." It was unclear what came of these terms, or what the exercise accomplished aside from fostering a sense of corporate responsibility and dedication to the "double bottom line." These were bloated, entrenched monopolies gathering in a gilded desert to confirm to themselves that they had not totally lost their taste for truth. Hired to provide such vérité, our role was like that of a royal soothsayer, and gigs became a productive exercise in failure. We quickly learned what kind of work we had to do in order to "pass" – that is, to be seen as the thing itself rather than as art-school imposters. While we offered strategy and insights, any tactics or ideas for execution that we brought to the table stayed there. Corporate clients can't stand to feel like they're being trolled. To many clients, we were useless beyond our cultural capital or "brand equity."

It became clear that what constituted trend forecasting "in itself" in the case of K-HOLE was the collective work of immaterial, unlocatable, affective, and knowledge labor. That, and the effusive, intangible, shape-shifting, and value-adding fog of branding. We realized that behind the multinational curtain is a decentralized quagmire where no one is held accountable and decisions are driven by fear. Corporations are people, US presidential candidate Mitt Romney said, and people need jobs, and jobs are jeopardized for all sorts of dumb, cyclical reasons without adding reckless departures from precedent. This is why, increasingly, most successful entrepreneurs – like most successful

Gilbert Simondon (1924–89) was a French philosopher best known for his work on individuation and technology. He studied at the École normale supérieure in Ulm and the Sorbonne, defending his doctoral dissertations in 1958. He is the author of *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de Forme et d'Information*. While his main thesis, which laid the foundations of his thinking, was not widely read until it was reviewed by Gilles Deleuze in 1966, his complementary thesis, *Du Mode d'existence des objets techniques*, was published by Aubier shortly after being completed (1958) and is now available in English.

1
This is an excerpt from Gilbert Simondon's work from 1958 *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* newly translated into English for the first time by Cecile Malaspina and John Rogove and available this month from Univocal books. It is always a question how to approach a deployment of the terms 'man' and 'primitive' the Simondon uses them here. Whether, that is, to restore the damaged universal by substituting for the offending terms their contemporary equivalents, or to grant the writer the specificity he is unaware of asking for. This would mean reading Simondon's philosophy of technics and technicity *more particularly,* as referring to one sort of encounter with technology in a world where different ones are possible. 'Man' would still have to be replaced, but not because of its crimes against universalism - or not only those - but also for its ambiguity. Very probably Simondon narrates something like the masculine or butch experience of technicity, as opposed to that of the feminine or femme. However, the vocabulary of exploration and discovery, of mountains and towers, recalls latency more specifically still. In other words, the sequence described by Simondon, from a magical and unified world into one characterized by technics and religion, *describes also the sex-process*, whether this be understood as puberty, marriage, or something else entirely.

2
Not metaphorically, but really: it is toward it that the geological folding orients itself and the push that has edified the entire high plateau. The promontory is the firmest part of the chain eroded by the sea.

3
Variation in the proofs: "there are in fact three types of reality: the world, man, and the object, intermediary between the world and man, whose first form is the technical object." – *Ed.*

Arseny Zhilyaev

Tracing Avant-Garde Museology

From a Chemist's Shelf to a Communist Museum on Mars

If you have "avant-garde" and "museology" or "museum exhibitions" in one sentence, especially if that sentence is in English, the first name that comes to mind is El Lissitzy and his collaboration with Alexander Dorner in Hannover.

Everyone who has an interest in experiments with display design has seen images of the *Abstract Cabinet* installed at Landesmuseum in late 1928. This masterpiece marks the limit of known ambitions for the transformation of the museum in the time associated with the young Soviet state or even the historical avant-garde. But most interpretations of the *Abstract Cabinet* reduce its meaning to formal innovations distinctive for Western modernism. The new concept of the museum that resulted from the combination of new social relationships and a political agenda remains unconsidered.

I'd like to risk going beyond this limitation to describe the trajectory and logic of the transformation of the concept of the museum and art in general from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia and the Soviet Union.

Let's use the proletarian revolution in Russia as a point of departure for our discussion of avant-garde museology. Not only did this event determine a majority of interpretations of art and the role of institutions charged with preserving art after the fact, it also served as a point of attraction for the goal of establishing social equality even before it took place. Beginning from the revolution will make it easier to describe the radicalized conceptions of the museum that emerged at the time, and the hierarchy of these conceptions. At its foundantion lies the historical avant-garde's destructive impulse towards any attempt to preserve the past. Kazemir Malevich expounded this idea, writing in 1919: "Contemporary life has invented crematoria for the dead, but each dead man is more alive than a weakly painted portrait. In burning a corpse we obtain one gram of powder: accordingly, thousands of graveyards could be accommodated on one chemist's shelf."

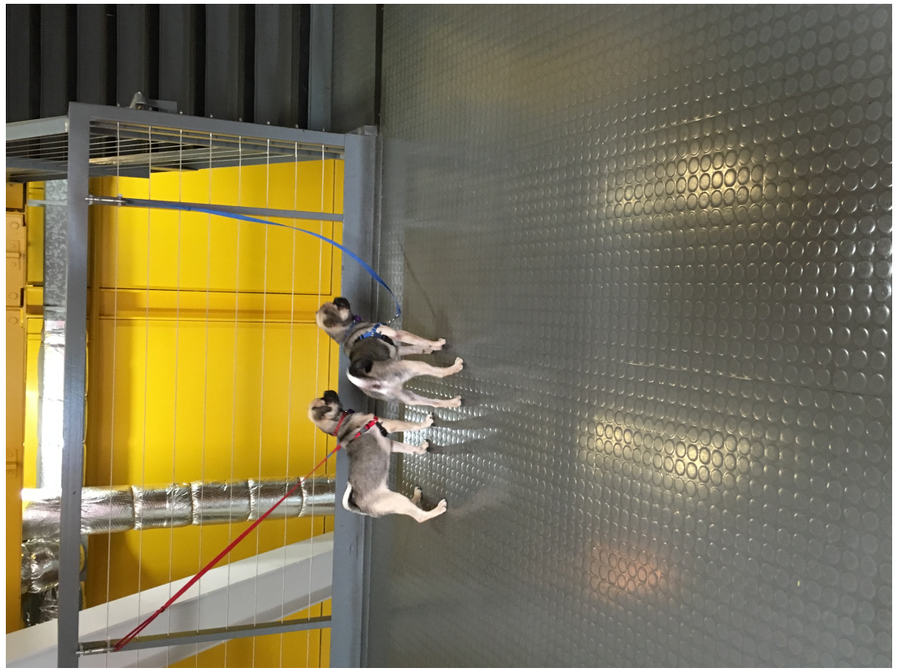
Others expressed similar opinions. The majority of artists associated with the historical avant-garde were sharply critical of the museum as an institution. Those who did not clamor for the incineration of the past in the crematoria of the present nevertheless spoke of the need to take control of the institution and reorganize it with a view to creating conditions more favorable to the new art. If the museum were to survive, it had to become highly mobile; it had to keep pace with the transformations of reality as it sped towards socialism. Radical theorists of futurism,

bird's-eye view and more of an over-the-shoulder lurk. This sense of having distance from and perspective on your situation is, of course, illusory – you're just high. The rationale behind using K-HOLE as a name was that we did not claim to have any macro view of the landscape we inhabited as artists, writers, and twentysomethings in postrecession, pre-Occupy New York City.

The project grew out of a frustration with an attitude common among Gen X artists, who liked to neg on younger artists for not keeping their distance from the inner workings of capitalism – for "selling out." Like our professors, artists who were a generation older than us promoted subcultural tactics such as zine-making and abject performance, which had since been aestheticized and recuperated by mainstream brands from Urban Outfitters to IKEA to MoMA. They acted as if our decision to engage was motivated by anything other than awareness of the immediacy of recuperation, survivalism, and the deep-rooted anxiety brought on by the recession and student debt. We resented the unspoken mandate within the art world that there are only certain "acceptable" jobs for an artist: assistant, teacher, physical laborer, bartender, retail worker, food service worker. As if these positions allowed artists to retain their identity as artists. You could be a singular artist, without having to confront the complexity of an imbricated identity, as long as you worked for another artist, at a boutique that happened to sell artists books and editions, or at a restaurant frequented by art-world luminaries. Beyond propagating the model of the monolithic artist, who creates their artwork uncompromised by other forms of labor, this model normalizes independent wealth and excludes those who feel poor, disenfranchised, and generally alienated when confronted with class disparity. When compounded with other occupations, the identity of an artist requires qualification – which often becomes the qualification "artist as ethnographer" or "anthropologist," thus claiming the position of both observer and performer, and maintaining a critical stance within that role. The disappearance of salaried positions, lack of access to affordable health care as a freelance worker, lack of access to affordable housing, and student debt led me to wonder what kind of critical distance one can have in a survivalist state.

With K-HOLE, we were not interested in taking on the role of ethnographer or performer; we were interested in the total collapse that comes with being the thing itself. So, rather than perform "artists as trend forecasters," we produced trend reports like those that are sold via subscription for tens of thousands of dollars to corporate clients and advertising agencies. We created the publications in a form we thought would circulate as freely and fluidly as possible – PDF. Unable, perhaps, to fully shed our training in market confrontation and antagonism, we saw the fact that our report was free as an affront to the traditional trend-forecasting model of groups such as WGSN, Stylus, or the Future Laboratory. What we didn't realize was that the worlds of branding and advertising already had a word for this sort of antagonism: "loss leader." A loss leader is a product exchanged at a loss to attract customers for the future. From a certain perspective, this would include some of the most radical twentieth-century market-refusing art practices. Far from being an exception to the standards of established commerce, distributing free information that can be harnessed by an elite or restricted group with cultural legitimacy is the way conglomerates do business. Historically, artists have been regarded as forecasters of everything from style and behavior to speculative international futures. Trend reports are a vehicle for identifying emerging behaviors and the forces that motivate them. We issued our own because we wanted our community of peers to be aware of the strategies that were being used on them as consumers, and that they were parroting back in their own artistic and creative practices. Trend forecasting is a form of armchair sociology that identifies how consumers respond to global sociopolitical and environmental change through pattern recognition. Trends are less about seasonal colors, and more about consumers' crisis response. Our thought was that the more people are aware of these strategies, the more they can develop tactics based on those strategies and use them towards their own ends, whether in their studio practice or in their plan for survival on Earth. For me, our practice was about peeking behind the curtain, gaining an understanding of the logic and intentions of corporate behavior, and seeing if there was any potential for us to affect change. We wanted to identify the threshold dividing viable from nonviable in the commercial sphere.

Our first two reports mirrored the traditional format, with the coining of a neologism, the definition of the trend, and the inclusion of supporting case studies. The first report was on "FragMOREtation," a strategy by which brands play with fragmentation, dispersion, and visibility in order to conceal expansion and growth. The second was on "ProLASTination" and addressed the ways that brands seek ambient omnipresence over long periods of time. In 2012, after Hurricane Sandy and leading up to the Obama-Romney presidential election, we released K-HOLE #3, "The Brand Anxiety Matrix,"



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for example Osip Brik, insisted that the museum should be transformed into a scholarly institute. Avant-garde theoretician Nikolai Punin complained to colleagues about the museum-as-repository: “One cannot breed contemporary European art museums out of the ‘kunstkammer’ and the ‘repos’ any more than one can hatch the contemporary state directly from the feudal order. Museums were once “repos,” but for a long time they have developed a different character – an auxiliary scientific character.”

Malevich might have been closer to anarchism in terms of his political preferences, but at its core his and similar thinking was inspired by the Marxist interpretation of artistic creation under conditions of capitalist production and its potential transformation after the revolution, when the emphasis of the artistic activity should gradually shift from the museum towards everyday life and production. Because without social equality art is mainly a ghetto for imaginary solutions to the traumas of exploitation and the ruling class’s violence against the oppressed. And in this situation, the museum fixes this order of things institutionally, under the name of art history. Consequently, the museum could be seen as an enemy of the revolution, doomed to be destroyed. But if

society overcomes the social contradictions associated with class struggle and inequality, then art as a bourgeois ghetto will melt into liberated reality. The artist, as a special professional occupation, will gradually give way to the engineer – be it an engineer of industrial machines or social interactions.

The position of the “proletkult” – short for “proletarian culture” – came close to the radical position of a Malevich. Proletkult was a broad movement of unprofessional poets, writers, theatrical activists, film directors, and artists who tried to build a new proletarian culture through the negation of the art of previous epochs, in a practical attempt to destroy the museum as a castle of enemy-class culture. The intellectual leader of proletkult was Alexander Bogdanov, who started as a professional revolutionary and close collaborator of Lenin but was later forced from political activity and started working as a scholar and a cultural organizer. Thanks to Bogdanov, proletkult was influenced by the ideas of Russian cosmism, which resulted in a series of narratives of Communist space exploration written by self-taught poets.

Almost a decade before the revolution, Bogdanov depicted a postrevolutionary Marxist

Exhibition on ”The History of the Civil War” at Leningrad Museum of Revolution, 1930.

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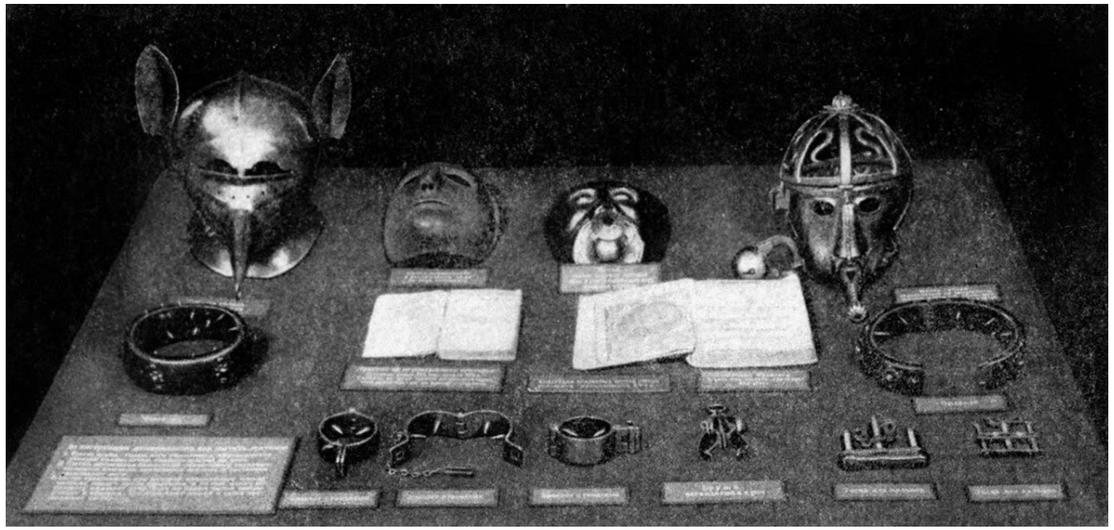

A display case exhibits the inquisition's instruments of torture in the exhibition of the Museum of Atheism, Leningrad.

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exhaustive references to context and constructed narrative. These commodities in themselves gesture to the democratization of art, through relative affordability and accessibility when released as consumable goods, design objects, and clothing. It is a functionalist approach that values art for its usability and ability to seamlessly incorporate itself into daily life. This approach to art is not meant to create rupture or to jockey speeds and tempos in its consumption. These objects do not strive to open up a chasm, and they do not call into question their own objecthood. They do not produce moments of unease that, when phenomenologically approached, lead the viewer/consumer to question their own inhabitation of a body and occupation of space. Rather, they are meant to replace the other commodities that previously occupied that space in the consumer's lives. Why wear a Supreme shirt when you can wear a Some Ware long-sleeve? Why buy Crofters or Smuckers when you can eat Sqirl jam? Why drink Absolute or even Tito's when you can drink Material Vodka and Enlightenment Wine? Why use a Brita when you can filter your hormone-laden municipal water through a Walter Filter? In this sense, there is a perceived ethics to consuming these commodities: you are supporting a community of artists – or artists functioning as small businesses. You may not be able to afford a painting, but you can afford a sweatshirt, and chances are, the producer of that sweatshirt doesn't pay their gallery commission. But this provokes the question of whether these profits benefit the artist's lifestyle, artistic practice, or the cause nodded to in the sweatshirt's logo or brand name (see: Election Reform, or The Future is Female). The artist-as-shirt-producer will likely spend more time sourcing sustainable materials and investing in fair-labor practices than the artist who creates work out of petrochemicals with the help of their unpaid interns. Many of these practices retain their position within the art community by operating under a FUBU ethos (For Us By Us), wherein a brand produces specifically for, and for the benefit of, a community of peers, with the aim of providing financial capital, visibility, and broader legitimacy for the group. But within the context of art, these commodities transform viewers into direct consumers. The shirt, the jam, and the vodka function simultaneously as signifiers of taste and signifiers of belonging. While they might not get you thinking about objecthood and phenomenology, they will get you thinking about community and identity.

Retail Apocalypse

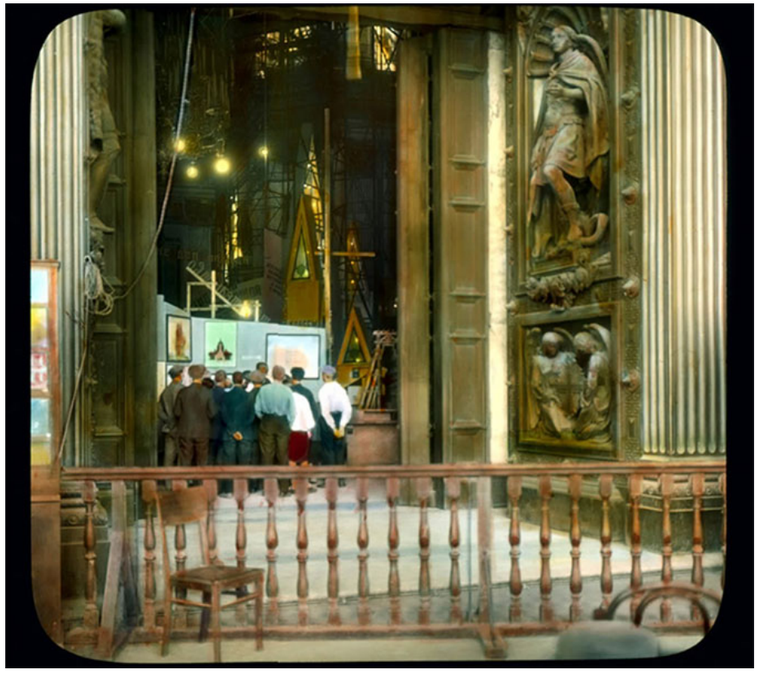
The nostalgia inherent in this commodity-driven practice is mirrored on a mass-produced, national scale, in that companies selling these commercial goods cannot sustain themselves solely on the sales of products without inflating their value through branding and context. If a business seeks to sidestep this, they instead rely on the distribution networks and logistical convenience of human powered, but soon to be automated, fulfillment centers. This allows a level of anonymity for the importer or small-business owner who is shuttling goods between mass producer and anonymous consumer via branded distribution networks like Amazon Prime. But at either level, brand value is what accounts for the difference in price between two instances of the same commodity. Often, the cheapest commodity is also the one with the least identity. A lesson learned from pharmaceuticals: generics can be bought at a lower price. The more expensive drug is branded, trademarked and I.P. driven. Branding allows for the mass production of slightly less authorless objects.

Abandoned American malls are postcard images for deindustrialization and the bottoming out of an upwardly mobile middle class. Retailers are transitioning to e-commerce-only models that rely on fulfillment centers serviced by low paid invisible labor and customer service chatbots, virtual agents and AI assistants with names like Nadia, Twyla, Tara, Polly, and Alexa. Brick-and-mortar stores have come to function as pop-up showrooms and concept spaces. Today, profitable commodities are largely those that trade in the invisible – rooted in financial trading, service, intellectual property, and culture. In other words, profitable commodities aren't commodities at all, but assets and capitals.

Naked and Afraid | K-HOLE

In 2010, shortly after leaving school, four friends and I self-identified as cultural strategists and created a trend-forecasting group named K-HOLE. "Cultural strategists" seemed broad enough to encompass all of our practices (artist, writer, musician, filmmaker) and whatever else we might eventually mutate into, while internalizing how brands and agencies were likely to perceive our position as twentysomethings in New York City. A K-hole is what happens when you take too much ketamine, a veterinarian tranquilizer and party drug popular before our time in the '90s. Ketamine provides the sensation of having an externalized view of your body and situation. It is like you are your own puppet master, whispering words in your ear and then hearing them spoken by a disembodied version of yourself. It is similar to an out-of-body experience, but with less of a

Exhibition view from "Labor and Art of Women of the Soviet East" in the Museum of Oriental Cultures, c. 1930s.



Right and left images: Exhibition view at Museum of Atheism, Leningrad, the former St. Isaac Cathedral, date unknown.

museum in his science-fiction novel *Red Star* from 1908. “I imagined there would be no museums in a developed communist society,” exclaims Bogdanov’s astonished protagonist upon finding that the instituion has survived on Mars, home to a highly advanced Communist civilization. The museum has indeed survived, but its function has been modified. It is no longer a bourgeois ghetto, a repository for all the delusional hopes for the resolution of social contradictions. Instead, the liberating force of proletarian revolution has dissolved class divisions as such, and art, once an autonomous professional sphere, has been integrated into the everyday life and work of humanity. “The museum showcases distinct specimens of art conducive to the upbringing of new generations,” replies Enno, a Martian Communist, to Bogdanov’s protagonist. The conversation continues:

> “I must say I never even imagined that you might have special museums for works of art,” I said to Enno on our way to the museum. “I thought that sculpture and picture galleries were peculiar to capitalism, with its ostentatious luxury and crass ambition to hoard treasures. I assumed that in a socialist order art would be found disseminated throughout society so as to enrich life everywhere.”

> “Quite correct,” replied Enno. “Most of our works of art are intended for the public buildings in which we decide matters of common interest, study and do research, and spend our leisure time. We adorn our factories and plants much less often. Powerful machines and their precise movements are aesthetically pleasing to us in and of themselves, and there are very few works of art which would fully harmonize with them without somehow weakening or dissipating their impact. Least decorated of all are our homes, in which most of us spend very little time. As for our art museums, the [art museums] are scientific research institutes, schools at which we study the development of art or, more precisely, the development of mankind through artistic activity.”[1]

Before proletkult’s vision of the communist colonization of Mars, exhibition-making led to “avalanche exhibitions,” i.e., worker-organized and continually augmented exhibitions at factories. This vision of the Communist museum was later repeated by avant-garde artists and activists who could not support the full destruction of the institution outlined by Malevich. Instead of smashing it, the revolutionary must appropriate the museum for the purposes of propaganda – for “good art,” which was avant-garde art and which served to educate the proletarian masses. In essence, the idea was to create a museum that could answer to the professional demands of pioneering artists – to create, that is, a museum of avant-gardism. The demands, however, focused principally on access to exhibition facilities and changes in the purchasing policy that would benefit innovative art. There was no talk of transforming the very role of the museum beyond a more active approach to exhibitions and a greater emphasis on the museum’s undoubtedly important educational function. As Nikolai Punin wrote: “The museum collections are archives to be consulted freely by anyone who wishes to do so. Let the paintings be hung and rehung without any interruption. Ideally, the museum must be made entirely of moving parts. Any tendency towards the stasis of the church icon must be eradicated.”

A professional version of the avant-garde museum opened in Moscow in 1919 in the form of the Museum of Painting Culture. The new institution was run by artists and mainly attended by a professional audience.

In his polemical remarks on the “museum bureau,” the avant-garde artist Aleksandr Rodchenko proposed fundamental changes to exhibition strategies espoused by the old-guard museum:

> First of all, the gallery and the wall are construed as equipment for displaying the artwork. Under such formulation there can be no question of economy of wall space. Wall-to-wall coverage is categorically rejected. The wall is no longer construed as an autonomous entity, and the artwork does not adapt itself to the wall. Instead the artwork becomes an active participant.

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Once the Bolsheviks were established as a real political government, they could not support the avant-gardists’ initial demand for the destruction of museums either. Years of revolution and civil war had left Russia a very weak and exhausted country. Art not only had cultural value, but a material value as well, which limited revolutionary violence under these particular historical circumstances. Simple destruction was not a wise decision from a practical point of view. At the same time, the avant-garde appropriation of the museum as a tool for propaganda art did not work out as planned either. One possible solution to this

dilemma was proposed by Leon Trotsky in his debates with the proletkult movement. His approach was somewhere in between the early Bolshevik support of the left-wing avant-garde and the later Bolshevik support of more traditional socialist realism.

Trotsky claimed that it was necessary to appropriate and preserve the cultural treasures of previous epochs, because a new proletarian culture couldn't rise without sufficient educational background and access to museums. According to Trotsky, the fetishism of unskilled art production expressed by proletkult was not enough for building a new culture and a new human freedom. The new artist-workers had to reclaim the cultural treasures that had been stolen from them as surplus value. But the crucial question was how to use these treasures without arousing sympathy for antagonistic classes.

"The Experimental Complex Marxist Exhibition," proposed by Alexey Fedorov-Davydov and mounted at the State Tretyakov Gallery in 1931, was supposed to resolve this dilemma. The idea was to contextualize art production according to different class positions, as expressed by different works of art. Fedorov-Davydov constructed complexes of different styles that characterized different class positions. Each complex consisted of a number of different artistic mediums, including furniture.

The exhibition was built as a series of rooms with the typical interiors of collectors from different class positions. It also had supplementary material about the economic and political specificity of each room. Thus, the thinking went, proletarians could understand the connection between art and its social background. "The Experimental Complex Marxist Exhibition" resonated with Victor Shklovsky's idea of defamiliarization or estrangement, later adopted as the "alienation effect" in the theater of Bertolt Brecht. It deconstructed the illusion of the museum as a temple of art, but left open the possibility of learning from the masterpieces of previous epochs.

In addition to works already recognized as art by capitalist museums, Fedorov-Davydov included works by peasants and proletarians, along with political slogans and street advertisements. And for visitors who wanted a more advanced or professional view of the development of artistic forms throughout history, Fedorov-Davydov included special cabinets that repeated the logic of the avant-garde Museum of Painting Culture.

All images: Lev Soloviev's sketches for the icon *High Priestly Prayer* (1898).

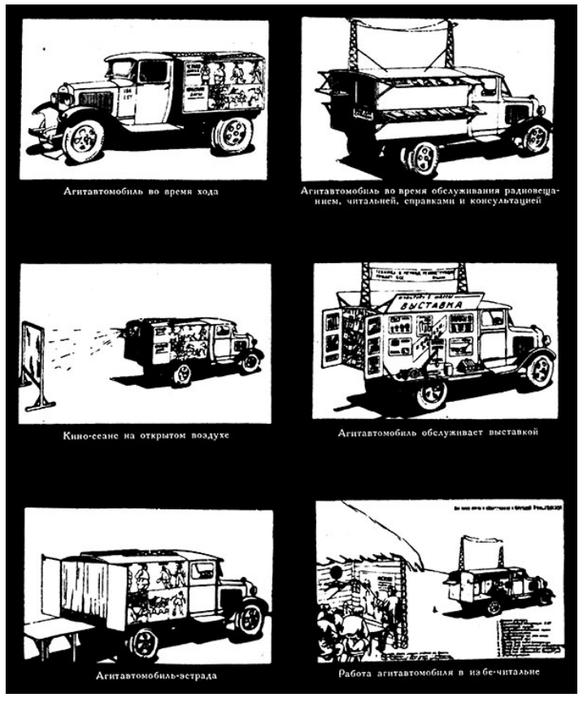
For a short period of time between Lenin's death and Stalin's deployment of the Socialist Realist apparatus, the reappropriation of bourgeois culture for educational purposes became the dominant model in Soviet museums. Dialectical materialism was named the principal method of museum activity. This meant that in contrast to the bourgeois museum of the past, its Soviet counterpart must treat natural history, social history, and the cultural sphere not as alienated and antagonistic to man, but as products of his conscious effort. The "kunstkammer" – the vulgar materialistic or idealistic museum – would be replaced by the museum as an integral aspect of the artistic transformation of life. Passivity, neutrality, and the positivist or metaphysical stance of the museum with respect to the phenomena within its purview would become a thing of the past. Political engagement, partisanship, direct participation in industrial processes and in the ongoing class struggle, critique of ideological superstitions, critique of fetishism – these were the new guiding principles and slogans of Soviet museology of the late 1920s early '30s.

The first Museological Congress was an important milestone in the drive towards the new museology. However, there was no tried and true procedure whereby the museum was expected to put the principles of dialectic materialism into practice. This, in turn, opened the doors for experimental ideas.

An important innovation of Soviet museology was the museums of the revolution, the very idea of which seems contradictory in and of itself. Indeed, the revolution is an event that in its scale transcends any traditional methods of representation or archiving. And yet the works in the museums of the revolution became one of the most important artistic discoveries of twentieth-century museology.

And if the museum of the avant-garde was a museum of the ongoing rupture in the history of art, effectively the prototype of the modern or contemporary art museum, then the museum of the revolution served the same function with respect to social history. It often pushed the boundaries of traditional media even further than the most radical artists of the time. The very structure of the exhibition in a revolutionary museum is a collage of varying types of artistic media and auxiliary non-artistic information, facilitating their analysis. In the Soviet museum the critique of spectacle through alienation was meant to awaken in the viewer a conscious stance, grounded in the understanding of historical processes. And this was the principal distinction between the Soviet and the fascist museum, which used similar means to achieve opposite ends.

One of the outcomes of the dialectical approach to the museum was the apparent need to bring the institution into everyday life, i.e., for the museum to transcend its own boundaries. In this respect Soviet museologists were very much in accord with the avant-garde artists. At the same time, their engagement with industrial production and agriculture had a more systemic character and was, moreover, materially supported by the state. In the pages of the journal *Soviet Museum* we find numerous reviews of so-called "itinerant exhibitions," i.e., mobile exhibitions that traveled to locations that lay far beyond the reaches of traditional museums. Museum agit-trains and mobile museums housed inside vehicles were organized as part of the campaign aimed at the successful completion of socialist construction.

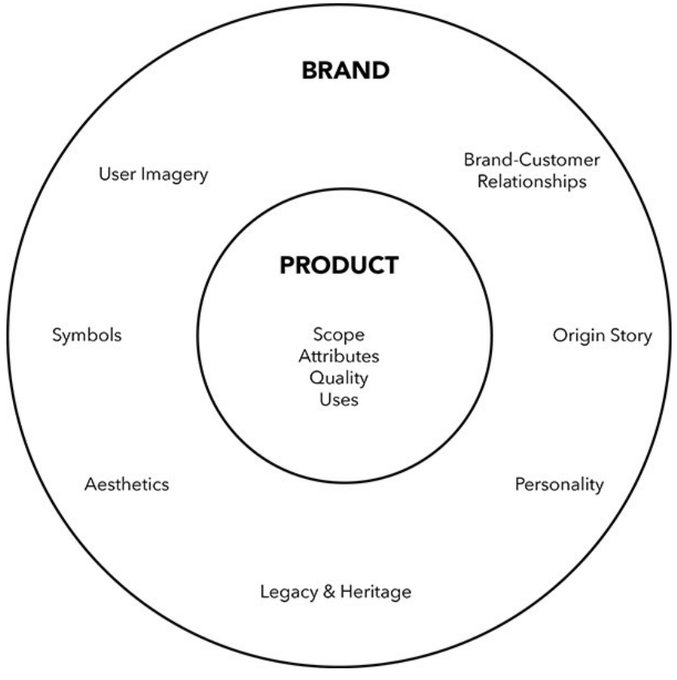


"The agitprop-truck on the go; The agitproptruck functioning as a radio, library, and an information point; The agitprop-truck as an outdoor cinema; An exhibition at the agitproptruck; The agitprop-truck is transformed into a stage; The work of the agitprop-truck in conjunction with the local reading hut," from M. S. Ilkovsky's text "Bringing the Agitprop-Truck to the Service of Cultural Construction," Soviet Museum no. 3, (1932).

Another example of museological innovation is the industrial museum project of D. E. Arkin. The project largely echoed the ideas of the industrial avant-garde, developed by Boris

businesses as expanded art practices. These groups are faced with split identities: they are seen by the IRS as small-business owners and operate as such, while also being seen as producers of culture through commercially sold commodities – differentiated from "art objects." A third identity of "artist as fashion designer, technology and food importer, or alcohol producer" is not added to the mix, because any critique aimed at the broader violence of capitalism is not being made from within the world of art, but from that of "basic" consumer-oriented commerce, albeit "aspirational" lifestyle commerce. By refusing to identify as artists, these groups resist the recuperation of this identity by start-ups, creative agencies, and real-estate developers that value creativity and "disruption."

This turn towards commercial, commodity-driven practices arrives as the value of art objects becomes ever more abstracted and contingent on densely imbricated social, institutional, and cultural reticulation. As immaterial artistic practices are both rewarded with seven-figure sales and called out by alt-right conspiracists as satanic practices of the liberal elite, the ancient ritual of making an object of basic utility for the purposes of transparent exchange begins to promise relief. The commodity in itself offers a level of commercial purity that feels, to some, less complicit or exhausting than the highly mannered and baroque tapestry of brand narratives and leveraged networks on which creating and exhibiting even traditional forms of contemporary art – like paintings, sculptures, or photography – have come to rely. Certainly many of the groups that produce such commercial commodities continue to lean on a community of friends or a city-specific scene for visibility and cultural legitimacy, but at least these are peer networks, contrary to the inter-generational hierarchy that flourishes in the market-resisting art silos nestled in our educational institutions with HR oversight.



Seamless Web

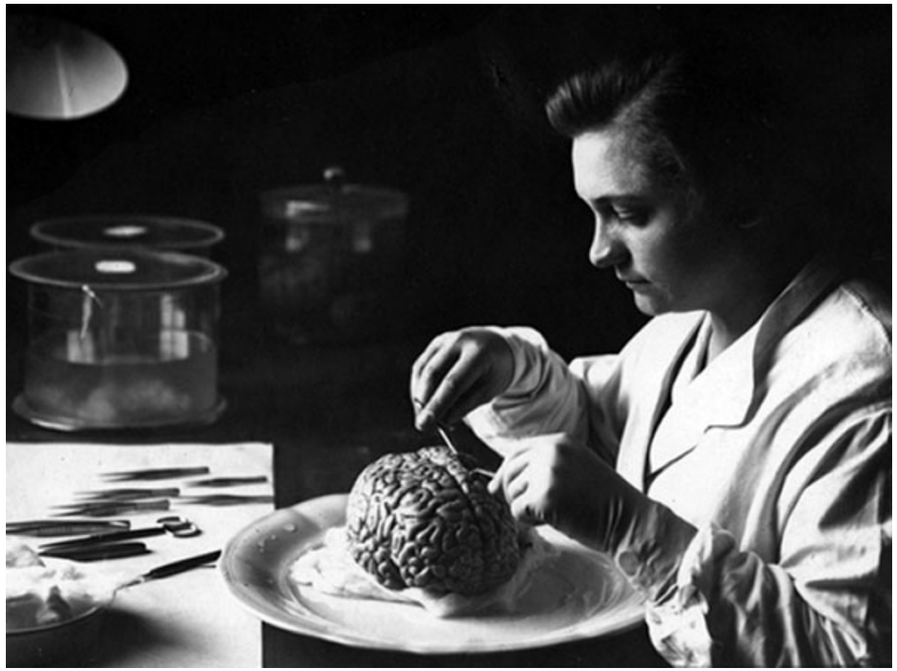
A factor in this turn within art is the nostalgia for an era before branding, taste, and cultural context became the primary factors by which artistic production is evaluated. These commodities can claim a materialist and modernist approach, where the value of the object is ostensibly inherent in the object itself. Value derives from craft and quality or an ability to satisfy a specific need rather than from

is to utilize and leverage all possible identities, situations, and social relations for their own benefit. From this accumulative imperative emerged practices where every bender was a durational performance and every broken bottle an artifact of critical engagement. Out of this educational model came Times Bar and New Theater in Berlin, the vitriolic blog Jerry Magoo, and, in my own case, a trend-forecasting group named K-HOLE. Relational aesthetics began to look a lot more like aspirational aesthetics, through the aestheticization of trolling, waste, usage, consumption, and the role played by "artist as consumer."

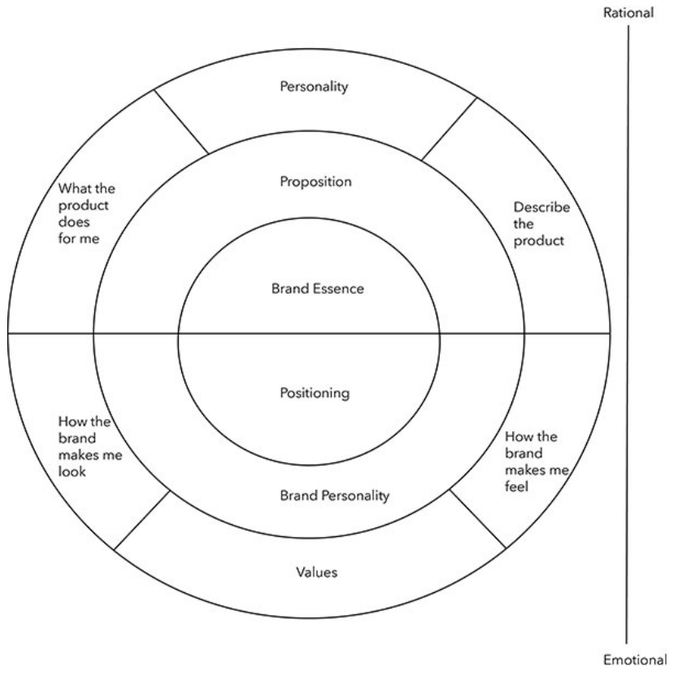
Business LARPing

To some, art is also an excuse to do things poorly. If an experiment fails, calling the process and its ruins "art" becomes a contingency plan. If an experiment in a structure traditionally considered as being outside of the boundaries of art succeeds, as functional business enterprises in entertainment, tech, food, or fashion, or the murkier realms of logistics or import/export operations, it is acceptable for the experiment to exist as the thing itself. In the case of the failed, or dis-functional, commercial venture as art, the failure can be understood as performed criticality; it reveals delineations otherwise invisible and shows how the mechanisms of commerce function behind the curtain. But, regardless of success or failure, it has become expected practice to leverage the context of art for the purposes of cultural legitimacy and capital. Many successful business ventures were born this way, from restaurants and fashion labels to BuzzFeed and Kickstarter.

There is an ever-expanding gray zone where groups and projects seek to operate as commercial ventures outside the art world proper while retaining the cultural context from which they came. Cynicism reads this retention purely as cultural capital instrumentalized towards individual ends. Generosity counters that these artists seek to support their community through heightened collective visibility and towards collective ends. Art-world institutions and curators want to stake a claim on the success of these ventures. Including commodity-based, art-adjacent practices in their programs nods to an opening up and democratization of otherwise exclusive, closed institutions. This can be seen in the emerging model of pop-up shop as group exhibition, or the recent inclusion in biennial exhibitions of fashion labels that do not self-identify their brands or



An Soviet-era image of a scientist working at the Moscow Brain Institute, date unknown.



All images: View of *The First World Exhibition of Interplanetary Spacecrafts and Mechanisms*, 1927 Moscow.

Arvatov, but implemented them at the institutional rather than the individual level. The industrial museum was a laboratory-museum, tasked with preserving and developing creative prototypes for subsequent implementation into production. This concerned first of all handcrafts and design-based industries such as textiles, ceramics, etc.

A peculiar variation on the dialectical-materialist museum was the atheist museum. The original materialist critique of religion as a refuge for irreconcilable social contradictions belongs to Feuerbach. In the visual arts, however, one had to wait for the iconoclastic impulse of the historical avant-garde to mount an artistic critique of religion as a kind of camouflage for exploitation and social inequality. The Soviet years saw the rise of the Union of Militant Atheists, numbering several million members at one point. Many of the major church compounds were expropriated for the use of various kinds of antireligious institutions. Modest museums of atheism were organized in schools and workplaces. The opposing tendencies – on the one hand, calling for the preservation and study of religious art, and on the other, for the total rejection of an alien and dangerous ideological delusion – determined the specific character of antireligious museums and, at the same time, served as the driving force of their development in the Soviet Union.

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Returning to the proletarian revolution and the dilemma of art after it, Boris Arvatov, theorist of productivism, had suggested that even when, in the advanced Communist future, the social contradictions are resolved, there will still be a place for traditional media like painting and sculpture. This is because even advanced Communists will be left with physical bodies subject to various traumas and affects. The strongest and most significant of these is death, on the one hand, and love or sexual reproduction, understood as an attempt to overwhelm death, on the other. In this way, Arvatov was theorizing about the potential boundaries of avant-garde interpretation of postrevolutionary art, drawing them precisely at the point where the museum proposed by Russian Cosmists was to begin. This museum starts with a victory over death, resurrection, and the overcoming of the need for traditional sexual relationships.

The idea of the museum as a staging ground for transcending the limitations – both social and physical – imposed upon mankind can be traced back to the works of Nikolai Fedorov, one of the most prominent exponents of religious philosophy, originator of the philosophy of the "common task," and founding father of the Russian Cosmist movement, which in large part inspired the Soviet space program.

The idea of space colonization was a natural consequence of Fedorov's conception of man as a transformational force in the Universe, a kind of universal artist whose role is to impose the necessity of the regulations of nature and the cosmos. One of the key aspects of this process was the resurrection of the dead and the subsequent resettlement of newly resurrected generations on planets in outer space.

Space exploration, however, was not a principal tenet of Fedorov's teaching. His common task was the need to assume direct control over the mechanisms of evolution in order to defeat death. At the same time, mere immortality would not suffice: the generation destined to triumph over death would still stand on the graves of all those who gave their lives in the service of this ideal. Thus, the blessed brotherhood of the Sons would be forever indebted to the Fathers. The ethical radicalism of the idea of indebtedness became the driving force behind Fedorov's futuristic constructs. The creative transformation of the universe and its planets into spaceships, the regulation of natural phenomena on the Earth and beyond, the transcendence of humanity – these are some of the striking results of the idea that mankind must assume an active position with respect to the debt it owes its dead ancestors. And one of the central places in this agenda is occupied by the museum, understood in the broadest sense of the word as an institution that can subsume all of man's activities in the service of the common task.

Needless to say, the museum as it existed towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries could not accommodate such an ambitious project. Fedorov mounts a strident critique of traditional museum practices. He notes that the museum had often been used to enshrine mankind's poverty, strife, and misconceptions concerning its destiny. The museum of the future, on the other hand, must be construed as a place of reconciliation, an institution that, like the church, will register every new life and every new death. But the church, which proffers an important – but so far illusory – intuition of immortality must extend it to other institutions, and thus be supplemented by the museum, regarded as a research facility for the preservation and resurrection of every individual in his physical and mental totality. Hence the need to combine the museum with a scientific laboratory, library, and church-school. As Fedorov wrote:

A diagram detailing "Activist Brands" by Sean Monahan.

Dena Yago

On Ketamine and Added Value

Artist as Consumer

Artists like to role-play scenarios in order to max-out concepts to their logical ends. Art is the space where practices that cannot function within generic constraints run up against the walls and expose fissures in the structures they are working in. Think of documentary or narrative films that don't quite cut it in a mainstream film context, or technologies that fail as commodities but succeed as concepts. When understood as art, these are allowed to exist in all of their complexity.

As an art student in the late aughts, my professors propagated the fantasy that alterity provided access to an otherwise of multinational capitalism. Armed with identities shaped when an "outside" or "another world" was possible, they maintained that the other is always outside, and always subversive to "dominant" culture. With practices emerging in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, punk negation, slacker refusal, institutional critique, and art-as-activism were put forth as viable tactics for resistance. But to my cohort, the proposal of simple opposition over immanence did not feel appropriate or effective in resisting the conditions of our moment; it felt romantic. A strategic sense of imbrication seemed to better address the layered complexities of the reality at hand. By 2008, institutional critique was being taught as a historical practice. What had once been radical – even, with Buren and Haacke, to the point of censorship – had now been wholly recuperated. As Hal Foster pointed out a decade earlier, the "quasi-anthropological artist today may seek to work with sited communities with the best motives of political engagement and institutional transgression, only in part to have this work recoded by its sponsors as social outreach, economic development, public relations ... or art."[1]

My sculpture class gathered weekly to collectively cook meals. This exercise, led by an exemplary relational aesthetics artist, quickly devolved into performative class warfare, with students bringing everything from Balthazar bread to discount produce, resulting in mixed feelings of guilt, shame, ambivalence, and inadequacy. This was at Columbia. At neighboring institutions, there was a painter known for his Beuysian performance paintings made with heritage pork fat from the Berkshire pigs he raised upstate. In Frankfurt, there was a German painter who apparently ate glass. This education championed the model of "artist as x," or artist as performing a role – whether it be artist as cook, artist as bad boy, artist as gentleman farmer, or artist as sociopath – from a position of critical distance. Similar to *homo economicus*, the primary function of "artist as x"

> Aesthetics is the science of recreating all those rational beings who have been on this little Earth (this drop of water which reflected in itself the whole Universe, and reflected the whole Universe in itself) for their vivification (and control) of all the huge heavenly worlds that have no rational beings. In this re-creation is the beginning of eternal bliss.[2]

In the second half of the 1890s, Fedorov traveled regularly to Voronezh to visit with his friend and former pupil Nikolai Peterson. There he became acquainted with the founder of the Voronezh Regional Museum, S. E. Zverev, a priest and regional ethnographer, and was subsequently instrumental in organizing several of the Museum's exhibitions:

> Since 1896, at Fedorov's initiative, the Museum has mounted a number of theme-based exhibitions devoted to the most significant events of the year, a practice that later became a tradition. Between 1896 and 1899 we organized six such exhibitions: on the subject of the Coronation (May 1896) and on the rule of Catherine (November 1896); an exhibition of engravings bearing religious themes (May 1897); an exhibition devoted to St. Mitrophan of Voronezh (Nov.–Dec. 1897); an exhibition commemorating one hundred years of the printing trade in Voronezh (May 1898); and an exhibition titled The Nativity of Jesus Christ and Conciliation (Dec. 1898–Jan. 1899).
>
> Fedorov was directly involved in each case: he chose the theme and participated in the selection of materials, some of which were either brought to Voronezh by him personally or delivered from Moscow at his request. He also wrote the introductory articles for three of the exhibitions: on Catherine the Great, on the printing trade and on the Nativity.[3]

Voronezh also became the site of the first incarnation of the Resurrecting Museum, created by the local artist and disciple of Fedorov, Lev Solovyev. A widower, Solovyev was determined to resurrect the memory of his lost wife by turning his home and garden into a prototype of the museum of the future. To this end he opened a free painting school and created several studies for murals that would decorate the walls of the Resurrecting Museum. Fedorov highly valued the project, devoting several articles to it and including his literary description of the museum

of the future in an article titled "The Voronezh Museum in 1998"[4]

The second attempt to realize Fedorov's Resurrecting Museum project was made in the early 1920s by the avant-garde artist Vasily Chekrygin. Chekrygin was twenty-three when he first encountered Fedorov's ideas. By that time he had already served on the front lines of World War I (albeit not by choice), had befriended Mayakovksy, and was instrumental in founding the artistic movement "Makovets." The philosophical doctrine of the common task had so impressed the young artist that he devoted the final years of his life to making sketches for the monumental fresco that would grace the walls of the Resurrecting Museum, and to a prose poem of the same name. The poem was completed, but Chekrygin's artistic vision was never realized. The correspondence between Chekrygin and Nikolai Punin that has come down to us contains a discussion of the idea of synthetic art and the Resurrecting Museum project. Unfortunately, these two leaders of the cultural revolution were unable to reconcile their ideas: in 1922 Chekrygin was killed in a train accident at the age of twenty-five. His Resurrecting Museum remained confined to paper.

Another project that may be considered alongside Fedorov's ideas on the museum is the Pantheon of the USSR. The project belongs to the renowned Soviet neuropathologist and psychiatrist Vladimir Bekhterev, one of the pioneers of reflexology. In the final years of his life Bekhterev became convinced of the need to create an institution that would study the brains of leading Soviet citizens with the aim of finding connections between the physiological features of the cerebral cortex and the individual's mental abilities. Bekhterev called for a special legislative act requiring the brains of all prominent Soviet citizens to be extracted at their death and delivered by a special commission to the institution in question. In addition to its research activities, the Pantheon of USSR would also house an exhibition hall showcasing actual brain specimens, plaster casts and molds, as well as products of the individuals' creative activities, and biographical information and psychological profiles based on data from close relatives and associates of the deceased.

Bekhterev was a prominent figure, occupying the influential position of director of the Leningrad Institute for Reflexology, and his proposals received considerable attention at the highest level. Bekhterev's remarks calling for the creation of the Pantheon were printed in *Izvestiya*, one of the most widely read papers of the time. The launch of the project was,

moreover, to mark the ten-year anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. But before his plans could be realized, Bekhterev died unexpectedly, under circumstances that remain mysterious. A commission convened for the occasion resolved to cede the project's mission to the already existing Institute for the Study of the Brain, which at that point already possessed Lenin's brain and would soon receive Bekhterev's own. This marks the beginning of the history of the successor project to the Pantheon, which continues to this day. We know that the collection of the Institute for the Study of the Brain was significantly enlarged in the 1920s and '30s, receiving, among others, the brains of the following citizens: the poet Andrei Bely; Alexander Bogdanov; psychologist and Marxist philosopher Lev Vygotsky; writer Maksim Gorky; fellow revolutionary and Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya; prominent party and cultural leader Anatoly Lunacharsky; poet Vladimir Mayakovsky; physiologist Ivan Pavlov; leader of the international Communist movement Clara Zetkin; and one of the founding fathers of the Soviet space program, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky.

Although Fedorov's philosophical legacy was never published in systematic form during his lifetime, the ideas of Cosmism lived on in the works of his pupils and disciples. The foundations of the Soviet space program laid by Tsiolkovsky, the writings of the proletkult poets under Bogdanov's guidance, and the general awareness of momentous social changes all contributed to making the theme of space exploration one of the major components of Soviet cultural production. Accordingly, without any overt reference to the common task or the role it ascribed to the museum, Soviet museums began organizing observation decks for astronomical observation and measurement. At the same time, the idea of the rational exploitation of natural resources and agriculture became an indelible component of exhibitions-laboratories that traveled to distant villages spreading scientific knowledge.

Today, of course, Fedorov's ideas sound rather weird. Total resurrection, a museum that collects as much information about living humans as possible … But if we replace "museum" with "archive" or even "Big Data center," we understand better what Fedorov was striving for. In fact, big corporations like Google, Facebook or systems of governmental surveillance can be regarded as a belated realization of Fedorov's impulse to preserve traces of life. The only difference lies in the purpose of such activity. Instead of obtaining control or money, for Fedorov this information was to be used as a tool for social development, educational planning, and extending our lives.

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A version of this essay was originally presented at the Walker Art Center as part of Avant Museology, a two-day symposium copresented by the Walker Art Center, e-flux, and the University of Minnesota Press. Video documentation of the original lecture at the Walker can be found here.

Arseny Zhilyaev was born in 1984 in Voronezh. An artist and museologist, Zhilyaev lives in Moscow and is a co-founder of Moscow Center for Experimental Museoloy.

1 *Avant-Garde Museology*, ed. Arseny Zhilyaev (New York: e-flux classics, 2015), 256.

2 *Avant-Garde Museology*, ed. Arseny Zhilyaev (New York: e-flux classics, 2015), 146.

3 Nikolai Fedorov, Sobraniya sochineniy (Collected Works) vol. 3 (Moscow: Tradition, 1995–2005), 235.

4 Don no. 64, June 14, 1898.

e-flux journal #82 — may 2017 Arseny Zhilyaev
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