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# e-flux journal



## issue #54

## 04/2014

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e-flux journal #54 — april 2014  
Colophon

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04/04

1  
Grant Kester, "The Device Laid Bare: On Some Limitations in Current Art Criticism," *e-flux journal* 50 (Dec. 2013) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-device-laid-bare-on-some-limitations-in-current-art-criticism/>

2  
Anselm Frank, "Across the Rationalist Veil," *e-flux journal* 8 (Sept. 2009) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/across-the-rationalist-veil/>

3  
Ellen Feiss, "What is Useful? The paradox of rights in Tania Bruguera's 'Useful Art,'" *Art and Education* <http://www.artandeducation.net/paper/what-is-useful-the-paradox-of-rights-in-tania-brugueras-useful-art/>

4  
The history of challenges to the discipline, practice, and use of anthropology is far too extensive to make note of here. Anselm Frank references the work of Michael Taussig, Johannes Fabian, and Bruno Latour.

5  
I am referring here to Stephen Wright's work on usership, which was discussed in the context of Bruguera's Museum of Arte Útil at the Van Abbemuseum on March 15th. See [http://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programma/detail/?tx\\_vabdisplay\\_pi1%5Bptype%5D=20&tx\\_vabdisplay\\_pi1%5Bproject%5D=1300](http://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programma/detail/?tx_vabdisplay_pi1%5Bptype%5D=20&tx_vabdisplay_pi1%5Bproject%5D=1300)

6  
See Wendy Brown, "Suffering the Paradoxes of Rights," *Left Legalism/Left Critique*, eds. Wendy Brown and Janet Halley (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2002), 430.

7  
As he references the work of Douglas Crimp in much of his criticism of *October*, it would seem reasonable to assume that Kester would be aware of how the move from the direct action of ACT UP to the current LGBT initiative for marriage rights is an instantiation of how rights discourse fundamentally structures political response – when present and when absent – and is still under-theorized, largely accepted as the end-goal of any social movement.

8  
Targeting its international audience, the IMI project issued an "Open Invitation for Actions on International Migrants Day," designated by the UN as December 18th. See <http://immigrant-movement.us/wordpress/december18/>

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**Editorial**

01/02

e-flux journal #54 — april 2014 — Julietta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle  
Editorial

Spring is here, so we are naturally thinking about sex all the time. It was a busy winter with many personal calamities and meltdowns, and this only makes now a better time to think about sex. Big beautiful interspecies sex. Instrumentalized sex. Makeup sex and breakup sex. Overman sex and that business with the eunuch. Tender Marvin Gaye sex and also the weird stuff. Sex as the symbolic drainage area for desires that exceed and escape the society, but also as the visceral pelvic thrust behind those desires that glue the whole contraption together when it is actually hopelessly falling apart. Because we all know the fear of sex, and most of us have spent too much time close to a military or imperial or populist regime bent on regulating or functionalizing it. Keep it minimal, because this kind of intimacy mashes subject and object relations together in a way that makes governance confusing if not impossible.

In order to stabilize power, it is absolutely necessary to keep sex cordoned off and in its place because of how it switches and mutually erases notions of emancipation and enslavement, which is after all why sexual practices and codes can be such a terrifyingly direct line to how deeply emancipation and enslavement have been inscribed into the most minute practices of a person. Just on the level of muscle movements, you can detect an emancipated citizen lapsing into the most severe or infantile brutality, and the most repressed can freely express all the tenderness that is usually systematically foreclosed in every other part of the day or in every other part of the city. Sex is where classes switch roles just for kicks and gender can forget itself. In it, you can only be a conduit for codes of submission and domination that were written into your being at some point by history, ancestry, upbringing, star sign – and even though you can never change the fact that you will always be a macho entitled fuckhead or a generous submissive who stores all that hardship on a remote server, you can rewrite yourself through role play with another person.

Even if sex has been celebrated as a means for collectives to be formed by desire rather than by birthright, we know by now that it is too unstable to use as a base to construct any kind of lasting structure, and will rather always work as a force of entropy that exceeds attempts to capture and limit its flows within any stabilization mechanism. Sex now joins with a parliament of abstract and unruly forces that are integral to logics of class, capital, power, and property relations, but that also overflow their terms and compromise their command at every turn. It will always be the most visceral metaphor for what cannot be contained, just like

awareness of the parameters of agency and affect,” masks the inevitable *differential* access to participation, and therefore to the act of recording by the critic, that Brown’s work accounts for. In addition to capturing experiences, what are the conditions that shape the capacity, and therefore the critical reception, of participant response?

In the theoretical work I utilize, Brown mines the paradoxes of a historically specific disagreement between critical race theorists and legal theorists working on the critique of rights in the late 1980s.<sup>6</sup> My use of Brown was an attempt to tie IMI to this debate, and in so doing to import an analysis that charts material conditions of intersectionality with regard to civil rights – I disagree that this is a general application of a bloated totality from the school of “Badiou or Deleuze or Rancière or Nancy or Agamben or Derrida,” as Kester derides. Rather than a “theoretical brand concept,” intersectional analysis is necessary here because the project is meant to be socially operational: the rights that it asks for, as well as how it is structured internally – where the record of participant experience would come into play – needs this theory, regardless of whether one agrees with how I’ve applied it. My use of Brown’s work in the context of IMI takes Bruguera’s campaign very seriously, applying a still highly contentious idea from recent history to the notion of civil rights for immigrants. In this vein, I therefore seriously object to Kester’s accusation that I dismiss Bruguera, reducing her “critical act to a kind of syllogism.” I explicitly discuss the politically productive aspect of the work as its creation of more space – and a very different kind of space – for public discussion around migration and the question of rights. I consider the international conversation around the project to be only strengthened by the incorporation of a critique of rights, even in the event of similar debates occurring within the project itself. While Kester accuses contemporary critics of using “theory simply to provide intellectual validation for relatively unremarkable concepts or ideas that are already widely accepted within our discursive field, and which add little to our understanding of a particular project or work,” I would argue that the critique of rights I draw on, particularly with regard to how access to rights is striated, is by no means commonly accepted or publicly discussed within “our” discursive field.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, my use of Brown’s work is meant less as a diagnosis and more a (formal) opening up of IMI to work already undertaken by this school of thought – an understanding of how rights operate in structuring political claims seems tantamount to grasping this project. Kester concludes that I miss how the project

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“engaged issues that extended well beyond the sphere of ‘rights,’ in ways that transcended the artist’s intentions and expectations.” Rather, I conclude similarly that the project may become a site for a radical reconfiguring of how rights are conceived, which would necessitate engagement far beyond the domain of the law or the purview of political representation in its most literal sense. While Kester may not have read my text in its entirety, it is testament to the generative application of the rights critique to IMI that he ultimately arrives at this analogous supposition. In relation, I discuss Brown’s call for rights to be considered beyond their sphere of practice, and in so doing, try to situate Brown as a “genuine interlocutor in the unfolding of a given work” as Kester put it, with IMI a fitting response to the unresolved question of what such a space might be.

Finally, a particularly tragic irony of Kester’s reprimand for not witnessing the action at the physical location of IMI is that he misses the central element of mobility with regard to the entire project. In fact, IMI has two stated audiences: the immigrants who use the project’s headquarters in Corona, Queens, and an international community of migrants – all of whom, by definition, cannot frequent the project in New York either.<sup>8</sup> For this second audience, IMI is located in exactly the objects I attended to. While I agree that engagement with the localized context of the project over a long period of time will be an important aspect of its historicization, the notion that such a project can be encompassed by a single critical approach doesn’t adequately undertake the challenge this work presents to criticism.

X

Thanks to Larne Abse Gogarty and Marina Vishmidt.

As Frank concludes, where the “border of the political” is at stake – beyond, in this instance, the internal conflicts specific to art criticism (the occasional moving of the goal posts) – divergent critical strategies are necessary. While I don’t purport to have an answer for what those strategies may be, it is clear that Kester replaces the reveal of a “device” with the “laying bare” of fundamental truths in his proposition for recording “the actual, rather than the hypothetical, experience of participants” within the social work of art. While speaking the language of power, impressing upon critics the need to report on the “moments” of agency and upset, these conflicts are framed as confined to the “actual experience” of the project, whereby the hierarchical foundations (what I would argue to be the border of the political here) of any gathering of people for change or exchange are purified from the critical undertaking. In the space of art, all participation is rendered, if not equal, at least divorced from power relations outside the frame.

I agree with many of Kester’s observations regarding the use of continental philosophy in current art criticism, and certainly my article “What is Useful? The paradox of rights in Tania Bruguera’s ‘Useful Art’” is characterized by several of the sins outlined.<sup>3</sup> However, it is abundantly clear that “What is Useful?,” rather than being guilty of an oversight or an inability to attend, was never intended as an engagement with the practice and performance of IMI. I concede that I leave Brown’s theory uncontested in the space on offer from Art & Education, but it is stated quite plainly that it is Immigrant Movement International’s communications material (in fact, two very deliberate documents, IMI’s “Bill of Rights” and “Manifesto,” which Kester dismisses as “statements posted on the IMI website”) that makes up my object of inquiry. I am not explicit about addressing IMI as an important facet of the larger discursive appearance of “social use value” as an art-institutional but also cultural-policy objective across the US and Europe, yet it seems Kester’s critique lies more in professional ring-fencing, the conservative mandate on attendance instituting a school of “diachronic” criticism dependent on globally mobile experts of an ambiguous “fieldwork,” rather than a disagreement rooted in an actual engagement with my text. I think a significant departure is needed from analysis of “dialogical” practice that sees it as immaterial, or even primarily located in the space of encounter – made up of “modulations of agency,” as Kester writes. These projects produce things with their own branding, their own adherence to language and visual

communication, which are both “byproducts” of the work as well as outcomes carefully engineered by the artist and I would argue that they make up the work in equal measure to embodied experience. Particularly as Bruguera comes from a tradition of performance art, disregarding the composition of the project’s Manifesto or the politics of documentation seems historically shortsighted. It is critical to note here that I view both as valid points of entry – I don’t take issue with Kester’s call for engagement at the IMI headquarters, but rather his easy attribution of all encompassing power to the critic (the ability to “see” the shifts in power within the project as a specialized observer) and his uncritical importation of ethnographic terminology. Kester is no doubt aware of what has already been said here (in *e-flux journal*) and elsewhere concerning ethnography as far from the neutral work of an engaged and responsible reporter, and made up of its own devices – with politically contingent outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

In constructing a dichotomy between “fieldwork” and the *October* doctrine, the long history of challenges to ethnographic practice are set aside – a laxity that weakens the otherwise valid assessment of the easy reliance on theory in current art criticism. Kester’s article perhaps produces an important unanswered question: How to work with participant experience in criticism without reproducing well-known problems of representation currently being contested within the social sciences?

The text leaves more troubling questions unaddressed: Who can “see” shifts in power? Just as you cannot “see,” or for that matter witness, the workings (and embedded hierarchies) of a right, as Brown’s work so adeptly lays out, I would argue that attempting a diachronic analysis, as Kester calls for, must start with how the project articulates its own demands. While Kester pays cursory lip service to the idea that a methodology for this fieldwork must be worked out, given what we know about the centrality of methodological inquiry in critical ethnographic practice, the notion that a specific discussion of method can be deferred without even a footnote is highly suspect. In effect, the reader is left with a proposal for sauntering into Bruguera’s community center in Queens and taking notes on the “resistance and accommodation” within the project. Kester’s insights into how “reception itself is refashioned as a mode of production” are incisive, however they share a blindspot with recent theory concerning the “usership” of art in their inability to take hierarchies of access into account.<sup>5</sup> Kester’s sweeping reference to the “participants” from which the critic must collect “actual experiences,” even “with a particular

**the change of seasons. Which is why spring can only make us think about how there are things that you guess and things that you know, boys you can trust and girls that you don’t, about the little things you hide and the little things you show. Sometimes you think you're gonna get it but you don’t, and that’s just the way it goes.<sup>1</sup>**

x

<sup>1</sup>  
See <http://youtu.be/vldh7oQD-a4>.

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Keti Chukhrov  
**Sexuality in a  
Non-Libidinal  
Economy**

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e-flux journal #54 — april 2014 Keti Chukhrov  
Sexuality in a Non-Libidinal Economy

1.

The historical socialist societies were usually severely criticized for their restrictions on sexual freedom. At the same time, the undergrounds of these same socialist societies were researched for manifestations of the sexuality that was supposedly suppressed because of ideological control. Researchers tried to discover the concealed practices of sexual liberation and subversive behavior, which would enable them to confirm that the expression of sexuality automatically subverts the authoritarian apparatus.

Usually, sexuality stands for freedom and emancipation. However, this stereotype ignores numerous contradictions in the concept of sexuality – sexuality might not necessarily be emancipatory. Foucault attributed the notion of sexuality to the emergence of bourgeois society. He located the origin of sexuality in the discourses that regulated health, clinical deviation, and medical care in post-disciplinary societies.

In the section called “Scientia Sexualis” in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault examines a very important stage in the history of Western European culture and science: when sexuality replaced the culture of Amor and Eros.<sup>1</sup> Sexuality didn’t so much bring with it bodily freedom from restrictions; rather, it introduced a language of scientific, juridical, medical, and psychical description – a language where perversion, punishment, analysis, knowledge, and pleasure are intertwined. The same language that maps and controls sexuality generates its seductive and subversive power. Thus, the superseding of Eros by individual sexuality goes hand in hand with the birth of bourgeois society; the aristocratic poetics of amorous sentiment were replaced by analytical stratification and the control of health, pleasure, and disease.

If we now turn to Deleuze’s treatment of the unconscious, we see that according to him, the unconscious is devoid of any psychoanalytical background and is dissipated on the surfaces of the social. The productive force of the unconscious is divorced from personal pleasure, but still resides in the realm of desire and its libidinality. The dimension of the libidinality of desire is ambivalent. It is far from being exclusively emancipatory. Desire stands for emancipation, but it is also permeated by the libidinal economy. What does this mean? Jean-François Lyotard’s research on libidinal economy can be of help here.<sup>2</sup> Lyotard exposes the libidinal complements to monetary exchange and the economy. The capitalist economy is a total externality, but our critique of it doesn’t situate us beyond its externality, because our impulses

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In response to Grant Kester’s “The Device Laid Bare: On Some Limitations in Current Art Criticism,”<sup>1</sup> I have some concerns about the characterization of my work, but more importantly, it seems there is perhaps another “device” to be laid bare here, at the risk of being stale. As Anselm Frank writes in issue #8 of this journal, “critique, itself a modern practice, has entered into the often lamented crisis we currently face, foregrounding its complicities in upholding the power of the critiqued, corresponding to the specific ways in which transgression confirms, rather than undoes, the law of boundaries.”<sup>2</sup>

As a tearing down rather than a systemic overhaul, Kester’s essay is inseparable from the canonical critical structures he seeks to unseat. The most convincing aspects of the text function to “reveal” the genealogy, and therefore the inherited limitations, of art criticism today – the aim therefore is to de-naturalize, conforming, in part, to the device it simultaneously sought to dismantle. Overwhelmingly, because it positions itself as an antagonist to *October* and its more recent derivatives, Kester’s text preserves precisely the role of the art critic that “dialogical practice” (to use his term) challenges and arguably makes redundant: both the status of the critic as an un-implicated analyst as well as the progressivist notion that a single critical tact must overtake current practice, replacing it to become the definitive mode of appraisal is undone by projects which involve complex relationships with their constituents. Not to mention the economy of high stakes and low salaries that this article participates in without acknowledgment: How can a text on “current art criticism” make no mention of the vast change in conditions for the appearance of writing on art – the change in platforms as well as financial viability – since the founding of *October* in 1976?

Kester calls for a replacement of the model of the *October* critic with one in which the critic undertakes what he terms a “field-based approach,” as if the practice of ethnography were uncontested or not in crisis itself. Frank’s essay also serves to remind us that the history of imperialism is inseparable from the discipline of anthropology – the anthropologists he draws on grapple with how to approach the notion of “fieldwork” and its subsequent representation and use. Particularly as Kester is proposing the use of an undefined notion of “fieldwork” in the analysis of socially engaged art practices, which are described as “inspired by, or affiliated with, new movements for social and economic justice around the globe,” the question of the historical and present-day relationship between anthropology and colonial power seems necessary to negotiate.

20  
And thus, the conflict between the utility theory of value and the labor kind is that between a theory which accepts this misrecognition and one that denies it.

21  
Greenblatt, "Towards a Poetics of Culture," 4.

22  
Streeck, *Re-Forming Capitalism: Institutional Change in the German Political Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 230–272.

23  
Ibid., 230. Emphasis in original.

24  
Ibid., 232.

25  
Typically represented by Michel Aglietta, Robert Boyer, Bob Jessop, and Alain Lipietz.

26  
Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 85–126.

27  
Alain Lipietz: "A regime of accumulation describes the fairly long-term stabilization of the allocation of social production between consumption and accumulation." *Mirages and Miracles: The Crises of Global Fordism*, trans. David Macey (London: Verso), 1987, 20.

28  
Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979).

29  
Lipietz: "The set of internalized rules and social procedures which incorporate social elements into individual behavior is referred to as a mode of regulation. Thus, the dominant regime of accumulation in the OECD countries during the postwar period – an intensive regime centered upon mass consumption – has a very different mode of regulation to that operating in nineteenth-century capitalism ... we now refer to it as Fordism." *Mirages and Miracles*, 21.

30  
Ibid., 19.

31  
Wendy Brown, "At the Edge: The Future of Political Theory," in *Edgework: Critical Essays in Knowledge and Politics* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2005), 68.

32  
Fred Block, "Varieties of What? Should We Still Be Using the Concept of Capitalism?" in *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 23, ed. Julian Go (Bingley, UK: Emerald Books, 2012), 269–291.

33  
Ibid., 278. Recall Harvey's point about the two meanings of "production" in Marx, cited above.

34  
Ibid., 276.

35  
Ibid., 278.

36  
Ibid., 280.

37  
These four concepts come from Streeck and Kathleen Thelan, "Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies," in *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*, eds. Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1–39.

38  
Peter A. Hall and David Soskice, *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

39  
Sewell, "The Temporalities of Capitalism," *Socio-Economic Review* vol. 6, no. 3 (2008): 517–37.

40  
Ibid., 535.

41  
This term appeared no less than fourteen times in Perry Anderson's recent article on American politics – a repetition most worthy of analysis. See Anderson, "Homeland," *New Left Review* 81 (May–June 2013), 5–32 <http://newleftreview.org/II/81/perry-anderson-homeland>

42  
Formerly "consumption."

43  
I take this opportunity to thank Peter Hall, Kathleen Thelan, and Martha Rosler for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this text. None of them are in any way responsible for my numerous errors, misrepresentations, and distortions. To misuse Barthele once again: the negation of the negation is based on an incorrect reading of the right books.

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Boris Mikhailov, *Untitled*, from the series *Suzi and Others*, date unknown. C-Print. Copyright of the artist.

and desires are unconsciously inscribed in the production of this alienated externality. We might think that we can resist the logic of capitalist production, but our libidinal pulsions happen to be in tune with this economy: we are unconsciously invested in it, and this is manifest in various forms of our behavior, labor, leisure, communication, exchange, and production. The macabre dimension of this argument is that according to Lyotard, the critique of capitalism itself is not at all free from the pulsions and desires that produce the capitalist condition. The libidinality scattered over the social body of capitalism permeates anything produced under its regime – including anticapitalist critique.

One can decipher to what extent capitalism is part and parcel of life by looking at the way *jouissance* and phantasms circulate within the framework of production and exchange. Lyotard sees in capitalism “the return, but unaffirmed and unrecognized, of what it rejects – libidinal intensity in the heart of neutralized exchanges.”<sup>3</sup> The nature of spending money, of exchange and production, reveals the way libido works. But it also confirms that capitalism is libidinally desired, even if it might be theoretically and conceptually denounced.

According to Lyotard, what we regard as creative intensity or subversive desire ultimately becomes currency and exchange. It’s not that we necessarily desire commerce; rather, we need the surplus attraction or estrangement that accompanies material culture and artistic production. Desire constructed via surplus is intertwined with surplus value, and hence with an economy molded via surpluses of various kinds – phantasmatic, sexual, libidinal, financial. That makes capitalism’s power stronger, but also reveals that *jouissance* (enjoyment) is not necessarily liberatory. Quite the opposite: it resides within the logic that seems to be contrary to it. Individually experienced pleasure or pulsion may be inseparable from the desire for power and domination.<sup>4</sup>

Although he mainly discusses capitalist production, Lyotard nevertheless extends this libidinal logic to any society, even to the symbolic order – religious acts, martyrology, and sacrifice. This means that even ostensibly non-libidinal acts, such as sacrificial deeds prompted by ethical or political convictions, can be approached from the point of view of libidinal drives and can be interpreted as transgressive realizations of enjoyment.

Such a totalizing attitude towards the instinctive and affective was also characteristic of Deleuze and Foucault. Although these authors uncovered the ambivalent character of the unconscious and sexuality, they nevertheless

reserved a subversive, emancipatory role for them. The components of capitalism were simultaneously its oblique subvertors. To deprive the economy of its libidinal resource would imply the termination and castration of desire altogether. Getting rid of the vicious part of libidinality would also get rid of its potential for creative fervor, since in a libidinal economy, creativity can only develop parallel to libidinal drives. Thus, capitalist alienation is fiercely criticized, but it nevertheless remains unconsciously seductive to its critics.



Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Saint Teresa in Ecstasy*, 1647–52. Marble sculpture.

## 2.

But what if the society rids itself of the tempting form of a commodity, of surplus value, and grounds economy on competition in production and distribution according to the necessities constructed by de-libidinalized habits of consuming?

In the work of Soviet Marxist philosophers and psychologists, especially Lev Vygotsky, one comes across an unconcealed mistrust of the role of the unconscious – mistrust of the idea that there might be a dichotomy between the unconscious and conscious regimes. In his book *Mishlenie i Rech (Thought and Language)* (1934), Vygotsky harshly criticizes Jean Piaget for his Freudian interpretation of the infant psyche.<sup>5</sup> Piaget points to the psyches of children under the age of seven as an example of the autonomy of a child’s syncretic thinking, its “autistic” fixation on the satisfaction of desires and pleasures. Piaget interprets this feature as

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1  
Lanchester, “Marx at 193,” *London Review of Books* vol. 34, no. 7 (April 5, 2012) <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n07/john-lanchester/marx-at-193>

2  
Alastair Fowler, “Mode and Subgenre,” chap. 7 in *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

3  
I must reference Kojin Karatani’s essential *Transcritique*, which I encountered for the first time in the middle of this writing. Karatani’s point that “surplus value ... comes from the difference of value systems in the circulation process ... and yet [this] difference is created by technological innovation in the production process,” is similar to my own. The fine details of the distinction need not concern us here – it’s more important to indicate a shared debt to Kozo Uno. See Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, trans. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 11.

4  
Some posit only three, with consumption belonging to circulation. My preference for four, rearticulated as production, representation, reproduction, and distribution, reflects a desire to create a framework capable of recording more variations in the class struggle than has been possible hitherto.

5  
Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 39.

6  
It may be best today to substitute “reproduction” for “consumption” and “representation” for “circulation.”

7  
Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital, Volume 2* (New York: Verso, 2013).

8  
Ibid., 17–18. Originally in Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), 89.

9  
Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital, Volume 2*, 23. Emphasis in original.

10  
Quoted in *ibid.*, 23. Originally in Marx, *Grundrisse*, 99. Emphasis in Marx’s original.

11  
Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 32, 36. I have left out Erik Olin Wright’s similar accounting in *Classes* (p. 9), which also privileges mode of production in the overdetermined way.

12  
Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 24.

13  
Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 94.

14  
Some will argue that Marx himself does this with his concept of “real subsumption,” and perhaps this is so. I cannot help but feel, however, that our attachment to real subsumption is a rhetorical one, as comforting and satisfactory as the idea of predestination was in its time. Certainly the two can be distinguished at the level of theology, but in practice, both serve to misrecognize as eternal and necessary what is, in truth, always already contingent and incomplete. As Castoriadis says of reification: “The essential tendency of capitalism, can never be wholly realized. If it were, if the system were actually able to change individuals into things moved only by economic ‘forces,’ it would collapse not in the long run, but immediately. The struggle of people against reification is, just as much as the tendency towards reification, the condition for the functioning of capitalism. A factory in which the workers were really and totally mere cogs in the machine, blindly executing the orders of management, would come to a stop in a quarter of an hour.” Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 16.

15  
Stephen Greenblatt, “Towards a Poetics of Culture,” in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989), 8.

16  
*Ibid.*, 3.

17  
Politically, of course, they couldn’t be more different, apologists for “totalitarianism” be damned. Generically speaking, *Being and Time* is a work of fascist anticapitalism.

18  
As it happens, the distance between alienation and abstraction is everything, really, which Lukács only understood later. For a more recent reframing of the same, fundamental question, see Ray Brassier, “Wandering Abstraction,” *Metamute.org*, February 13, 2014 <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/wandering-abs-traction>

19  
See Lucian Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger* (Candor, NY: Telos Press, 1970).

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singularity of political decisions) and so it must be jettisoned.

While Streeck cites Polanyi to bring “capitalism” back in, Block cites him to drive it out; where Sewell sees dynamic capitalism as the only stable structure at work throughout history, Streeck sees its dynamism as a source of instability; and when Block sees capitalism as apolitical and mired in economic determinism, both Sewell and Streeck seem to valorize its conceptual utility for precisely this reason – for the way it explains and determines otherwise disparate and apparently unrelated political and social events. It was this nexus of contradictory uses of the term “capitalism” – which appeared particularly troublesome in the light of a recent political setback – that launched this rapidly concluding inquiry.

Absent the awareness of the different levels of analysis at work in political economy, “capitalism” inevitably elevates distinct and conflicting relations within and between the modes of consumption, circulation, production, and distribution, confusing them with an overwhelming para-natural force: the creation of surplus value, or what I have called “alchemy.” The result is that, in one way or another, every “capitalism” is always already a spiritualism, a mystification that places the actual levers of collective emancipation out of reach.

It is in many ways the specific virtue of the institutionalist tradition that it recovered these elemental and analytic distinctions – in order, of course, to knit them up together in new combinations, like that of the “regime of accumulation,”<sup>41</sup> wherein a concept like Fordism is fashioned precisely to account for the combination of productive and consumptive modes into a single accumulative logic. Any anxiety over Streeck’s reformation of “capitalism” is thus precisely a concern for the potential loss of this level of specificity in political-economic analysis. Instead, it is better to talk about an international mode of circulation, which interacts with the nationalist mode of distribution, than to return to, or invite back in, “capitalism.”

In this respect, the term “capitalism” should be retired, not because it is too determining or apolitical, but rather because it is not determined enough, having never shed the spiritualist essence of its popular origins in Sombart and Weber. It elides precisely those distinctions that critical political economy intended to recover, confusing conjunctural or historical analysis of the generic or the modal kind with attempts to consider surplus value separately from its every instance of appearance.

This position – call it radical anti-

“capitalism” – has the virtue of allowing for struggles occurring in different moments and across different modes to be understood as engaging in a common project. No longer will it be necessary to sublimate the campaigns of certain class formations – like those against the patriarchal mode of reproduction<sup>42</sup> – to others like the refusal of Taylorism on the factory floor. Similarly, it will be equally difficult to understand a successful struggle in one moment – like the destruction of private property – as being sufficient for emancipation in all the others. Such is the hope, at least, for a world without “capitalism.”<sup>43</sup>

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the mode of the unconscious as such. This stage of infancy represents the psychic condition directed to individual pleasure and detached from culture and reality. All social, logical, and generalizing functions emerge later.

Contrary to the way the pleasure principle is treated in the theory of the unconscious, Vygotsky often paraphrases *pleasure as necessity* (потребность) and inscribes it into the social and collective dimension. Generally speaking, in works of Soviet philosophy in which the impact of the unconscious, pleasure, libidinality, and individual psychology was debated (works by, for example, Evald Ilyenkov, Mikhail Lifschitz, and Mikhail Bakhtin), the emphasis was always on the fact that social functions precede the instincts and hence the regimes of the unconscious. For example, Vygotsky insists that before the “autistic” period, the child is already inscribed into sociality; even the egocentric syncretic modes of speech and thinking are part of a more complex developmental teleology. Within the framework of such a teleology, individual pleasure, desire, and its satisfaction are complements to the broader demands of the social, even at a very early stage. By contrast, in Piaget’s system and in psychoanalysis, the principle of pleasure, the libidinal, and the drives precede objective reality, and are incompatible alterities in relation to consciousness.

Vygotsky’s critical claim against psychoanalysis is that it turns the pleasure principle into an autonomous vital resource (*primum movens*, as Vygotsky put it), when it could have just remained a biologically auxiliary condition. Vygotsky insists that the attachment or detachment of a child to the implementation of social procedures is dependent on the social conditions of his or her upbringing – on whether the child is raised in the family or in broader collectivities. This presupposes the acquisition of cultural and social habits by way of collectivity, rather than via the nuclear family. It means that even when a child is confined to the father-mother nucleus, he or she acquires qualities general for humanity and society, since these qualities have been constructed diachronically over the course of human history. From this standpoint – a standpoint that obsessed Soviet Marxist philosophy – so-called polymorphous sexuality and the whole set of sexual perversions ascribed to the child by psychoanalysis can be regarded as superfluous. Perversions and sexuality can be ascribed to the child only if they unfold via the linguistic articulation and registration of them – which the child, at least in the pre-oedipal (or even oedipal) stage, is not able to do.

When Piaget autonomizes pleasure and

detaches it from logic and reality, he places pleasure (which Vygotsky calls the satisfaction of needs) prior to the child’s later socialization adjustment to reality. By contrast, Vygotsky insists that the satisfaction of needs (which Piaget calls the regime of pleasure) cannot be divorced from the social adaptation to reality.

According to Vygotsky, pleasure is not just about receiving pleasure; rather, it is inserted into a more complex teleological set of references to reality. This logic is diametrically opposed to the logic of libidinal economy that characterizes capitalist society. Socialist “reality” is already de-libidinalized (which does not at all mean that it is de-eroticized). Desire and pleasure can only be understood as necessities to be implemented. The gap between the need for pleasure and the necessity for common values is minimized. A society in which production tries to attain the conditions of use value rids itself of the surplus economy – both in desire, as well as in consuming and communication. However, the rejection of surplus doesn’t at all imply the termination of the extreme, the intense, and the excessive. On the contrary, excessive action is manifested elsewhere – in labor, ethical deeds, social responsibility, art, and culture. It becomes the zeal and toil of dedication rather than pleasure or *jouissance*.

Thus, under the conditions of an economy aimed at use value, desire stops being libidinal. By contrast, in Lyotard’s case, libidinality is extended to all acts, even symbolically motivated ones like sacrifice, the sublime, and love.

### 3.

Lyotard expertly describes the way the commodity form permeates bodies and their impulses. This is why the critique of the commodity cannot overthrow the regime of capital and the libidinal economy: because the body, the unconscious, and desire remain aroused by the commodity. This does not, of course, take place in a straightforward way. The point here is that the commodity form is constructed so that it serves and extends the phantasmatic drives of the unconscious. If we now turn to Piaget’s infantile pleasure principle (as criticized by Vygotsky), we find there the idea that pleasure can only be satisfied through the deformation of reality and its reduction to the ego’s drive for pleasure. Egocentric phantasms prevail over reality, such that the “autistic” thought aimed at pleasure never deals with “truth” or “the real.”

But Vygotsky, along with many other Soviet thinkers, tried to prove that the satisfaction of desire should not be opposed to the adjustment to reality. Necessity can be realized in the

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domain of reality, not counter to it, as Piaget claims. Even the “autistic” thought can be a part of a child’s broader thinking. Similarly, there is no abstract thought without a relation to reality, to concreteness. Both the unconscious and the speculative or logical regimes are part and parcel of reality. Desire is tied to reality rather than to phantasms; it functions within the regime of necessity. According to Vygotsky, detaching pleasure and needs from the accommodation to reality would endow them with metaphysical import, which would in turn completely detach the realistic principle and “realistic thinking” (the opposite of autism and its pleasure principle) from needs (since the needs are pleasures and are considered to be phantasmatic).<sup>6</sup> In this situation, both realms – “pure thinking” and pleasure would be deprived of reality altogether.<sup>7</sup>

To repeat: for Vygotsky and his Soviet colleagues, pleasure is described as a need to be satisfied. This means that pleasure is not epistemologically separate from necessity. It also implies the non-libidinality of an economy based on necessity and its unmediated satisfaction (this unmediatedness is actually the quality of use value). By contrast, in a libidinal economy, pleasure, even when it is satisfied, is embedded in the diversification of modes of mediation – mediation between the drives and their satisfaction. It is precisely this gap that is phantasmatic and that produces the surplus.

#### 4.

Historically, in socialist countries, extensive underground economies developed to meet the demand for alluring commodities from abroad. Western researchers often ask why the governments of these socialist countries didn’t try to satisfy this demand themselves. Wouldn’t it have been profitable for the socialist economies to satisfy this desire for beauty, technical sophistication, success, and fashion? Perhaps, they may speculate, there was some ideological imperative to keep the whole spectrum of production, trade, and services plain enough to evade the attractiveness generated by a surplus economy – attractiveness that first takes the form of a phantasm, and is then embodied in a commodity. I put this question to Andrey Kolganov, a well-known economist who researches the Soviet economy. He answered that there was never any deliberate social engineering through unreliable services or intentionally unattractive and poorly designed commodities. Rather, this situation was the consequence of a planned economy that did not so much aim to satisfy individual, specific demands; rather, it was constructed to satisfy basic shared (and hence general) necessities.

Commodities were radically de-personified. Paradoxically, this de-personified, de-privatized material culture met the demand for de-alienation among individuals, who no longer needed any privacy or individualized space.

In this economy, the object became the tautological realization of its idea – as if it were possible to imagine the chairness of a chair or to wear the coatness of a coat. Interestingly, this applied even to food, which had to be healthy, but deprived of any specific gourmet features, meaning that one had to eat the cheeseness of cheese – i.e., one kind of it, not its varieties. This asceticism was not pre-designed ideologically. The de-libidinalized commodity was just a consequence of the planned economy. This quality was manifested in a number of works by Moscow Conceptualists. To designate this anti-commodity condition, Ekaterina Degot used a term invented by Boris Arvatov: “the object as comrade.” This referred to the de-commodified and thus de-libidinalized quality of objects produced under socialism.<sup>8</sup>

These non-libidinal conditions of production implied an economy that was not economical, that did not aim at economic growth: economy and production were had to be subordinated to social and cultural criteria. Production served the interests of society’s shared values. That is why social and economic efficiencies were not treated as one and the same thing.

Here we encounter an interesting paradox. The society that tried to de-alienate social relations produced extremely unattractive commodities and artifacts of material culture (which even compelled the Moscow Conceptualists to invent a concept for a Soviet-produced object: *Plokhaya Vesh* – bad thing). By contrast, the society in which production was by definition based on alienated labor and social relations generated commodities that aroused intimacy, desire, and comfort – i.e., attitudes towards the commodity-object that frame it as something lovable and unique. The anti-commodity was too general, since it was the embodiment of the idea of a basic need, whereas the capitalist commodity acquired the qualities of an unalienated, desired thing. The socialist “object as comrade” was bad and undesired, as if proving that in a new society based on equality, desire should be evacuated altogether.

Later, this unattractiveness of Soviet material culture was characterized by its critics as the embodiment of inhuman, abstract mass production. But maybe the fact that objects were produced unattractively and badly didn’t at all annul the principle that had been developed by Boris Arvatov and the Productivists – namely, that precisely the generalized, communalized object that doesn’t meet the demands of

however, this solution opens up the problem that gives his essay its title – namely, how to account for the significant variety of different regimes that exist despite the apparently univocal discipline of the capitalist world system:

[Wallerstein’s theory offers] no real acknowledgement that under a particular hegemon, there is a possibility of a variety of different regimes that would provide different levels of constraint on governmental choices. And some of these regimes could open up space for some societies to pursue greater equality and greater democratization of economic decision making than anyone associates with the idea of capitalism.<sup>36</sup>

Again, if this is the case, it is because the “idea of capitalism” is always already confusing at least two of our three levels of analysis. All Wallerstein has done is reposition an international mode of circulation so that it can be seen to operate in tension with the nationalist mode of distribution. Indeed, the failure to read distribution as a distinct mode of social conflict, complete with its own historical set of antagonisms, accounts for Block’s fixation on “government” or “state-sponsored fixes.” Most of these are located within the moment of distribution, insofar as they concern institutions whose jurisdiction is the price of land, labor, and capital. Today, by and large, such institutions are national ones. Nationalism, understood as a mode of distribution, not only allows for different regimes, but actually requires them, as it is the ability of nations to enforce differences in the price of labor that allows for the global discipline of the workforce.

In both Block and Streeck, “capitalism” is thus a summoner of final vocabularies, revealing what each writer takes to be the most significant problem facing his respective traditions. For Streeck, “capitalism” has in fact been absent from the institutionalist tradition to which he belongs; however, he underestimates the extent to which that absence was enabling and emancipatory, even inaugural for that approach. For Block, addressing himself to the amalgam of commercialist, productivist, and abstractionist approaches he understands to be Marxist, “capitalism” has consistently covered over the political stakes of these approaches. However, it is too much to declare that capitalism has always entailed a forgetting or an absence of the political *tout court*; rather, it provincializes it, making some genres merely political and others merely economic, rather than understanding each as a moment of political economy.

Furthermore, it was precisely in order to

recover these specific political histories at the level of their institutional evolution, adaptation, drift, and decay that concepts like the “mode of regulation” or the “liberal market economy” were first formulated.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Block’s proposed swap of “market society” for “capitalism” is already contained in the ostensible target of his article, the “varieties of capitalism” approach that substituted two kinds of market economy, liberal and coordinated, for one homogenous “capitalism.”<sup>38</sup>

## 2. Capitalism as Temporality

We have seen, I hope, that the more “capitalism” refers to the alchemical level rather than that of the mode or the genre, the broader and more totalizing the claims that can be made for it.

In this respect, William Sewell’s argument in “The Temporalities of Capitalism” that “capitalism” is best understood as a kind of time is perhaps the most honest of all the examples considered.<sup>39</sup> Capitalism, for Sewell, acts to structure an otherwise fundamentally discontinuous historical chronology – it stands opposed, that is, to precisely the vision of history for which Sewell is known. Amidst his radically anti-teleological conception of historical time, Sewell has located some consistency in the world system since 1700, and he calls this consistency “capitalist temporality.” Thus, in the same way that Lyotard exempted capitalism from an otherwise total skepticism towards metanarratives, Sewell argues that, to the extent that a transhistorical mode of time can be understood to exist, this should be called capitalism.

On its face, Sewell’s is an abstractionist understanding of capitalism – he cites Lukács and Postone – even as he appreciates the importance of institutional analyses like those of Kathleen Thelan. Eventually, his spiritualism becomes explicit, as when he claims that one would have “to be a God to write a truly adequate history of capitalism.”<sup>40</sup> If Sewell’s analysis has a unique value today, it is because, unlike typical examples of spiritualism and abstraction, it recovers the sense of “capitalism” as being an incomplete project, as something that is always encountering resistance, even if this resistance remains entirely contingent and open.

It is interesting, finally, that while Streeck contrasts the need for “stability in human affairs” with the “dynamism of capitalism,” for Sewell, this dynamism, however expansive and flexible, nevertheless represents the only stability in an otherwise radically unstable – discontinuous, contingent, and temporally open – account of history. For Block, too, “capitalism” stands opposed to singularity (albeit the

regulation is tantamount to saying that some sovereign power established regular trade flows, codified and guaranteed universally applicable social norms and procedures, and then, when the need arose, delegated its powers to local states that were simultaneously established throughout the world. It is tantamount to saying that every compromise and every shift in the balance of power at any given point on the surface of the earth corresponds to the need to adjust a totally adaptable and perfectly homeostatic cybernetic system.<sup>30</sup>

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In phrases like “sovereign power,” “universally applicable,” and “perfectly homeostatic cybernetic system,” we can hear echoes of spiritualism and abstractionism alike. The contrast between analyses focused at the modal, institutional level of the political economy, and ones focused on the more general, alchemical one is clear when we compare Lipietz’s desire for particularity with Wendy Brown’s move in the opposite direction:

Capitalism remains our life form. Understood not just as a mode of production, distribution, or exchange but as an unparalleled maker of history, capital arguably remains the dominant force in the organization of collective human existence, conditioning every element of social, political, cultural, intellectual, emotional, and kin life.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, Streeck returns to “capitalism” precisely because he does see a common institutional trend across many specific national contexts, namely the trend towards liberalization under the influence of globalization. This might not be Lipietz’s “perfectly homeostatic cybernetic system” or Brown’s “life form,” but it is enough, for Streeck, to justify speaking again in terms of capitalism.

### Two Contemporary Approaches to “Capitalism”

Hopefully, we have come some distance in our understanding of what is going on behind this word. We have seen how it confuses distinct levels of analysis and how it thus obscures the different genres of the political economy. Two final, contemporary approaches to “capitalism” reinforce this reading, indicating how the word continues to point in opposite directions.

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### 1. Market Society contra Capitalism

Despite reaching the opposite conclusion, the sociologist Fred Block draws on the same Polanyian framework as Streeck to argue, in his 2012 essay “Varieties of What? Should We Still Be Using the Concept of Capitalism?,” that the term be abandoned in favor of Polanyi’s “market society.”<sup>32</sup> Block gives the two most “coherent” definitions of “capitalism” as those offered by Marx and Engels, on the one hand, and by Immanuel Wallerstein, on the other. The first Block refers to as the “genetic theory of capitalism” in that

It is fundamentally similar to the idea that the DNA encoded in each cell shapes the structure and development of the entire organism. Rather than the cell, the basic unit is the production unit where surplus is extracted. The dominant mode of surplus extraction, in turn, shapes the structure and development of the entire society.<sup>33</sup>

We recognize the problem: so long as production remains indistinguishable from the creation of surplus value, then the theory of capitalism becomes the series of hybridized exceptions with which I began Part I. For Block, this hyphenation almost always involves the state, and is “characteristic of virtually all” of twentieth-century Marxist theorizing: Lenin, Luxemburg, Hilferding, Baran and Sweezy, Ernest Mandel, and the French regulation theorists all “seek to delineate different stages or phases of capitalist development by analyzing the different ways in which the state seeks to resolve and manage the underlying contradictions of the system.” But, crucially, Block argues that each of these fixes “could give you societies with different class structures, different dynamics, and different contradictions,” and that thus change or eliminate “the unifying element” that defines capitalism as a system for Marx and Engels.<sup>34</sup>

However, so long as we understand alchemy, rather than production, to be that unifying element, the existence of countless, accumulating institutional arrangements, state-sponsored or otherwise, no longer appears to threaten the coherence of the system. On the contrary, these confirm it.

Nevertheless, Block argues that this impasse was resolved by Immanuel Wallerstein, who shifted the element underpinning capitalism from surplus-value extraction to the existence of a system of global trade. This solved the problem of accounting for the various changes in capitalist nations by offering capitalism as “a world system that exerts unrelenting pressure on societies to obey its commands.”<sup>35</sup> For Block,



This poster was designed by Alexander Rodchenko in 1923.

personal taste or phantasmatic desire is able to de-alienate communication among its users (former consumers). This is because personal desire is refused in favor of impersonally deployed de-alienation.

Thus, the unattractiveness of Soviet goods was not the ideological imperative of the Party. Rather, it was the consequence of economic shortages that resulted from the demand for equal distribution for all. Modesty and asceticism were an inevitable consequence of social equality. By contrast, under capitalism and its forms of sexualization, the unconscious oedipal sexuality of the family is guaranteed by “nice things” (commodities of quality), which shape personal imaginaries. Without the fetishism of commodities, it would be impossible to design any constructs or languages of sexuality. This is one of the important issues ignored by Freud.

To repeat: according to a widely held belief, sexuality during historical socialism was suppressed by authoritarian restrictions on various freedoms. But, the argument goes, since sexuality is the epitome of liberation, and since sexuality can never be absent from any society, sexuality is always at least latently embedded in any society as the potential for freedom – freedom from prejudices, power, control, and so forth. However, judging by statistical data, the rate of sexual intercourse under socialism may have been even higher than under capitalism.<sup>9</sup>

But when we identify sexuality with freedom on the one hand, and with sexual intercourse on the other, one thing is overlooked: sexuality is not the same as statistics about sexual relations. If we accept this, then ignoring sexuality does not mean the end of sex. Libidinal drive, pleasure, and sexuality are not directly connected to the practice of genital sexuality. Aaron Schuster, in his foreword to Andrei Platonov’s pamphlet “Antisexus,” emphasizes this feature – namely, the incongruence between genital sexuality and the libidinal drives as theorized in Freud’s interpretation of the libido.<sup>10</sup> Schuster first comments on Stanislaw Lem’s novel *Sexplosion*, in which the extinction of genital function due to the drug “Nosex” only shifts desire into the oral drive, i.e., perversion. Then he quotes Freud from *Civilization and Its Discontents*: “Sometimes one seems to perceive that it is not only the pressure of civilization but something in the nature of the function [of libido] itself which denies us full satisfaction and urges us along other paths.”<sup>11</sup>

In other words, Freudian interpretation (and many other interpretations that follow Freud) presents the libido as a negative drive that results from the fact that genital intercourse is not necessarily supposed to stand for sexuality

or libidinality. In the quotation above, Freud describes the surplus element, that very “other path,” which constructs desire and pleasure and nourishes the economy of libidinality. Sexuality and libidinal pulsion can be present in things not connected semantically with sexuality at all, and vice versa: genital intercourse can be deprived of the languages of sexuality.

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Odessa, 1982. Photo: Jana Berri.

## 5.

The economy of use value eliminated sexuality in socialist culture, and it was superseded by the languages of enthusiasm and amorousness. But why couldn’t the rhetoric of enthusiasm and amorousness accommodate the languages of sexuality? We know from Foucault that the languages of sexuality are generated to control sexual life, and that together with the clinical function, they turn sexuality into surplus pleasure. By the same token, the unconscious as a language had been constructed to grasp what is beyond consciousness – to treat psychic deviations using clinical methodology. However, over the course of the history of psychoanalytic

sinister-sounding organizations – churches, schools, unions – are what we now call institutions. It was a short step to bundle these together into broader accounts of their complementary interaction; concepts like mode of regulation, regime of accumulation,<sup>27</sup> and later, worlds of welfare capitalism, liberal market economy, and coordinated market economy, are all, in some sense, groupings of ideological state apparatuses concerned with the maintenance of a given economic arrangement.

Althusser saw himself as pushing back against an undue Hegelian influence – against, that is, a certain abstractionism. A classic confrontation between abstractionism and early institutionalism can be found in Manuel Castells’s *The Urban Question*.<sup>28</sup> In it, he sharply attacks Henri Lefebvre for allowing “the urban” to operate ideologically – that is, as a determining factor in *contemporary* economic reproduction, rather than as a *transhistorical* form common to most of recorded history and thus to many different economic arrangements. For Castells, the city cannot be ideological, in terms of reproducing the status quo, because as an institution it has continued to exist across many different political-economic histories. Translated to our own framework, Castells

accuses Lefebvre of putting the urban in the place of alchemy – of elevating it to a total social force – when in fact the urban is never entirely on one side or the other, but is instead a site of struggle.

Institutionalism is not introduced here to minimize the distance between a concept like Fordism<sup>29</sup> and one like diversified quality production, but rather to indicate a generic affinity for political-economic explanation in terms of institutional complementarities drawn from across the genres – that is, a preference for thinking at the level of the mode, wherein institutional sets become the building blocks of the political economy.

Streeck is certainly correct to note that this focus has had the effect of dislodging “capitalism” from the center of analysis. However, as we have seen, this was because capitalism had become a reference to the alchemical field, an abstract and history-less monologue of domination. This tension is particularly evident in Alain Lipietz, an early regulationist, writing already in 1977:

To argue that world capitalism has from the outset been a single regime of accumulation with forms of global

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Daniel Cockersell, *Chaos War Mammoth*, undated. PVC figurine from the game *Storm of Magic*. The figurine is a replica of an original sculpture by Jes Goodwin.

of Lukács and Martin Heidegger, or the thinkers who stood behind Jameson's Marxism and Lyotard's postmodernism, respectively.<sup>17</sup>

Both Lukács and Heidegger described a world fallen into maleficent abstraction or alienation.<sup>18</sup> For Lukács, this alienation has its origins in the dominance of the commodity form, while for Heidegger – who is, it has been shown, responding more or less directly to Lukács – the bad abstractions of “Western metaphysics” are alienating.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that abstraction is equally important for the literary critic Jameson, who reaches back to “capitalism” by way of Sartre, Adorno, and Lukács, as it is for the postmodernist Lyotard, for whom the term “capitalism” nevertheless survives the collapse of the metanarratives that produced it. Capitalism the abstract divider, now called metaphysics, and capitalism the abstract uniter, now called metanarrative, should both be read for what they are: attempts to treat the alchemical metalevel of the political-economic field. In this respect, both treatments function like negative imprints of the spiritualism of Sombart and Weber. In the same way that Sombart and Weber read the claims of religion as transparent descriptions, both Heidegger and Lukács take the scientific status of alchemy at face value. This leads both thinkers to confront positivism as the bad science of modern life.

This connection is not arbitrary. Alchemy – that is, the creation of surplus value – and positivism both participate in the misrecognition of the human as an object for naturalizing science. The refusal of this misrecognition at the moment of production stands behind our understanding of surplus value as alchemical, as the imprint of the labor movement on thought. Because Marx could not, or at least did not, consider refusals located in other moments of the political economy, his results reflect his data. By locating alchemy first from within the theater of production, Marx comes to rely on “production” as the morphological model for all subsequent processes of surplus-value creation. This is why, in other words, it is the *production* of surplus value, and not its distribution or circulation. With this understanding in place, the theory of surplus value says simply this: that a misrecognition of the kind required to process human labor as a commodity can be found at multiple moments throughout the political economy.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, for Lukács and Heidegger, positivism consists in nothing other than the elevation of this misrecognition to the universal principle of social life.

And this unifying anti-positivism explains why, for Greenblatt, both conceptions appear to reduce history “to a convenient anecdotal ornament,” where “capitalism appears not as a

complex social and economic development,” but “as a malign philosophical principle.” This opens the door to his historical reorientation:

If capitalism is invoked not as a unitary demonic principle, but as a complex historical movement in a world without paradisaal origins or chiliastic expectations, then an inquiry into the relation between art and society in capitalist cultures must address both the formation of the working distinctions upon which Jameson remarks and the totalizing impulse upon which Lyotard remarks.<sup>21</sup>

The success of the subsequent New Historicism thus highlights the extent to which history had dropped out of abstractionist approaches to capitalism, in a way that it had not in productivist or commercialist examples. We can now understand this to be a function of the abstractionist focus on the alchemical field, rather than on the particular history of a given mode or genre, which, alone or in combination, can never be understood purely from the standpoint of alchemy. In this respect, the New Historicism shifts the focus of analysis from the field back towards the genre and the mode. It therefore belongs to our last way of reading: institutionalism.

#### Capitalism and Institutionalism

In what amounts to our first contemporary example of “capitalism,” Wolfgang Streeck closes his examination of the German economy, *Re-Forming Capitalism*, with a chapter entitled “Bringing Capitalism Back In.”<sup>22</sup> He offers a sketch for what he calls a “historical-institutionalist” model of capitalism. Institutional economics, Streeck writes, “must drop its pretensions at timeless and placeless general theory and focus instead, not on *institutions as such*, and not even on *economic institutions*, but on *the economic institutions of capitalism*.”<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Streeck renders the very appeal of institutionalism in a way that recalls Greenblatt's frustration with “capitalism” as a unitary demonic principle, in writing that “by focusing on capitalism as a really existing social and economic order in historical time, institutionalist analysis avoids ... speaking of an abstract ‘economy.’”<sup>24</sup>

Such a focus on the economic institutions of capitalism is only apparently new, and can actually be seen at least as far back as what is known as the Regulation School.<sup>25</sup> One could probably trace this even farther, all the way back to Althusser's positing of “ideological state apparatuses” that secure the reproduction of society.<sup>26</sup> Althusser's examples for these

and post-psychoanalytic thought, what used to be the symptoms of a disease in the realm of the unconscious became the vocabulary for creative, nonrational, and hence liberating forms of behavior, production, and communication. The Soviet mistrust of the unconscious was never a mistrust of its clinical, therapeutic, and research function. Rather, it was a mistrust of a certain dominant ideology of the unconscious in which all drives are reduced to suppressed enjoyment, acquire the status of an *a priori* principle, and thereby take on emancipatory potentialities.

In Lyotard's interpretation of pleasure, the totalizing impact of the libidinal and the unconscious is always present. Its surplus appears as a macabre force. However, the evacuation of the libidinal surplus is impossible, since it is impossible to terminate the pleasure principle. Therefore, the viciousness of the libidinal economy should be intensified to make it appear even more vicious, so that an unimaginable or inhuman *jouissance* will subvert or transgresses the imaginable pleasure. This would mean that, even when pleasure becomes a vice that might be ousted in favor of religion, love, ideology, or any sacrificial procedure, the pleasure principle and the surplus economy are sustained. According to this logic, a saint is a prostitute. But a resisting worker is also a prostitute. Every political economy is libidinal, since any excess can only be libidinal. Hence, the sublime also belongs to the category of unattained *jouissance*, since it is imagined at the phantasmatic level.

However, I want to assert that the shift away from capitalist production led to the termination of surplus value and its libidinal dimension.

Within the framework of psychoanalysis, phenomena related to the superego – the ideal, love, death, the ethical deed – become so unattainable that they acquire either a repressive and censoring function, or are only approached through the regime of transgression. This regime converts these conscious phenomena into individualized *jouissance*, thus drawing them into the realm of the unconscious and turning them into drives. These phenomena thus either remain in the regime of pleasure and *jouissance*, or are labeled as repressive. This is the generally acknowledged constellation of psychoanalysis.

The characteristics of a non-libidinal economy described earlier suggest that in the Soviet context, this constellation functioned differently. Here, sublime phenomena are not regarded as the superego's counteraction against pleasures and freedom, nor as transgressive acts that inscribe them into the pleasure principle in twisted way. Instead, all the sublime phenomena

that are usually symbolic – death, idea, love, solidarity, ethical deeds – become part of objective reality, precisely because the allure of the commodity is removed from them. Such a disposition changes the form and constellation of desire, the role of sexuality, and the attitude towards reality. Along with such a change, the dichotomy according to which freedom, desire, and drives belong to the unconscious, while the superego and consciousness belong to power, ideology, and apparatuses that censure the unconscious, is also sublated.

If in capitalism even the sublime acquires libidinal qualities, in socialism the object tends to equal its use value, tends to stop being a commodity, and doesn't seduce or tempt anymore. In addition, the idea (e.g., the idea of communism) is not something remote, imaginary, or phantasmatic – not the voice of the Big Other – but instead permeates reality and becomes an exchangeable, concrete, everyday value. The further distancing of already alienated phenomena is the aesthetic device of capitalist society. By contrast, in socialist society sublime and unimaginable phenomena pervade the everyday as if they were common, unremarkable things.

What happens to sexuality under such conditions? Sexual intercourse is of course present, but it becomes one of the modes of communication within the framework of existential necessity – be it love, friendship, or even just physiological need. That is, it is inscribed into the more general framework, so that the elements of sexuality do not acquire any surplus value that would make them seductive in a specific way. Therefore, it is not necessary to represent or circulate sexuality's sovereign images as the simulacra of desire, separate from their tie to existential or ontic necessity. Sexuality is just one of the modes of social production, amorous attachment, and communication: it doesn't have an autonomous value or a seductive allure. It is inscribed into the collective Eros, presupposing joy rather than enjoyment (*jouissance*).

The way Andrei Platonov depicts sexual intercourse in his novella *Djan* is interesting. In the midst of their exodus, the starving people treat sex as a basic necessity, in the same way they treat sleep and nourishment. This necessity isn't framed as an alternative to love or the sublime. The sublime is not detached from the mundane, but is implanted into matter and bodies, even when these bodies are on the verge of physical collapse. Likewise, in Platonov's short story “The River Potudan,” when Nikita, the husband of Ljuba, first has sexual intercourse with her after hesitating to do so for a long time, Platonov describes it as a “poor and inevitable

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pleasure, from which Nikita didn't acquire more joy than he hitherto experienced with Ljuba without it."<sup>12</sup>

It is traditionally thought that Platonov's writing is confined to the sexual part of love relationships. He is often juxtaposed with Alexandra Kollontai's anti-puritanic standpoint. According to Aaron Schuster,

Platonov and Kollontai condense two separate strands of sexual theorizing that equally belong to the revolutionary project and express its emancipatory aspirations: on the one hand, a male-dominated ethic of sacrifice in the service of constructing another world, and on the other, the invention of a new "love-comradeship" based on pleasure, equality and solidarity, to replace intimate relations dominated by the bourgeois property form.<sup>13</sup>

However, Platonov's novels, while teeming with sex scenes, are either completely devoid of the phantasm of libidinality, or depict the libidinal features characteristic of sexuality as the squalor of a lonely individual unable to overcome his dependence on drives. And Alexandra Kollontai's manifesto "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle," which is considered to be an open declaration of sexual liberation, does not at all contradict to the non-libidinal form of Eros.<sup>14</sup> Kollontai's criticism of the bourgeois family nucleus is fallaciously regarded as a simple legitimizing of free sex, when her claim is in fact more complex and demanding than that.

Although the political means for achieving the goals stated in Kollontai's manifesto are left quite vague, its futurological motivation is clearly articulated. Kollontai calls for the convergence of comradeship and political Eros, which would reconstruct the logic of individualized sexual communication. If the collective were motivated by de-alienated production and social relations, then sex and love relationships would stem from political Eros rather than from an individual's demand to get pleasure from another individual. Kollontai's quest for freedom in sex does not so much legitimize what might be regarded as adultery; rather, it calls for creating new terms of friendly solidarity, which can only come about after the creation of new economic and social conditions. According to Kollontai, the same bourgeois society that makes an individual feel solitary and alienated also provokes him to seek another individual "soul," privatize that "other soul," and thus ground love in the imposition of obligations on another person. Kollontai insists that the abolition of private property would eliminate the privatizing attitude towards the "other" in love relationships. But only in a

communist economy would it be possible to transform love relationships and sexual intercourse from "blind physical" acts into a "creative principle." Her manifesto is not so much an apologia for free sex as it is an appeal to transform society so that it acquires a sense of solidarity, which would in turn have a transformative impact on the human psyche. However, this change in the human psyche can only take place as a consequence of the abolition of private property and the transformation of social and economic relations. Thus, the destruction of marriage and the family nucleus is not aimed at liberalizing sexual relations, but rather at constructing the potential for class consciousness. It is aimed at producing a society of common interest that supersedes individual desire. New modes of non-privatized sexuality and changes in gender dispositions are subsequent to this social and political transformation, not vice versa as implied by contemporary subversive practices that unfold *within* the framework of the libidinal economy.

Kollontai's program – quite in tune with Platonov's communist sexuality – is aimed at reducing the libidinal and seductive complement to sexuality, so that sexuality stops being seductive and mysterious – so that it stops being sexual.

The problem, however, is that the loss of the libidinal phantasm of desire would be much scarier and more repressive than any puritan restriction on concrete sexual relations. Under capitalism, the cessation of libidinal striving seems impossible. This is why even legalized sexual services cannot be just services or a form therapy: they are compelled to engage the surplus imagery of seduction.

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This essay is an edited version of a lecture delivered at the Historical Materialism Conference, SOAS, University of London, on November 10, 2013.

mode of calculability shows itself ... in its purest form [in] the reified mind ... just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher and higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully, and more definitively into the consciousness of man.<sup>13</sup>

We can see how Lukács takes calculability – an aspect of the spirit of capitalism – and, fusing it with the commodity, turns a relation back into a force. Lukács's lasting influence has been his account of capitalism as a total social system, one which invades and transforms every aspect of lived experience.<sup>14</sup> Unsurprisingly, perhaps, abstractionists have favored the city as the terrain of their analysis, where the totality of the built environment provides a kind of scaffolding for a vision of the world completely transformed by capital. Here we can think of Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, and Guy Debord.

Abstractionism has been so dominant in the humanities that it has often appeared to oppose itself, as proliferating examples continue to obscure a more fundamental generic affinity. This affinity has been uncovered periodically

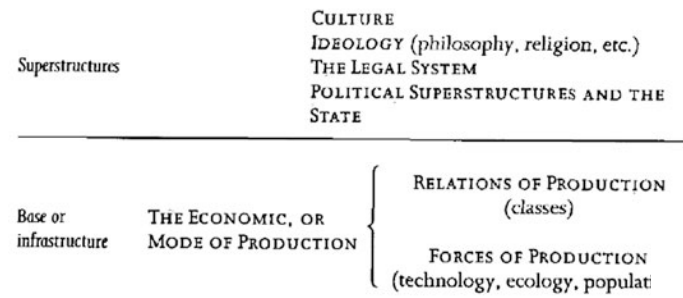
with significant consequences – perhaps none more so than Stephen Greenblatt's indication in "Towards a Poetics of Culture" that for Fredric Jameson and Jean-François Lyotard, capitalism meant two apparently different things.<sup>15</sup> For Jameson, capitalism *fragments*, isolating distinct individuals, while for Lyotard, capitalism *amalgamates*, reducing the differences between people and offering them up for consumption by a larger system. Greenblatt writes:

The difference between Jameson's capitalism, the perpetrator of separate discursive forms, the agent of privacy, psychology, and the individual, and Lyotard's capitalism, the enemy of such domains and the destroyer of privacy, psychology, and the individual, may in part be traced to a difference between the Marxist and Poststructuralist projects.<sup>16</sup>

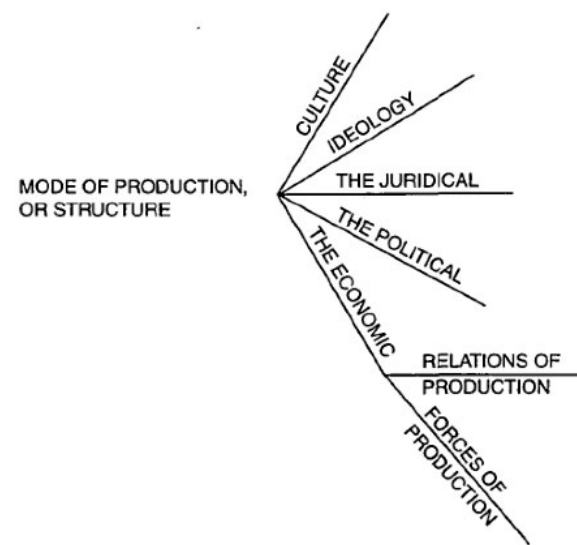
This, it turns out, was rather the narcissism of minor differences, for as Greenblatt later indicates, both conceptions are alike in their reduction of history. The resulting disciplinary reorientation is what is now known as The New Historicism, which, through Foucault, pushed back against the congruent *theoretical* projects



This postcard depicts the Palace Hotel at Mont Pelerin, Switzerland, meeting place of the Mont Pelerin Society, founded by economists Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, among others.



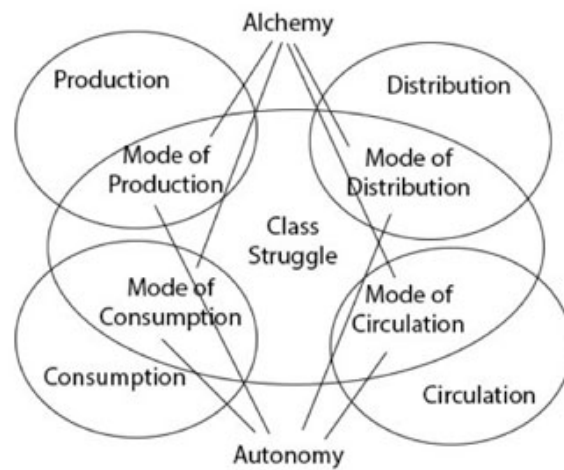
We can see that the confusion between alchemy and production not only has the effect of making “production” primary and original. It also has the effect of separating politics from economics. Rather than understanding production as one of several genres that are always already both political *and* economic – that is, comprised of both forces and relations determined not only by alchemy but also by the struggle against it – politics is something that happens far away, in “the state.” Jameson then introduces the Althusserian revision, which aims to shorten this distance:



We have recovered the economic, but in the service of a new master – *structure* – and we still have the doubling of “production,” such that it is set off from itself by the economic, and separated entirely from the political, while ideology has the same status as culture. Most importantly, there is no indication of how struggle impacts any of these elements. Still, for all this, Althusser’s revision probably went as far as possible within the confines of a commitment to the eternally ambiguous “mode of production.”

Once we have made a distinction between production and alchemy, we recover the former

as a site of struggle. It is the struggle, in other words, that determines the various modes, and not the other way around. In order to make this clear, I have used “autonomy” as the name for the counter-tendency to alchemy – that which stands opposed to the creation of surplus value:



The diagram above allows us to see the various objects of analysis to which we have seen “capitalism” refer. Spiritualism is concerned with the total field of alchemy, while productivism and commercialism usually describe the genre/mode relation in production and/or circulation, respectively. In the fourth genre, abstractionism, we find a return to the field defined by the social-historical relationship of alchemy.

### Capitalism as Abstractionism

Abstractionism reads capitalism as an “abstract system of domination.”<sup>12</sup> This can be understood as the negative imprint of the spiritualism discussed in Part I. Instead of capitalism being established by a specific idea of God, capitalism has established itself, via the mechanism of alienation, as a new, godlike power. Like the gods, that is, capitalism is fundamentally a product of human thoughts and behavior but appears eternal and all-powerful. This reading has been a favorite with literary critics and aestheticians for ninety years. Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* provides the conventional hallmark of abstractionism, namely an expanded reading of the chapter on commodity fetishism that opens *Capital*. Lukács’s claim is that it is not merely production that is organized by the commodity but *all of social life*:

The commodity character of the commodity, the abstract, quantitative

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- 1 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (London: Penguin, 1976).
- 2 See Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* (London: Continuum, 2004).
- 3 Ibid., 87.
- 4 “The Desire Named Marx,” chap. 3 in *ibid.*, 94–145.
- 5 Lev Vygotsky, chap. 2 in *Mishlenie i Rech (Thinking and Speaking)* (Moscow: Labyrinth, 1999 (1934)), 20–73. English translation at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/words/>
- 6 With the phrase “realistic thinking,” Vygotsky refers to thought that is not “autistic” and self-referential – thought that is counter-individualistic and tied to reality.
- 7 Vygotsky, *Mishlenie i Rech*, 50–73.
- 8 Degot, “Ot Tovar k Tovarishu” (From commodity to comrade), *Logos* 5/6 (2004) [http://www.ruthenia.ru/logos/number/2000\\_5\\_6/2000\\_5\\_6\\_04.htm](http://www.ruthenia.ru/logos/number/2000_5_6/2000_5_6_04.htm)
- 9 See the documentary *Liebe der Osten Anders? - Sex im Geteilten Deutschland* (Do communists have better sex?: Sex in divided Germany) (Germany: MDR, 2007).
- 10 Aaron Schuster, “Sex and Antisex,” *Cabinet* 51 (2013).
- 11 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1955), 105.
- 12 Andrei Platonov, “The River Potudan,” in *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. Robert and Elizabeth Chandler and Angela Livingstone (New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2008).
- 13 Schuster, “Sex and Antisex.”
- 14 Kollontai, “Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle,” in *Alexandra Kollontai: Selected Writings*, trans. Alix Holt (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977).

e-flux journal #54 — april 2014 Keti Chukhrov  
Sexuality in a Non-Libidinal Economy

# Boris Groys Poetics of Entropy: The Post- Suprematist Art of Mladen Stiljnović

e-flux journal #54 — april 2014 Boris Groys  
Poetics of Entropy: The Post-Suprematist Art of Mladen Stiljnović

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The modern/contemporary subject tends to react to a “system” with a desire to change it, to undermine its order or escape its control. At the same time, the dominant system seems almost omnipotent, because the technology at its disposal is incommensurate with the forces and capabilities of an individual. Thus, the fight against the system appears lost from the beginning. That is why the modern subject is so often described as the subject of an impossible desire, or rather of a desire for the impossible – a desire doomed to frustration. An individual seems condemned to a state of ontological solitude without any chance for help from the outside: God is dead and the forces of nature are already under technological control. However, all systems, including modern and contemporary systems of control, are subject to forces of entropy. Modern technology is immune to divine intervention, but not to the fatigue of the materials of which it consists. Entropic processes permanently undermine every system, dissolving it into material chaos. The forces of entropy operate mostly underneath the surface of the world. Their workings remain unobserved and they sap energy from the system and render it unstable. Only after the system collapses into chaos does it become clear that it was the forces of entropy that undermined it – and without any conscious, heroic effort by the subject.

The modern/contemporary artist is a collaborator in this entropy. Every genuinely modern/contemporary artwork stages the processes of entropy within itself. Every such artwork operates by deforming and dissolving traditional artistic forms. It is in this way that an artwork gives to its spectator a promise that the system controlling this spectator’s individual fate will also be undermined by entropic forces and will eventually dissolve. However, the collaboration between art and entropy is highly ambiguous. By consciously staging the workings of entropic forces, art gives them a certain form. And by giving them a form, art reinscribes them into the existing system, or at least opens a way to build a new system upon a new foundation. Indeed, it is always hard to say what it is that actually provokes our anger: the stability of the system, or, on the contrary, the slow decline of the system – its loss of vitality, energy, and efficiency. Accordingly, it is hard to say what the modern subject really wants when it starts a revolt against the system: Does he or she want the end, the dissolution of this system and every other system together with it? Or instead the establishment of a new, more vital, energetic, efficient system?

We know that modern artists often protested against dominant artistic forms, accusing them of being old or even dead forms –

“production” over distribution or consumption, but rather that Marx believed that the different genres allowed for different degrees of scholarly or scientific rigor. In the same way that one cannot study plate tectonics by the same method that one studies particle physics, Marx thought that the different genres of political economy lent themselves to a greater or lesser degree of scientific apprehension. For Marx, production was generic in a way that consumption was not. This was a position inherited from classical political economy; Harvey quotes Marx: “Thus production, distribution, exchange and consumption form a regular syllogism; production is the generality, distribution and exchange the particularity, and consumption the singularity in which the whole is joined together.”<sup>8</sup>

As Harvey points out, Marx is essentially ambivalent about this framework, mocking it as a “shallow syllogism” even as he nevertheless relies on it throughout *Capital*. However, Harvey also indicates that elsewhere, particularly in the *Grundrisse*, Marx effects what he calls “a radical break” with the same tradition, and it is here that the great knot of “capitalism” finally begins to loosen.

Harvey points out that the nature of Marx’s break with classical political economy involves two distinct understandings of “production,” and that this doubling has been an endless source of confusion. What sets Marx apart from his predecessors is not the emphasis on “production” as something distinct from distribution or exchange; rather, it is a second, predominating meta-relation called “the production of surplus value” which is the substance of this radical break. As Harvey clarifies:

The production that “predominates” within a capitalist mode of production is *the production of surplus-value*, and surplus-value is a *social* and not a physical, material relation ... The production of surplus value through the circulation of capital is, in short, the pivot upon which the lawlike character of a capitalist mode of production turns: no surplus-value, no capital. This was the fundamental break that Marx made with classical political economy.<sup>9</sup>

And this is distinct from our genre precisely because it exceeds it. The “production of surplus value” now becomes something more like the total field of political economy, the proper equivalent to our “literature.” We can now return to our diagram from earlier:

Field	Literature	Production of Surplus Value
Genre	Poem	Distribution, Production, etc.
Mode	Lyric Poetry	Mode of Production, Distribution, etc.

Harvey finds both “productions” at work in the following section from the *Grundrisse*: “A definite production thus determines a definite consumption, distribution and exchange as well as *definite relations between these different moments*. Admittedly, however, *in its one-sided form*, production is itself determined by the other moments.”<sup>10</sup>

The first, definite production is “the production of surplus value” and the second, one-sided production is the moment distinct from distribution, consumption, and exchange. It seems essential to clarify these two different “productions,” so I will refer to the “production of surplus value” with a suitably ostentatious signifier – *alchemy* – and leave the simple, or one-sided, generic “production” as such. And so, as Harvey indicates, Marx does in fact break with the “shallow syllogism” – it is not “production” that gives the lawlike, general quality to Marx’s analysis, but rather alchemy appearing in the moment of circulation.

“Lawlike” is meant here in two senses. There is the sense of law as that which is revealed by science, and there is law as legislation: law as force, and law as relationship. The distinction is captured in this old science joke: “186 thousand miles per second isn’t just a good idea, it’s the law.” For many Marxists, alchemy, or the creation of surplus value, is a law in both senses: it behaves simultaneously like a law of gravity and a reverse speed limit, something that is both revealed by science, and a socially determined minimum pace at which everything must operate if it is not to be disciplined out of existence. Alchemy thus comes to be read as the social construction of a natural law.

The distinction between alchemy and production reveals the manifold confusions occasioned by their conflation, confusions which we can now recognize as mistaking one level of analysis for another. The “mode of production” is thus quite literally a fetish, a part of the political economy taken for the whole. Two diagrams illustrate this.<sup>11</sup> The first is Fredric Jameson’s rendering of the orthodox Marxist vision:

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Film still extracted from Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, 1973.

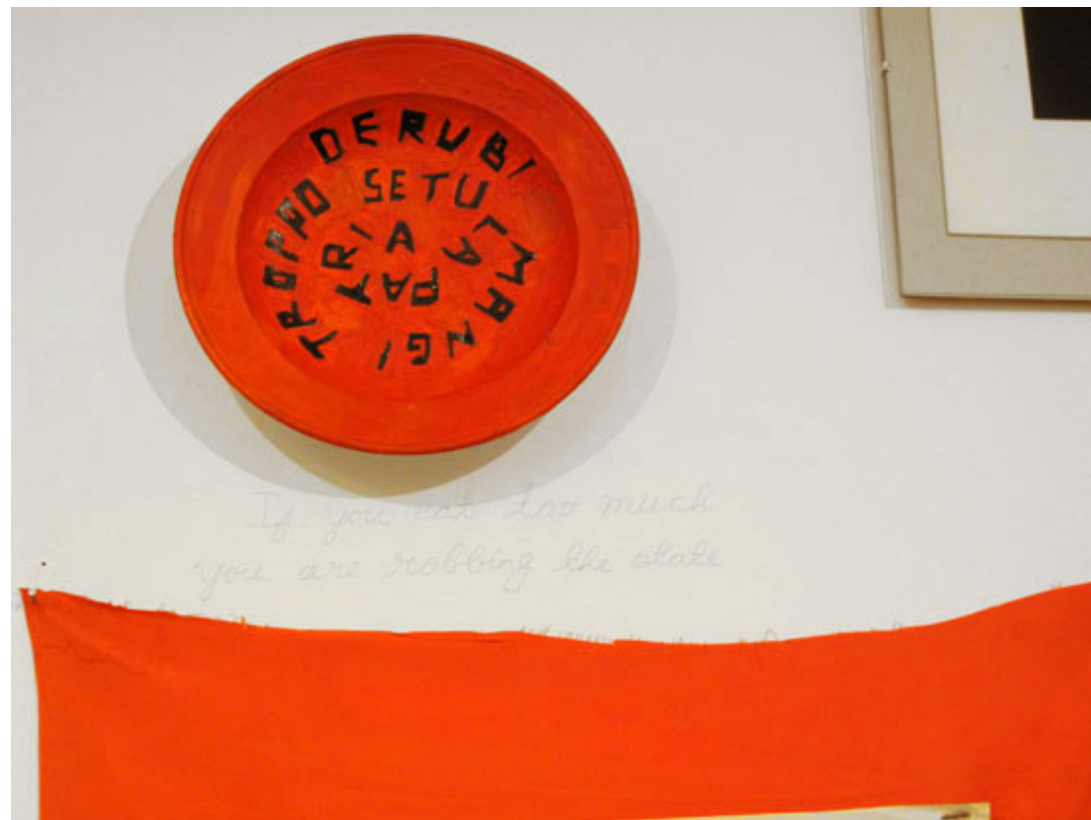
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Mladen Stilinović, *Exploitation of the Dead*, 1984–90. Courtesy of the artist.



Mladen Stilinović, *Save 00*, 1991. Photo: Ray Anastas.



Mladen Stilinović, *Se tu mangi troppo derubi la patria*, 1985. An Italian fascist statement is painted on the plate: "if you eat too much you are robbing the State."

the mode and "production" is the genre. Capitalist is adjectival, production is substantive. The capitalistic nature of the capitalist mode of production can only be recognized in relation to production, in the same way that the lyric poem falls into relief against the category of poetry. In this respect, the mode of production, capitalist or otherwise, is very specifically not a genre, but a mode, a subset of the genre of production. The capitalist mode of production is more specific still, and exists when and where a form of circulation – capital – begins to organize the entire substance of production, producing a mode, the capitalist mode of production.<sup>3</sup>

Speaking of "genres of capitalism" rather than "modes of production" thus draws our attention to the movement of "capitalism" up the conceptual ladder from the particular towards the generic – from a subset of one genre, a mode of production, past the level of genre itself – into something more like an entire field.

In other words, this analogy illustrates something about where "capitalism" takes place in our thinking: a position precisely *not* analogous to "lyric poetry" – and often, not even to "poetry" – but rather somewhat closer to "literature," insofar as both literature and capitalism roll up into a single identity the manifold genres that constitute the various forms of their appearance. The important thing to notice is that this expansion happens in both directions: not only does "capitalism" reach downward and absorb the particularities of the various modes of production, distribution, circulation, and exchange, but it also reaches upwards, claiming to exhaust the entire political economy. "Capitalism" has its origins as a mode (lyric poetry) and sounds like a genre (poetry), but in practice often signifies something more total (literature as such). The following table illustrates:

Field	Literature	Political Economy
Genre	Poetry	Production
Mode	Lyric Poetry	Mode of Production

If this comparison is to be helpful we must then ask: What are the names for the genres and the modes that "capitalism" subsumes – the political-economic equivalents, in our analogy, not only of poetry, prose, and drama, but also the lyric, epic, romance, and so on? In the first case, the answer seems clear: the four genres subsumed by "capitalism" are production,

circulation, consumption, and distribution.<sup>4</sup> And we recognize, in the first two of these, the first two of my "genres of capitalism." I will return to some of the modes in which we frequently encounter these genres.

It will be objected that this comparison is misleading, an uncalled-for deployment of a conceptual framework where it does not belong. It seems justified for two reasons. First, I am not claiming that political economy is organized in the way that literature is, so much as I am interested in delimiting a political-economic vocabulary that is *at least* as specific as the one we have for literature. Second, in the same way that literary criticism evolves to clarify and enable conversation about texts in the world, political economy responds to sites of struggle. One problem with the discourse of "capitalism" is the extent to which it cannot account for the contemporary class struggle, which appears only as a courtesy, an insignificant exception to an otherwise general law.

Put otherwise, the paradigm of capitalism as we have inherited it has too many anomalies, and these anomalies are too important, to simply continue amending it as we go along. The concluding, unscientific postscript to "capitalism" has become home to the most vital movements of the twentieth century, and it is this newness of our peoples, as Enrique Dussel points out, that must be reflected in our thinking, and not the other way around.<sup>5</sup> Bending "capitalism" to fit the contemporary world becomes the analytic equivalent of trying to read all of literature in terms of lyric poetry.

Avoiding this fate requires that we recover the missing elements, the generic equivalents, in this metaphor, of prose and drama. These are production, distribution, consumption, and circulation, which – like drama, poetry, and prose – can be understood as distinct theaters of social antagonism, complete with their own historically specific dramatis personae of forces and relations, or modes.<sup>6</sup> It is only against this conceptual background that the dynamic tension *between* circulation and production called the "capitalist mode of production" appears in focus. And it is this dynamic tension that is falsely resolved when "capitalism" is considered as a genre or a field unto itself. Instead of continuing to think at the level of the mode, too many have instead preferred to fight – always in the form of a debate about "capitalism" – over which genre Marx was talking about, production or circulation, when in fact he was not dealing with either of these on their own but with an uncanny amalgam of the two.

There was a reason for this, as David Harvey explains in his companion to volume 2 of *Capital*.<sup>7</sup> It was not simply that Marx preferred

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Film still extracted from Luis Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, 1972.

while at the same time proclaiming their own art as living and vital. The same can be said about the neo-avant-garde artists of the 1960s and 1970s – it is never quite clear what they really want: the breakup of the system or its revitalization. To use the language of Walter Benjamin from his essay on violence, the modern/contemporary subject of artistic as well as political violence hesitates between “divine violence” – or, one can say, entropic violence that has no beginning and no end – and “mythological violence,” i.e., the desire to instrumentalize violence with the goal of establishing a new, revitalized, reinforced order. Form today’s perspective, one can say that only very few artists of the twentieth century resisted the seduction of the “new order” and remained faithful to their union with the forces of entropy and anarchy. One of these very few artists is undoubtedly Mladen Stilinović.

Stilinović’s art has an obvious critical edge. But when, for example, Stilinović reacted critically to the language of the official ideology of Tito’s time, he did not do so in the name of an improved ideology. He did not confront the official ideological message with his own. Rather, the artist demonstrated that this official message had de facto become a zero message. The ritualistic language in which this message was formulated and distributed had already been long subjected to the forces of entropy, and all that remained were words on paper, sounds in the air. Language became a material object that could be fragmented, displaced, reduced to zero. Stilinović operated with the language of the official ideology as the avant-garde artists operated with traditional paintings and sculptures. For them, a painting was simply a canvas covered with paint, sculpture was an object in space, and so forth. Stilinović expanded this strategy to encompass all cultural and ideological phenomena with which he had to deal. The party slogans were simply combinations of words – and words can be combined with other words. Written words are simply combinations of lines – and can be combined with other combinations of lines.

A political authority guarantees the stability of certain modes of speech, forms of behavior, images, and rituals. But these are all material objects and processes. And so the “spiritual,” ideological authority is not able to stabilize them, to guard them against the forces of entropy, against their dissolution in material flow, their fragmentation and recombination with other material elements of this flow. These are the forces that Stilinović stages in his works. All the elements of these works – whether texts, paintings, drawings, or films – seem to be included in this flow. They all seem to drift, shift,

slip, and stumble into new combinations, contexts, and situations. No effort. No revolt. Rather, they let things go, and they move and slide in different directions – beyond the control of a political or cultural authority. The artist rejects any attempt to give this drift toward anarchy and chaos any definite direction, to let it culminate in any new order. Socialism collapses. Capitalism triumphs. But the process of entropy goes on. Stilinović now demystifies money as he had earlier demystified party language. After all, money is also merely images, signs among other signs. They are also made up of material components, their forms can also be destabilized. A room remains a room – be it an exhibition space, a bank, or an office of the Party committee. And an image remains a combination of colors and forms, be it a portrait of a leader, a currency unit, or a combination of both.

This shifting and sliding of images and signs on the blank surface of nothingness is a strong reminder of the Suprematist art of Kazimir Malevich. Malevich also rejected any attempt to interpret his art as a foundation for a new order. In Malevich’s Suprematist paintings, geometrical forms drift and slide in a way that is more deconstructive than constructive. Unlike Mondrian’s paintings or the geometrical constructions of Bauhaus artists, Malevich’s Suprematism does not create a stable geometrical order that can serve as a starting point for ordering architecture, living space, and society in general. Not accidentally, Malevich was extremely skeptical about the possibility of building any new utopian order.

Already in 1919, Malevich wrote the famous text “God Is Not Cast Down,” in which he criticized Russian Constructivist artists for submitting their art to the goal of creating a new socialist state.<sup>1</sup> Malevich saw the communist project as a repetition of the Christian project in a new, technological form. Christians wanted to enter paradise, he wrote, by achieving inner, spiritual perfection through permanent self-improvement – through working on their souls. Communists wanted to enter the radiant future by perfecting the material conditions of human existence, by turning the whole world into a factory. However, Malevich did not see any substantial difference between the Church and the factory: both wanted perfection, and both were unable to achieve it because the material world is permanently subjected to the forces of entropy. So Malevich proposed that the artist relax, that the artist give up the ambition of shaping the permanent flow of the material world. Instead, Malevich preached that laziness and inaction would release the entropic forces that have true revolutionary power.

The references to Malevich’s Suprematism

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Mladen Stilinović, *Clock – Zero*, 1992. Photo: Ray Anastas.

## Stephen Squibb Genres of Capitalism, Part II

*Continued from “Genres of Capitalism, Part I”*

The first part of these notes presented spiritualism, commercialism, and productivism as three ways of reading “capitalism,” which have formed, over time, into genres. This exercise proceeded from a slow-building impression that we don’t know precisely what we are talking about when we talk about “capitalism.” Or simply that the way we talk, read, and write about “capitalism” is not as *helpful* as it could be. Part I ended by noting that “capitalism” is sometimes read as an abbreviation and expansion of the related concept of “the mode of production.” Part II begins with an extended consideration of this phrase. It shows, first, how its centrality has been detrimental to critical political economy, and, second, just what sort of things “capitalism” can be seen to obscure.

### Capitalism as a Mode of Production

In an ingenious essay for the *London Review of Books*, John Lanchester demonstrated the slipperiness of the common use of “capitalism” by quoting several passages from Marx, with the word “bourgeoisie” in the original text replaced by the word “capitalism.”<sup>1</sup> The effect of this substitution was to highlight how capitalism is today ascribed a kind of agency that in the past would have been reserved for a class. “Capitalism” resembles “the bourgeoisie,” even as it represents “the capitalist mode of production” (the phrase with which *Capital* proper begins).

Certainly much could be said about this resemblance between the role of “capitalism” in the twentieth century and that of “the bourgeoisie” in the nineteenth, especially as it concerns the history of the novel. But it is the second signification, linking the notion of “capitalism” to that of “the mode of production,” that allows us to reconsider the relationship developing between “genre” and “capitalism,” by drawing our attention to the different levels of analysis to which these concepts refer.

The fastest way for these different levels to fall into relief is to consider the term “mode,” which, in addition to appearing in the middle of the “capitalist mode of production,” also has a central place in genre theory. In particular, it is helpful to think about Alastair Fowler’s positioning of “mode” as the middle moment in the progression “genre, mode, subgenre,” where each term specifies the previous one.<sup>2</sup> Thus, genre is substantive, and mode is adjectival, as in “lyric poem” – lyric is the mode, poem is the genre. We cannot recognize the lyricism of the poem in question without reference to its location within a larger generic framework.

A similar necessity lies behind the “capitalist mode of production”; “capitalist” is

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remain quite abundant.

The color is not available to the artists of the future because the color has been affected. But it has not been affected physically and materially. No. It has been affected immaterially.

This sudden realization brought me face to face with something I had never, ever considered about the protracted Lebanese wars.

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(To be continued.)

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Walid Raad is an artist and an Associate Professor of Art at The Cooper Union (New York). Raad's works include *The Atlas Group*, a fifteen-year project (1989–2004) about the contemporary history of Lebanon, and the ongoing projects *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* and *Sweet Talk: Commissions* (Beirut). His books include *The Truth Will Be Known When The Last Witness Is Dead*, *My Neck Is Thinner Than A Hair*, *Let's Be Honest*, *The Weather Helped*, and *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow*.

remain noticeable throughout the whole of Stilinović's work. Malevich was not seduced by the enthusiasm for life-building in post-revolutionary Russia – and neither did Stilinović allow himself to be carried away by the enthusiasm for the new democratic/capitalist opening. His distance from the neoliberal utopia that replaced the communist utopia was, of course, not dictated by any "ostalgia" – conservative nostalgia for the old socialist order. Almost immediately after the establishment of the new capitalist order, Stilinović began to ironize it in a way analogous to his ironization of the old socialist order. No aspect of the new utopia was spared – from the power of money to knowledge of the English language as a precondition for an individual's functioning in the new economy. Stilinović's statement "The artist who does not speak English is no artist" became so famous precisely because of its matter-of-fact character. Malevich, like many other representatives of the early avant-garde, was not ready to submit his artistic practice to ideological control by the new socialist powers. Stilinović demonstrates his unwillingness to accept the new rules of the game and submit his own work to evaluation by the international art market. Thus, even if the social and political

orders that were rejected and ironized by both artists were not identical – and even opposed to each other – the contemporary gesture of rejection as such repeats the avant-garde gesture. However, this repetition of the avant-garde gesture does not equal repetition of the avant-garde's forms.

As I have already said, art consciously stages unconscious entropic processes – and thus gives them a certain form. This form becomes solidified, petrified, and canonized by time. Malevich is no exception. Malevich investigated and deconstructed the high artistic canon of the past and laid bare its geometrical basis – culminating in the *Black Square*, which demonstrated the formal geometrical structure of any standard painted image consisting of a rectangular canvas and a frame. The geometrical forms that Malevich used in his own Suprematist paintings referred to Platonic ideas, to the Western philosophical and artistic tradition of mathematizing and geometrizing nature. These forms suggested a higher, "cosmic" level of reality towards which the imagination of the spectator was to soar. Stilinović, on the contrary, takes all possible fragments and bits of everyday reality, language, documentation, propaganda, and so forth, and lets them drift and slide on the

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Mladen Stilinović, *Pjevaj! (Sing!)*, 1980. Banknote on black-and-white photograph on artificial silk. Copyright: Carnegie Museum of Art.

blank Suprematist surface. The celebration of the reality of everyday life was a common feature of many artistic practices and philosophical discourses of the 1960s and 1970s. But Stilinović's transportation of the everyday into the Suprematist heaven of pure ideas is not only a celebration of the everyday world. Rather, the texture of everyday life demonstrates itself as porous and fragmented – open to the Suprematist nothingness that this texture is unable to fully capture.

Stilinović's para-Suprematist images remind me of the technological garbage that now circulates in the cosmic space around the earth. It is where the dissolved fragments of the everyday technological world enter the stage of their eternal return – and fill the heaven of our contemporary civilization. In fact, Plato himself saw the possibility for everyday garbage to contaminate the heaven of pure ideas. In his dialogue *Parmenides*, Parmenides asks young Socrates if he would include in the realm of eternal ideas "such things as hair, mud, dirt, or anything else which is vile and paltry; would you suppose that each of these has an idea distinct from the actual objects with which we come into contact, or not?" Socrates responds "no" and states that this suggestion, were it to be

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accepted, would bring his teachings on ideas to absurdity: "Yes, Socrates, said Parmenides; that is because you are still young; the time will come, if I am not mistaken, when philosophy will have a firmer grasp of you, and then you will not despise even the meanest things; at your age, you are too much disposed to regard opinions of men."<sup>2</sup> Now, Stilinović is obviously totally consumed by art and cares even less than Malevich about what other people think. So he is not afraid to bring his own artistic method to the point of absurdity. On the contrary, Stilinović combines a certain positivism with an acceptance of, and even delight in, absurdity.

This delight in absurdity is a part of the Dadaist and early Surrealist heritage. But Stilinović also radicalizes the Dadaist and Surrealist approach. His famous series of photographs *The Artist at Work* is a good example of this. This work reminds me of a passage from the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* by André Breton: "A story is told according to which Saint-Pol-Roux, in times gone by, used to have a notice posted on the door of his manor house in Camaret, every evening before he went to sleep, which read: THE POET IS WORKING."<sup>3</sup> Breton shares the perception of the poet as working in sleep because he believes that true poetry and



Mladen Stilinović, *Untitled, (Egg and Money in Bowl)*, 1997. Photo: Ray Anastas.



I did not want to contribute to the suffering of Johnny Tahan. I also immediately knew that I needed to find out everything I could about Tahan: Who was he? What kind of work did he do? Is he still alive? Where are his paintings and drawings? So I spent the next two years talking to his friends, acquaintances, and relatives, tracking down his works and other documents related to his life.

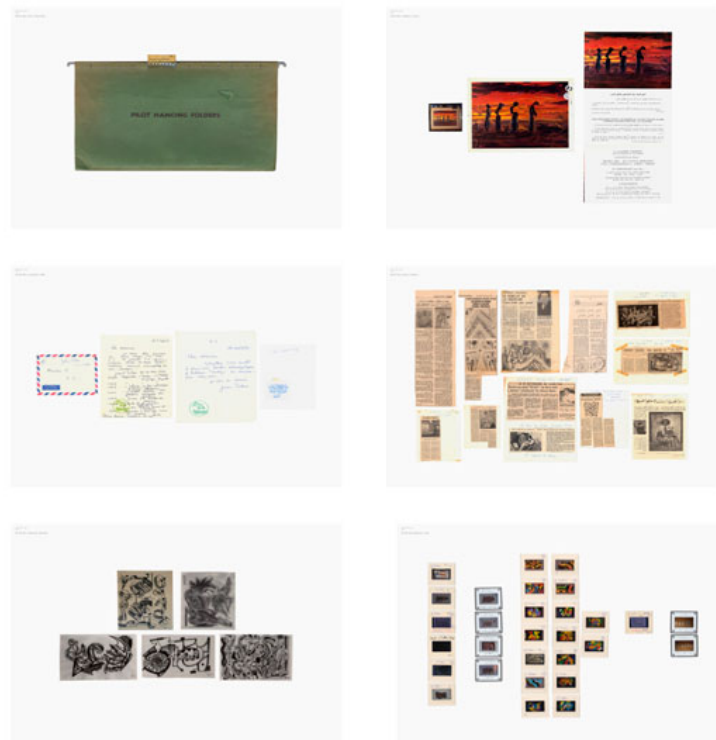
And I found out that Johnny Tahan was born in Egypt in 1930 and died in Beirut in 1989. I found copies of his drawings and paintings. I found reproductions of his works, his slides. I found reviews of his various exhibitions in Lebanese newspapers. In one of the reviews, there was even a photograph of him in a wheelchair. Yes, the cook was right. Tahan did spend the majority of his life in a wheelchair. I found price lists and correspondence with collectors and other artifacts. In other words, after two years of research I found enough documents to be able to say that Johnny Tahan was, well, let's not call him an artist. Let's say he was someone who painted and drew; he exhibited his works; he sold them; he lived in the second half of the twentieth century in Beirut. He is an historical figure and his name certainly deserves to be spelled correctly.

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But still, there was something unconvincing, something that seemed deceptive about the cook's indignation and his call for compassion. And over time, I came to view this indignation as a ruse distracting me from a scenario more insidious than merely ignoring a predecessor and misspelling his name.

I am now convinced that it was the artists from the future who did it on purpose. I am convinced that artists from the future purposely distorted Tahan's name when they communicated it to me via telepathy because artists from the future are not first and foremost hailing Tahan. They are not intent on launching me on some corrective historical mission, to fill the gaps in my artistic knowledge. Future artists want or need something else. And today I know what they want or need.

Future artists want or need a color. More precisely, they want or need this particular shade of red that appeared in the cook's sprayed "corrections." But why would future artists want or need this color? Is it because it is no longer available to them? But why would this color be no longer available to them? Has there been a major nuclear disaster sometime in the future that depleted or destroyed the pigments that compose the color? No, the pigments, in fact,



art consist of the production of dreams. During sleep, our imagination becomes liberated from all the restraints and obligations imposed on it by our everyday mode of existence. Here, the poetic dream is opposed to prosaic reality. And so it is important that, going to sleep, the poet closes the door behind him – to prevent the free flow of his imagination from being disturbed by the intrusion of everyday reality and the gaze of others.

However, Stilinović allows himself to be photographed during sleep. Instead of poetic dreaming, we are presented with a prosaic image of a sleeping body. Here, the sleeping artist is not a poet who forgets the world, flying from the world into a poetic dream – thus escaping the gaze of others. Rather, the artist completely delivers up his body to the gaze of spectators – unprotected and uncontrolled. In sleep, one loses the ability to manipulate, direct, and seduce the gaze of the spectator. Stilinović's sleeping artist reminds one more of *Sleep* by Andy Warhol than of Breton's sleeping poet. Presenting a sleeping body instead of a poetic dream, Warhol asserts once more the final victory of positivism and everyday life over "metaphysics" and "spirituality." But in Warhol's video, the sleeping man is, of course, an actor and not the artist himself. Warhol does not relinquish but rather strengthens his manipulative, controlling position of authority. When the artist sleeps, he lets the life around him and in him flow without control – thereby creating beyond work. Thus, the artist undermines the obligation to work – the true common ground between ideologies of capitalism and communism. It is this obligation to work that our everyday life depends upon.

Indeed, the power of the everyday was not taken as seriously in the socialist East as it was in the capitalist West. Of course, communist ideology was a materialist and atheist one. However, under the conditions of socialism, everyday life was subjected to ideological definition and interpretation to a degree that reminded one of medieval Europe. Each everyday decision was analyzed and justified in ideological terms: Does this decision serve the cause of building the socialist future? Does this decision conform to Marxism and its ideological principles? Here, indeed, the idea of every seemingly small and insignificant everyday thing was separated from the thing itself – and submitted to ideological scrutiny. Thus, the socialist subject always mediated between two worlds: an ideological world and a world of everyday survival.

The rejection of official ideology has not abolished the ideological, spiritual, utopian world altogether, but rather transformed it into

blank nothingness. This nothingness is not simply an absence of ideology but is rather a space of ideological freedom that should not be identified with freedom from ideology. It is this space of freedom that came to be endangered after the end of socialism. The victory of Western positivism meant the abolishment of this blank space of ideological, subjective, inner freedom that was so familiar to Eastern European dissident artists and thinkers. Instead, the post-socialist subject became the slave of the everyday – like his or her Western counterpart. That is why the art of Stilinović is so different from the art of many of his Western contemporaries and colleagues. It is different because it continues to celebrate the experience of radical spiritual freedom. And this freedom dissolves not only ideology, but also any familiar social space – allowing nothingness to shine through the holes in our everyday world.

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e-flux journal #54 — april 2014 Boris Groys  
Poetics of Entropy: The Post-Suprematist Art of Mladen Stilinović

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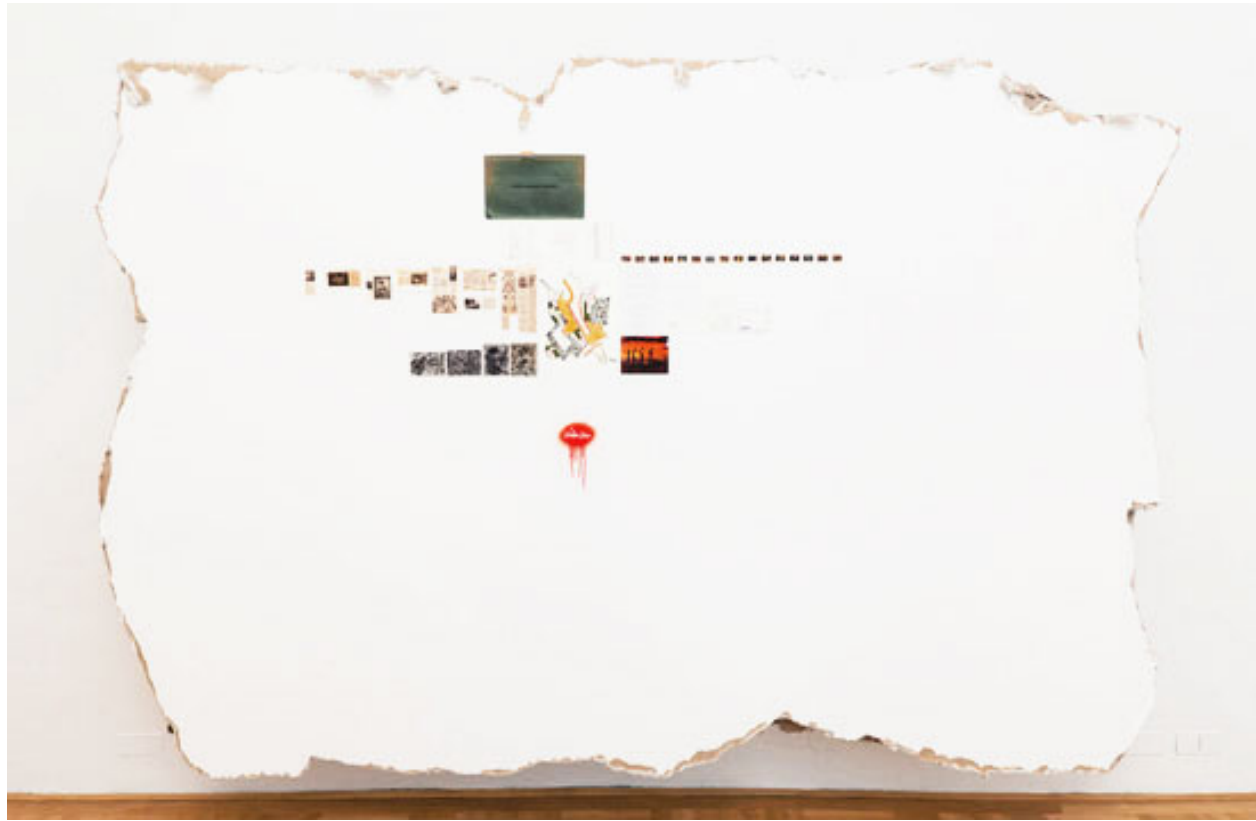
- 1  
"God is Not Cast Down," in Kazimir Malevich, *Essays on Art, 1915–1933*, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1968).
- 2  
Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 4, ed. and trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: MacMillan, 1892)  
[http://books.google.com/books?id=mlcMAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=mlcMAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- 3  
André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 14.



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Ana Ofak  
**Gentleman Next  
Door: Antonio  
G. Lauer, a.k.a.  
Tomislav  
Gotovac, and  
the Man  
Undressed in  
Times of  
Socialism**



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e-flux journal #54 — april 2014 Ana Ofak  
Gentleman Next Door: Antonio G. Lauer, a.k.a. Tomislav Gotovac, and the Man Undressed in Times of Socialism

Tenderness, unburdened sentiments, and freedom are rarely found in the cinematographic spectrum of the 1950s. Arne Mattsson's 1951 film *One Summer of Happiness* assures us with its title that we are going to see something perishable. Just as the water of the lake where the two protagonists swim glitters only on the surface, and only when the sun is going down, the moments they share in this fluid and forgiving medium are already doomed. The film's rather predictable boy-meets-girl story nevertheless presents one trope that was scandalous for the time: nudity. And we are not just talking about contours of naked female and male bodies at play, but a clear view of erect nipples. This came as close to sex on screen as 1950s audiences were likely to see. After receiving a Golden Bear at the second Berlin International Film Festival in 1952, the movie only made it to New York City in 1957. However, it was shown in Zagreb in 1952 at Kino Prosvjeta (Cinema Education), a movie theater on the ground floor of a former military hospital on Krajiška Street. Every fifteen-year-old seeing it must have gleaned enough material for an outburst of romantic or raunchy fantasies – except for one. Antonio G. Lauer, a.k.a. Tomislav Gotovac, decided many years after *One Summer of Happiness* that “what was implanted in [his] artistic brain [back then] was that nudity was one of the most important things through which you can tell the world your attitude toward it.”<sup>1</sup>

Gotovac's attitude, present in his entire body of work, was to provoke and please at the same time. It rarely abated and is echoed in contemporary correlations between artistic practice, the body, and factologies of the social. Who was this guy taking a stance for nudity in art when Marina Abramović was still a teenager, and coping in a society that condemned anything remotely unconventional (Gotovac's 1962 performance *Showing Elle* was his first attempt to take off his clothes in public)? Over the last few years, several notable shows have offered new perspectives on Gotovac's work. In the autumn of 2012, Tobias G. Natter and Elisabeth Leopold, curators of the *Nude Men* exhibition at the Leopold Museum in Vienna, placed Gotovac's *Foxy Mister* (2002) at the center of the audience's attention. At the time, one visitor told me that as soon as he entered the space where *Foxy Mister* hung, everything else faded to gray. In comparison, Robert Mapplethorpe's *Cock and Jeans* (1978), also part of *Nude Men*, turned into just another stylized image from the Charlie's Angels 1970s. The curators described *Foxy Mister*, in which a nude, aging Gotovac adopts the poses of a young female sex worker, as “ghoulish humor.” However, his nudes are more than persiflage or a parody of the constructed



Tomislav Gotovac, *Lying Naked on the Asphalt, Kissing the Asphalt (Zagreb, I love you)*, 1981. Postcard. Photo: Ivan Posavec.

## Walid Raad Index XXVI: Red

If you look closely, you can see the white lines on this fragment of wall.

And those who read Arabic can tell that these lines are actually letters and names. These are the names of men and women who have lived and worked in Lebanon as painters and sculptors over the past century. They are also the names that I have been receiving telepathically from artists in the future over the past nine years.

If, like me, you have experienced telepathic reception, then you know that you can never trust telepathic signals, because telepathic signals are always accompanied by something else. They are always accompanied by telepathic noise. That's why I usually need some kind of confirmation that the signals are indeed telepathic, and possibly from the future. To do this, I readied an exhibition space in Beirut and displayed these names in white vinyl letters on a continuous white wall (which was not broken as you see it here – we broke it up in order to transport it) and I told myself that confirmation would come – somehow, sometime. And I should let you know that when I look for confirmation for telepathic signals, I usually seek it from artists, writers, dancers, and cooks.

What I did not expect was for this confirmation to come to me from the least sympathetic person I could think of: a local cook who considers himself a guardian of Lebanese modern and contemporary art.

The cook walked into my room and immediately proceeded to disregard my telepathic claims as a fanciful contemporary conceptual conceit. Moreover, he unequivocally confirmed to me that the names displayed were those of "artists" who have lived and worked in Lebanon in the past century. "But," the cook said, "many of the names are misspelled."

"Of course," I said. "Telepathic noise."

He was unwilling to attribute my orthographic errors to telepathic noise. He said: "This is typical of your generation, this postwar generation of artists. Not only are you unable to even spell the names of anyone who came before you, more importantly, you always ignore their contributions."

Finally, the cook was most indignant at the fact that, of all the names I could have misspelled, I casually misspelled the name of an "artist" who deserved it the least, an "artist" who'd spent a good part of his adult life wheelchair-bound: Johnny Tahan. "Hasn't this man suffered enough in life? Must he suffer again at your hands?" said the cook. And then, with red spray paint and on my beautiful clean white walls, the cook took it upon himself to "correct" the misspelled names.

This shattered me. It hurt me. Not because I care about the cook and his opinion, but because

been understood until recent times, is simply the history of the evolution of architectural form. Compositional methods ... have remained in the background. Nevertheless, by discerning the peculiarity of compositional rules, one also fully understands style ... Together with the history of architectural forms, it is possible to establish a parallel history of compositional methods, which above all analyzes the driving force behind such methods: rhythm, in all its diverse manifestations." Moisei Ginzburg, *Ritm v arkhitekture* (Moscow: 1923), 71. A translation of the Russian: "История стилей, как она понималась до последнего времени, — есть лишь история эволюции архитектурной формы. Композиционные методы ... оставались на заднем плане. Однако и здесь разгадать своеобразие этих композиционных законов значит понять вполне стиль ... Наряду с историей архитектурных форм возможна и параллельная история композиционных методов, анализирующая в первую очередь двигательную силу этих методов: ритм, во всем разнообразии его проявления."

23  
A translation of the Russian: "Лента жилых ячеек ... в виде длинного однообразного объема с ритмически повторяющимися элементами."

24  
Sigfried Giedion, "Aesthetics and the Human Habitat," in *Architecture and Me: The Diary of a Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 93.

25  
Ibid., 95.

26  
Giedion flirts with atavism here, but restrains himself: "The attitude of contemporary architecture toward other civilizations is a humble one ... Often shantytowns contain within themselves vestiges of the last balanced civilization — the last civilization in which man was in equipoise." Ibid., 96

27  
The phrase "global modernity" is a coinage of the Turkish historian Arif Dirlik, but the sense intended here follows more closely Zygmunt Bauman's notion of a "liquid modernity" founded upon fluid networks of global exchange (which Dirlik draws upon himself). See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2000), 185–198.

28  
Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), 60–61.

29  
Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1991), 205–207.

30  
Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 6.

31  
"Time and space, the cyclical and the linear, exert a reciprocal action: ... everything is cyclical repetition through linear repetitions. A dialectical relation (unity in opposition) thus acquires meaning and import ... One reaches, by this road as by others, the depths of the dialectic." Ibid., 8.

32  
"[Bourgeois society] arises only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker available ... This one historical precondition comprises a world's history." Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 272.

33  
Hal Foster, "Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?," in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the Turn of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 1.

34  
Ibid., 2–5.

35  
"The Neo-avant-garde, which stages for a second time the avant-gardiste break with tradition, becomes a manifestation that is void of sense." Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 61.

36  
Foster, "Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?," 8, 10, 13–14.

37  
Sigmund Freud, "Repetition-Compulsion," trans. Theodore Reik, *Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 157.

38  
Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud, in *Complete Psychological Works, Volume 18: 1920–1922* (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 36.

39  
Foster, "Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?," 28.

40  
Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *The Return of the Real*, 66–68.

41  
Ibid., 63.

42  
"There is no identical absolute

repetition, indefinitely. Whence the relation between repetition and difference. When it concerns the everyday, rites, ceremonies, fêtes, rules and laws, there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference." Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 6. See also *ibid.*, 9–10, 15, 26, 32, 43, 90.

43  
Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 76.

44  
Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Saul K. Padover, *Collected Works, Volume 11: August 1851–March 1853* (New York: International Publishers, 1979), 103.

45  
"Karl Marx's theory of historical repetition, as it appears notably in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, turns on the following principle which does not seem to have been sufficiently understood by historians: historical repetition is neither a matter of analogy nor a concept produced by the reflection of historians, but above all a condition of historical action itself. Harold Rosenberg illuminates this point in some fine pages: historical actors or agents can create only on condition that they identify themselves with figures from the past." Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 91.

46  
"The historical relativism of the heroic is emphasized in Marx's contrast between the repetition of tragedy and the repetition of farce, which he defines as the repetition of a repetition." Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 161.

47  
Ibid., 160–161.

48  
"Conceptually the central problem for the latecomer necessarily is repetition, for repetition dialectically raised to re-creation is the ephēbe's road of excess, leading away from the horror of finding himself to be only a copy or a replica." Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 80.

49  
Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, trans. P. Morton Shand (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), 40.

50  
Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

51

Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982).

52  
Paolo Portoghesi, *Postmodern, or the Architecture of Post-Industrial Society*, trans. Ellen Shapiro (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1983).

53  
Patrik Schumacher, *The Autopoiesis of Architecture, Volume 1: A New Framework for Architecture* (Hoboken, NJ: Jon Wiley & Sons, 2011), 259.

54  
Ibid., 297.

55  
Ibid., 118, 311–312, 332, 335, 353, 407.

56  
Hal Foster, *Design and Crime (And Other Diatribes)* (New York: Verso Books, 2003), 35–37.

57  
Hal Foster, *The Art-Architecture Complex* (New York: Verso Books, 2011), 82–83.

58  
Ibid., 85.

59  
Douglas Murphy, *The Architecture of Failure* (London: Zer0 Books, 2011), 136.

60  
Georges Teyssot, *The Topology of Everyday Constellations*, trans. Pierre Bouvier and Julie Rose (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 17.

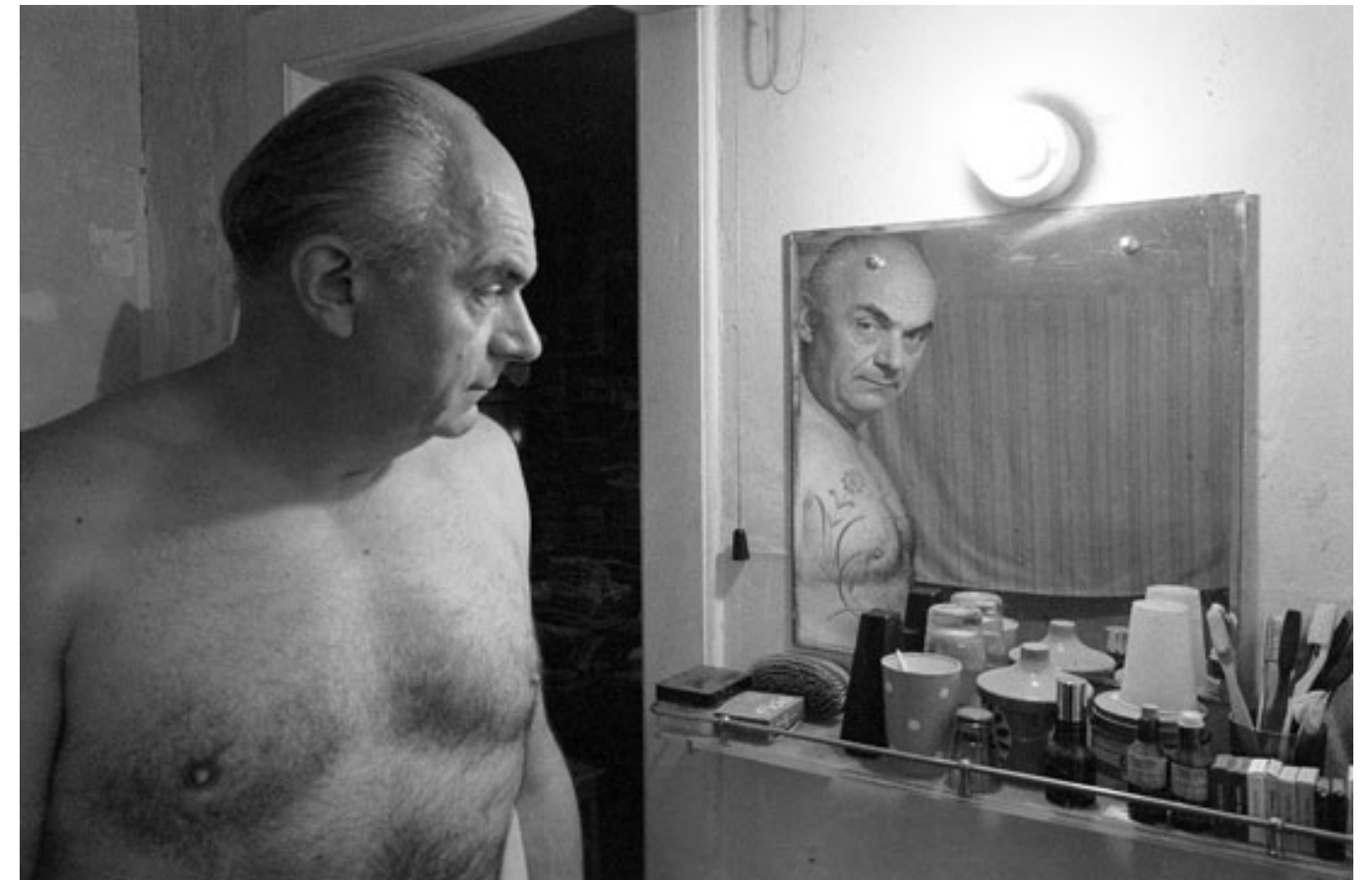
61  
Ibid., 23.

62  
Ibid., 18.

63  
Ibid., 12–13.

64  
"The new does not add itself to the old but remains the old in distress." Theodor Adorno, "Reflections on Class Theory," in *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedmann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 95.

65  
Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism: The Reproduction of the Relations of Production*, trans. Frank Bryant (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 32.



Tomislav Gotovac, *Tomislav Gotovac at the Building of Krajiška 29*, 1990. Photo: Žarko Vijatović.



ViGo, Tomislav Gotovac in the Building at Krajiška 29, 2008; 1990. Photos: Žarko Vijatović.

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e-flux journal #54 — april 2014 Ross Wolfe  
 Repetition—Compulsion: World—Historical Rhythms in Architecture

- 1 Clark Fagot and Harold Pashler, "Repetition Blindness: Perception or Memory Failure?" *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* vol. 21, no 2. (April 1995): 275–292.
- 2 György Kepes, *Language of Vision* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1995), 53.
- 3 Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964), 129.
- 4 Pierre von Meiss, *Elements of Architecture: From Form to Place*, trans. Pierre von Meiss (New York: Routledge, 1990), 32.
- 5 Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, trans. Richard Schonfield (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 13.
- 6 "Harmony consists of a beautiful appearance and harmonious effect ... achieved when the height of the elements of a building are suitable to their breadth, and their breadth to their length, and in a word, when all the elements match its modular [symmetrical] system." *Ibid.*, 14.
- 7 Semper championed "repose and harmony in colors (as well as in spatial combinations)." Gottfried Semper, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts, or, Practical Aesthetics*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Michael Robinson (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2004), 135.
- 8 Berlage quotes the historian Johannes H. Leliman's lectures on Greek building: "Its exalted repose finds form in stone; all proportions of dimension and mass are well balanced ... Perfect harmony makes all parts resonate in powerful chords." Hendrik Petrus Berlage, "Some Reflections on Classical Architecture" [1908], trans. Wim de Wit, *Thoughts on Style: 1886–1909* (Santa Monica: Getty Center Publications, 1996), 270.
- 9 "The aim of all artistic creation, in [Berlage's mind], was the achievement of repose, and thus of style, the ultimate aesthetic quality." Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980), 143.
- 10 "Harmony sometimes (often) exists: eurhythmia. The eurhythmic body, composed of diverse rhythms ... keeps them in metastable equilibrium." Henri Lefebvre, *Elements of Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction to the Understanding of Rhythms*, in *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (New York: Continuum, 2004), 20.
- 11 Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *The Genius of Architecture, or the Analogy of that Art with Our Sensations*, trans. David Britt (Santa Monica: Getty Center Publications, 1992), 89–90.
- 12 "We return to symmetry in space. Take a band ornament where the individual section repeated again and again is of length  $a$  and sling it around a circular cylinder, the circumference of which is an integral multiple of  $a$ , for instance  $25a$ . You then obtain a pattern which is carried over into itself through the rotation around the cylinder axis by  $\alpha = 360^\circ/25$  and its repetitions. The twenty-fifth iteration is the rotation by  $360^\circ$ , or the identity. We thus get a finite group of rotations of order 25, i.e. one consisting of 25 operations. The cylinder may be replaced by any surface of cylindrical symmetry." Hermann Weyl, *Symmetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 53–54.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 14 Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), 430.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 443.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 436.
- 17 Wolf von Eckardt, *Eric Mendelsohn* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1960), 14.
- 18 Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture*, 165–289.
- 19 "Modern industrial plants condense within themselves ... all the most characteristic and potential features of the new life. [Here is] a picture of modernity that is extremely lucid and differentiated from the past." Moisei Ginzburg, *Style and Epoch*, trans. Anatole Senkevitch (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 80–81.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 21 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
- 22 "The history of styles, as it has

against the neo-avant-garde project: to fail in its critique, as the historical avant-garde did, is one thing, but to repeat such a failure – more, to recoup this critique as style – is to risk farce.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the sheer ubiquity of these non-orthogonal, unrepeatable gems causes them to pass dialectically into their opposite. As the architecture critic Douglas Murphy has noted, in biting remarks directed at Hadid, Schumacher, and the British architect Norman Foster, “Difference is becoming standardized; the unique is becoming generic.”<sup>59</sup>

Repetition is essential to architecture in one final respect – to the extent that it overlaps with the sociological category of *habitus*. Georges Teyssot, the onetime protégé of Manfredo Tafuri, has dissected this relationship in the titular article to his *Topology of Everyday Constellations* (2013). Examining the tangled web of historical and etymological associations that lead from habitation to habituation, along with the theoreticians and philosophers who’ve dealt with it, Teyssot determines that

the process of repetition ... orders our lives. The ... repetition of need shapes time, but need is not properly understood in relation to a negative state, such as lack. Repetition is essentially inscribed in need, and this fact gives form to various aspects of duration in a person’s life: rhythms (of the body), reserves (of energy), reaction times, intertwinings (of relationships). It is tempting to extend this notion of habit to the house itself, conceived as a receptacle of practices, routines, and customs.<sup>60</sup>

Teyssot moves seamlessly between different disciplinary boundaries, from phenomenology to anthropology and beyond, delineating the structures of everyday life. Working his way up from the micro to the macro, in the manner of Raoul Vaneigem and Michel de Certeau, he avers that “the plurality of micro-events, the series of individual and social habits, repeated over the course of time, seems to hammer spaces with tiny, repeated blows, molding or forging, as it were, an ‘environment’ ... of everyday life.”<sup>61</sup> Over and above this gradient texture of cumulative, quotidian interchange lurks a more sinister figure of accumulation-by-repetition, however: the ongoing reproduction of the capitalist totality. “In the capitalist production of commodities,” Teyssot acknowledges, “the new and the novel stimulate demand by reintroducing meaning. At the same time, the process of repetition, organized for commodity production, imposes ‘the eternal return of the same’ (*immer gleich*).”<sup>62</sup>

Repetition in architecture today, as in every other cultural sphere, attests to the historical

impasse at which society has lingered for almost a century. Architects find themselves forced to recycle, reorder, and repeat novelties of the past in order to remain “cutting-edge” in the present. No longer does the steady march of technological progress provide a path for architecture to follow. Teyssot only glancingly grasps what Tafuri would have deemed decisive – the extraordinary dynamism of capitalist society masks a certain static remainder, one which cannot be reduced to surviving traditions, communal ties, or simple “pattern maintenance.”<sup>63</sup>

As Theodor Adorno put it in his 1942 essay “Reflections on Class Theory,” what appears today as ever-new under the conditions of late capitalism is in fact merely “the old in distress.”<sup>64</sup> Lefebvre made an almost identical point three decades later in *The Survival of Capitalism* (1973), wherein he noticed that “the concept and theory of reproduction brings out one of the most prominent but least noticed features of ‘modernity,’ the prevalence of repetition in all spheres. This poor little world ... is condemned not only to reproduce in order to reproduce itself, together with its constitutive relations, but also to present what is repeated as new, and as all the more new (*neo*) the more archaic it actually is.”<sup>65</sup> It matters little whether the forms of the past that are marshaled in the service of the present are repetitive or nonrepetitive. Until the capitalist social formation is finally overcome, they can only be the old repackaged as new.

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All photographs are copyright Marcus Lyon and appear courtesy of the artist, unless otherwise noted.

differences between the sexes. The artist rarely complied with categories; instead, he explored and exasperated them. And yet, Gotovac’s nudes were not widely circulated. In the spring of 2013, the exhibition *Zero Point of Meaning* at Camera Austria, curated by the art historians Sandra Križić Roban and Ivana Hanaček, turned to Gotovac’s early photographic work. His *Heads* (1960) were chosen for their implicit reflection of surrealist and nouvelle vague criticism of conformism and the church. Križić Roban and Hanaček arranged the images in the way Gotovac himself had originally intended: vertically aligned to resemble a totem, and mounted much higher on the wall than the works that surround them, as if Gotovac’s totem ruled over these other works. This detail is worth mentioning, because it is far from easy to exhibit the work of a perfectionist. Few others succeeded. A later series of photographs, also called *Heads* (1970), was shown at Frieze Masters 2013 by the Parisian gallery Frank Elbaz, and was curated by Gotovac’s longtime collaborator, the photographer Žarko Vijatović, and the artist Danka Sošić. Afterwards, both MoMA and the Tate inquired about organizing seminars on Gotovac for their curating staff, who were eager to beef up their Eastern European art epistemology. The *Heads* (1970) series depicts Gotovac in sequence: fully bearded, then partly shaven with sideburns, and then completely shaven and bald. The twelve mug shot–like portraits pay homage to the artist’s favorite troika: Godard, Dreyer, and Bresson. Gotovac’s cinephilia, combined with his unmistakably bold, bossy, brassy gestures and his slightly unsettling but attractive nudes, just might be the secret of his continuing rise. Not surprisingly, some have placed considerable monetary expectations on this rise.

When Gotovac’s widow, Zora Cazi-Gotovac, offered the city of Zagreb the opportunity to preserve – in cooperation with the Croatian Film Alliance and the Museum of Contemporary Art – the artist’s estate at Krajiška Street 29, city administrators declined because of budget deficits. Considering that at the time, the inhabitants of some areas of Croatia, including parts of Zagreb, only had access to drinkable water by way of antiquated water pumps, it is relevant to mention other projects the city did support. Most prominent among these was a large and colorfully lit fountain in front of the National Library, built at the behest of the city’s mayor. In the face of such neobaroque techniques of power and play, one might assume that Gotovac’s work couldn’t prevail. However, three years after the city turned down Cazi-Gotovac, the mayor inaugurated a commemorative plaque on Ilica Street honoring

Gotovac’s performance *Lying Naked on the Asphalt, Kissing the Asphalt (Zagreb, I love you)* (1981). In this performance, the artist paced the city’s main street barefoot and naked, lay down on the pavement, and graced it with his kisses. Last autumn, two bronze casts of the artist’s rather large feet were installed to commemorate the happening. Many Croatians welcomed this belated gesture of recognition. Others, some of whom were close to the artist, speculated in private about the fate of such walks of fame – about the one in St. Louis, which honors famous St. Louisans, amounting to not much more than a Wikipedia corpse; or about the one in Berlin, which honors German film stars, and which is either permanently under repair or ignored by citizens and tourists alike. Typically, these civic gestures merely give the illusion of a profitable cultural investment in provincial minds.



Tomislav Gotovac, *After Beška's Death*, 1988. Photo: Nino Semialjac.

Instead of compartmentalizing Gotovac’s work into different categories – like performance art, body art, or conceptual art – it is a challenge worth taking up to stay with Krajiška and the operations that occurred in and from there. And it is a challenge to concentrate on his nudes. Starting with short film sequences, then passing to collage, using his body in performance and photography as well as in conceptual projects, Gotovac assembled a “total system.” According to film critic Hrvoje Turković, this kind of “total system” is a compilation of complementary works that together form an all-encompassing totality. Gotovac’s collaborators and friends love

to seek explanations for his doings too, just to escape the dictum “Tom was Tom.” The total system was a “Tom system,” or in the artist’s own words, a “system of directing and viewing.” These were the favored techniques of a man who was a schooled film director and an obsessive reel consumer, who returned to his favorite scenes up to a hundred times. Gotovac made sure his art was saturated with his cinephilic knowledge and his obsession for micro-visualities that only his eye could perceive. Much of this began in 1941 when Tomislav, at four years old, moved with his family to Krajiška – just next door to Kino Prosvjeta.

After the death of his mother, Elizabeta Beška Lauer, in 1987 (in whose honor he changed his last name in 2005), Gotovac gradually converted his residence into a space under construction, much like a *Bau*. The German word *Bau* can mean many things: a building, a tunnel, an adit, or a hole dug by a small creature. Gotovac repeatedly referred to Kurt Schwitters’s *Merzbau* as his point of departure. This infamous work, destroyed by an Allied bombing in 1943, was an extensive environment carved into a Hannover studio. Entering *The Gotovac Institute* at Krajiška today, one can still encounter the *Bau* principle that Gotovac so passionately followed, identifying as he did with its thrown-togetherness and outsiderism. The kitchen and the bathroom, located on one side of the apartment, were left untouched by Cazi-Gotovac and her project partner Darko Šimičić after the ERSTE Foundation provided the majority of the preservation budget in 2012. Looking at the images of the Krajiška flat in Gotovac’s *After Beška’s Death* (1988, photographs by Nino Semialjac), which show Elizabeta Lauer’s belongings beautifully stacked in cupboards and the artist glancing into his mother’s mirror – its decorative etchings projecting a tattoo onto his chest – it seems as if Gotovac was preserving objects she left behind, at the same time as he was producing a new order closely connected to himself and the evolution of his work. Where the trappings of petit bourgeois life – laced handkerchiefs and gold-rimmed vases – used to sit, detritus from the artist’s everyday consumer life moved in. The kitchen walls are covered with newspaper clippings, beer bottle caps, clothespins arranged into a smiley face, receipts, slips of paper, plastic bags, film posters, and other ephemera. Gotovac pleated and wrinkled tram tickets and food labels, and then pasted them together into collages (1964). He collected daily existence and inserted it into his work with much care. Every detail mattered. It is hard to understand the systemic dimension of Gotovac’s work without looking at instances when his ephemera collages turned into assemblages. His

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e-flux journal #54 — april 2014 Ana Ofak  
Gentleman Next Door: Antonio G. Lauer, a.k.a. Tomislav Gotovac, and the Man Undressed in Times of Socialism

was a process of turning flatness into volume, volume into environment, and environment into being. One such instance was the floors of the flat, which Gotovac gradually filled with boxes and stacked paper, forming passages through the *Bau*. These passages were the intestines of the “Tom system,” processing everything that went through Krajiška. And if the flat was the abdomen around these intestines, the building itself was the body. For a time, Gotovac was the head of the property owner’s association at Krajiška Street 29. He took care of the garbage, lights, apartment maintenance, and the backyard. Described by Cazi-Gotovac as a very strong-willed and difficult person, Gotovac regularly got into disputes with the other property owners. One such dispute began when some residents wanted to cut down a tree in the backyard, for fear that its roots would damage the foundation of the building. In the end, Gotovac saved the tree.

The longstanding ViGo collaboration between Gotovac and photographer Žarko Vijatović speaks to this practice of salvaging a valued object by encapsulating it in an artwork. In a series of color photographs, we encounter Gotovac embracing and kissing the tree in the backyard of Krajiška (2008). This gesture is not one of triumph over others who are less compassionate. Rather, it is a gesture of integration. Just like the everyday objects he salvages, the tree is turned into a part of the artist’s body of work. Another series of photographs follows Gotovac around Krajiška, showing him next to a building’s trash receptacle, wearing his favorite trench coat and black leather baseball cap (2008). Despite the ravages of age and illness on Gotovac’s former physical grandeur, exhibitionism and the thrill of the unexpected are sneakily present in these images. We are not quite certain whether he is going to flash his genitals before taking the next step, or halt and perhaps make use of a walking stick we haven’t discovered in the picture yet. Gotovac was very picky when it came to choosing his collaborators; it is evident that Vijatović was one of his favorites. An earlier work, comprised of a series of black-and-white photographs depicting Gotovac roaming throughout the building at Krajiška – including the flat, the cellar, the staircase, and the rooftop – adds volume to the nude body, thereby reinforcing the significance of the assemblage as a pivotal part of the “Tom system.” *Tomislav Gotovac in the Building at Krajiška 29* (1990) is again a portrayal of a man at his residence, except that this man is completely naked and his residence stripped down to its essentials. Floors, walls, light, dirt, and debris are met by skin, body hair, bare feet, and a penis. A cinematographic chronicle is

Repetition as a facet of history figures briefly into Deleuze’s inquiry; a few paragraphs of the text are spent reflecting on Marx’s famous line about how world-historical personages and facts happen twice, “first as tragedy, then as farce.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, these sentences arguably comprise the best section of the book, and are sadly occluded by its otherwise metaphysical emphasis. However, Deleuze clearly benefited from the exegesis of a skilled interlocutor – Harold Rosenberg, to be exact, with his treatment of the issue in his 1959 book *The Tradition of the New*.<sup>45</sup> Rosenberg convincingly showed that Marx did not reject every effort to repeat the past out of hand. This is doubly true in light of his deep admiration for the 1789 French Revolution, which by his own testimony donned the garb of the Roman Republic. Tragedy and farce in history would both seem to involve repetition, then; the difference is rather that the latter is twice removed from its point of origin, as an attempt to repeat what was already an attempted repetition.<sup>46</sup> Either way, Rosenberg knew well enough that changed circumstances would inevitably intervene: “Through the effect of time ... the repetition of the past becomes a repetition in appearance only; the permanent effectuality of change permits no true repetition.”<sup>47</sup>

Repetition induces a certain anxiety of influence in architects, modern and contemporary alike. A distinct horror is attached to the idea that one is merely repeating past formulae and techniques, that his or her projects are little more than rote exercises demonstrating competence. This probably would not have bothered premodern builders in the least, as nothing could be thought more noble than the mastery of time-honored principles.<sup>48</sup> In modern times, by contrast, derivative works are marked by the stigma of “unoriginality.” Modernists bristled at the suggestion that the architect’s task was to simply emulate his predecessors, or even recombine their styles in novel ways. All the same, they accepted repeatability – in the form of standardization – as a maxim in their designs. Only by designing repeatable models could their buildings be mass-produced, in contradistinction to all hitherto existing architecture. Walter Gropius, legendary founder of the Bauhaus, thus asserted in his 1925 book *The New Architecture* that “the repetition of standardized parts, and the use of identical materials in different buildings, will have the same sort of coordinating and sobering effect on the aspect of our towns as uniformity of type in modern attire has in social life.”<sup>49</sup> For modern architects, the repeatability of new forms was affirmed just as the repetition of old forms was denied.

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Repetition-Compulsion: World-Historical Rhythms in Architecture

### The Old in the New

Repetition stirs a different kind of discomfort in contemporary architects. To them, part of what made modern architecture so problematic was its repetitive (if not utterly generic) appearance. Searching for a way out, Charles Jencks turned to “ad hocism”<sup>50</sup>; Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown learned from the Las Vegas Strip<sup>51</sup>; and Paolo Portoghesi hybridized elements of modernism with classicism.<sup>52</sup> Besides the postmodernists, however, another constellation of architects hoped to exploit new digital possibilities in departing from the modern movement. “Parametricism looks for continuous programmatic variations rather than the repetition of strict function types,” writes Patrik Schumacher in *The Autopoiesis of Architecture*. “Instead of juxtaposing discrete functional domains this style prefers to offer all the in-between iterations that might be conceived between two function types.”<sup>53</sup> Schumacher, chief theorist of parametricism in architecture and prominent partner of Zaha Hadid, leans heavily on the philosophy of Deleuze, but clearly favors differentiation over repetition. He offers the following advice: “Instead of working with rigid forms, set up all architectural elements as parametrically malleable; instead of repeating elements, set up systems that continuously differentiate its elements.”<sup>54</sup> Oddly, both he and Hadid recapitulate some of the expressionist undercurrents of modern architecture while forsaking its functionalist mainstream. Geometric orthogonality is abandoned for organic continuity. It chases after smooth, undulating surfaces.<sup>55</sup>

Repetition reaches toward its putative other, nonrepetition, in parametricism’s reversion to Futurist and Expressionist precursors. The modus operandi of Hadid, Schumacher, and others is to resuscitate “neglected” or “overlooked” strains of modern architecture, whose potential for radical innovation was cut short, by repeating their forms with the help of advanced CATIA (Computer-Aided Three-Dimensional Interactive Application) technologies.<sup>56</sup> Zaha’s recent shift away from Suprematist and Constructivist precedents toward Futurist and Expressionist ones is all part of a singular progression/regression.<sup>57</sup> But these revivals do nothing to reanimate the turbulent social conditions that gave rise to these architectural currents in the first place, which still grant them their revolutionary aura. Even Foster, who previously defended the neo-avant-garde from such hasty dismissals, has lately found himself agreeing with Bürger on this score. He writes: “In the end ... Hadid might not escape the accusation that Bürger made long ago

repetition in time and in space, without *reprises*, without returns, in short without measure [*mesure*].”<sup>30</sup> For Lefebvre, one major consequence of capitalism’s unique spatiotemporal framework was that its rhythm is both cyclical and linear – a cycloliner motion.<sup>31</sup> The lines that demarcate it from precapitalist rhythms are perhaps not drawn sharply enough in Lefebvre’s account, but this does not diminish the validity of his insights. More precisely, he fails to appreciate the globalization of space in the creation of the world alongside the modernization of time in the creation of history. Bourgeois society represents the dawn of “world history” in the emphatic sense, just as the emergence of industrial capitalism marks the beginning of its crisis.<sup>32</sup>

Repetition can be viewed from yet another vantage point that proves pertinent to questions of art and architecture. Besides rhythmic repetitions of predetermined patterns or motifs within a given spatial ensemble, there are likewise periodic repetitions of earlier gestures or conceits within a given temporal progression. This does not refer so much to the cataloguing and systematized reuse of past styles in nineteenth-century architectural historicism as it does to the neo-avant-garde propensity in the 1950s–1970s to return to themes originally established by the classical avant-garde in the 1910s–1930s. Hal Foster provided what is probably still the best examination of this tendency in his 1997 text *Return of the Real*, where he set the pervasiveness of artistic and architectural “returns” in these decades into the broader context of concurrent “returns” in Marxism and psychoanalysis happening around roughly the same time. “In postwar art to pose the question of repetition is to pose the question of the *neo-avantgarde*, a loose grouping of North American and Western European artists of the 1950s and 1960s,” Foster claimed, “who reprised such avant-garde devices of the 1910s and 1920s as collage and assemblage, the readymade and the grid, monochrome painting and constructed sculpture.”<sup>33</sup> Like Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan, who undertook rereadings of canonical texts by Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud in order to counter the alleged “vulgarizations” of their thought by the traditions that stemmed from them, members of the neo-avant-garde during this period, including Dan Flavin and Zaha Hadid, revisited artworks by Vladimir Tatlin and Kazimir Malevich.<sup>34</sup> Such returns were supposed to recover the revolutionary impetus that originally belonged to Marxian socialism and Freudian psychoanalysis, as well as Constructivist and Suprematist strains of modernism. Unlike Peter Bürger, for whom the neo-avant-garde’s repetition of the classical

avant-garde’s revolt against tradition was farcical,<sup>35</sup> Foster saw this exercise as a self-aware intervention into historical practices whose once-radical novelty had calcified into routine.<sup>36</sup> He recommended taking a page from psychoanalysis in order to understand this compulsive drive to repeat.

The repetition-compulsion “endeavors to make a trauma real by living through it once more” – this was how Freud construed it, at least.<sup>37</sup> Another pithy formulation of his: “Repetition is the re-experiencing of something identical.”<sup>38</sup> But what exactly does this uncontrollable urge to repeat signify? Of what is it symptomatic? For Foster, the neo-avant-garde’s desire to return to its own origins – its felt need to relive the primordial act of rebellion – pointed to unfinished business left by the historical avant-garde, some *desiderata* that had gone unresolved. “If the historical avant-garde was *repressed* institutionally, it was *repeated* in the neo-avant-garde rather than, in the Freudian distinction, *recollected*, its contradictions worked through,” Foster wrote. “The avant-garde was made to appear historical before it was allowed to become effective,” he continued, “that is, before its aesthetic-political ramifications could be sorted out, let alone elaborated.”<sup>39</sup> Divorced from the material conditions that had engendered the avant-garde project to begin with, the inadequacy of this first repetition necessitated a second.

Repetition and difference have been closely linked since Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*, if not before its publication in 1966. Today the association is practically automatic. Foster drew attention to this fact in his article on “The Crux of Minimalism” in *Return of the Real*,<sup>40</sup> back when he still held out hope for its subversive potential.<sup>41</sup> Even Lefebvre fell under its sway toward the end of his life, whatever reservations he may have held along the way.<sup>42</sup> Deleuzian difference, to explain, is itself generated through the process of repetition: “Difference inhabits repetition,” or rather, “*Difference lies between two repetitions.*”<sup>43</sup> Something must exist in order to differentiate the copy from the original, the repetition from that which is repeated. If this does not occur in the object, then it must occur in the subject perceiving it. Older notions of repetition as an “eternal return” of the selfsame are thereby undermined. The metaphysics of this operation, Deleuze’s back-and-forth between ontology and epistemology, are only interesting insofar as they inspired a generation of architects who looked to theory for guidance. Aside from this, his entire undertaking in *Difference and Repetition* feels strangely anachronistic today – unable to comprehend the conditions of its own exigency.

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Tomislav Gotovac, *Tom, A Proposal for a Sexy Mag*, 1978. Photo: Zora Cazi-Gotovac.

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Tomislav Gotovac, *Tom, A Proposal for a Sexy Mag*, 1978. Photo: Zora Cazi-Gotovac.

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Marcus Lyon, *Bric IV – Ghatkopar Wadi – Mumbai, India*, 2009.





Marcus Lyon, *Bric I – Santa Teresa, Rio de Janeiro*, 2008.

silently established around these two protagonists – Gotovac and the building itself. In the cellar images, Gotovac is a giant inhabiting the basement. In one picture, his left eye is gleaming. A lurking threat is present. Upstairs, the threat dissipates and concentrated movement takes over. Gotovac's long legs and sturdy upper body take charge. The building is not merely a prop, but an agent of assembly actively drawing the scene together, similar to Hitchcock's eye for architecture. Only inside the apartment does the movement stop; in the stillness of privacy, the nude body is presented in detail. In one of the images, Gotovac holds a light bulb close to his penis. In the circle of light, his navel becomes prominent as well. Its dark hollowness, its hole-like appearance, challenges the penile sovereignty. Furthermore, we are meant to see that the artist is looking down at his genitals. Such an acknowledgment of his sex as self-acknowledgment is a recurring topos. It invites the beholder to insert herself into the viewing regime of Gotovac's panopticon, adopting the role of a surveyor. It is daring to sidestep voyeurism – that island of intrusive visual joy – in favor of a far more intellectually attentive viewing. Instead of lingering on the nudity, a surveyor is expected to confront cultural frames that shape the *mise-en-scène*. These cultural frames are cinematography, social paranoia, and the politics of sex and the body.

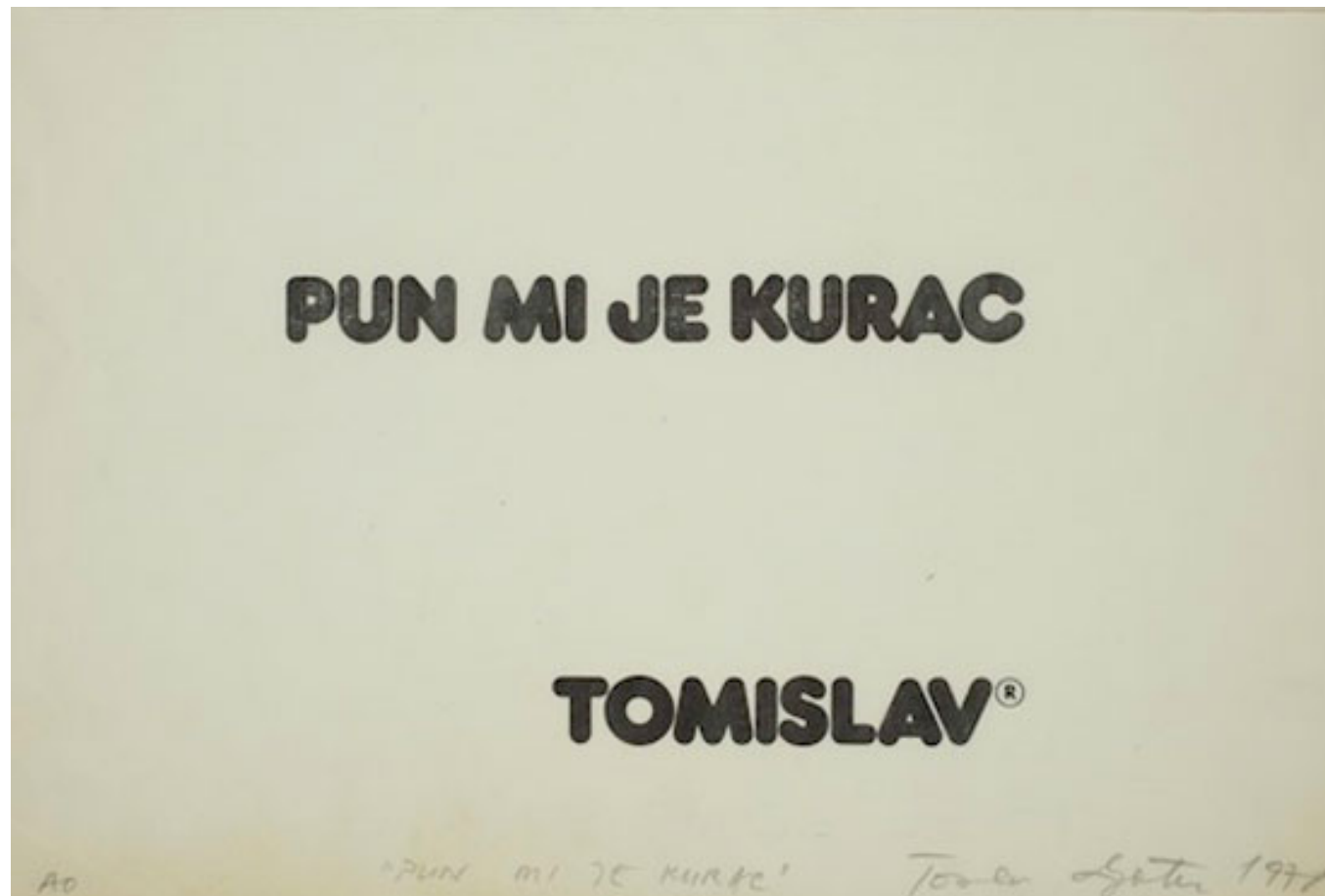
Such frames appear in many of Gotovac's nude photographic works. The earliest is *Tom, A Proposal for a Sexy Mag* (1978). As a product of an accidental collaboration with Cazi-Gotovac – the first photographer Gotovac asked for assistance declined – the work is unique for many reasons. Cazi-Gotovac was not just an amateur photographer; she was also the artist's young wife. The photos were taken in her parents' flat – on a bed, in the shower, and in front of a window with the blinds half closed. The only piece of clothing Gotovac wears in one image is a denim button-up shirt with mother of pearl buttons – the uniform of an American rebel. Signifiers of American culture are a regular occurrence in Gotovac's works. Here they allude to the possibility of translation into the local production of porn. One of the photos was supposed to be published in *Start* magazine as the first ever male pinup in Yugoslavia; the activist and *Start* journalist Vesna Kesić vouched for it. It didn't happen. However, erotic or pornographic magazines were not generally marginalized in Yugoslavia. On the contrary, from the late the 1960s to the '80s, Yugoslavia's media market was probably the most progressive in Eastern Europe, if not in all of Europe. Travel and sex – the latter on screen and on paper – were the cardinal freedoms made available by the

socialist regime of Yugoslavia. Erotic and pornographic magazines had a large circulation and were only lightly censored. Their objective was to entertain and educate while tearing down conservative and religious morals in order to give rise to others.



Cover of the October-November issue of *Čik* magazine, 1969.

Gotovac read and collected *Čik* and *Start* – the former was published in Belgrade, the latter in Zagreb. The girls on *Čik*'s cover were partially nude, and the magazine's focus was sexual education, with topics ranging from contraception to love advice to sexually transmitted diseases. An issue of *Čik* published in the autumn of 1969 had a rabble-rousing cover: a brunette baring her back and part of her behind was accompanied by the slogan "Sexual education in schools." Created in a socialist studio, the image had a Woodstock feel. *Start*, published by Zagreb's influential *Vjesnik* publishing house from 1969 to 1991, was a bigger, bolder publication. With quality journalism, it turned its readers' attention toward politics, cultural criticism, emerging writers, art, and sex. Following the *Playboy* model, *Start* always had a nude girl on the cover,

Tomislav Gotovac, *Pun mi je kurac*, 1978.

his rather ham-fisted attempt to draw a parallel between coincidental shifts in their epistemic foundations, through which he mistook correlation for causation. Giedion is better served by his focus on the social and historic transformations that form the basis for transformations in the ideological superstructure of a given epoch – such as the Industrial Revolution, and all the cultural and political upheaval that followed in its wake.<sup>18</sup>

Repetition manifests itself differently in its dynamic form than in its static variant; time introduces a whole range of hitherto unimaginable possibilities into the field of architecture. Asymmetries, imbalances, and disequilibria may be temporarily displaced, awaiting resolution elsewhere. In the meantime, they are held at bay. The Soviet Constructivist and architectural theorist Moisei Ginzburg compared the dynamism of modern design to the pulsating rhythm of industrial machinery, which he felt epitomized the new way of life being formulated in the earlier half of the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> In his 1924 text *Style and Epoch*, he characterized the principal lesson to be learned from the machine as follows:

The machine ... gives rise to a conception of entirely new and modern organisms possessing the distinctly expressed characteristics of movement – *its tension and intensity, as well as its keenly expressed direction* ... The axis of movement generally occurs ... beyond the machine itself. The question of symmetry in a machine is thus an altogether secondary one, not subordinated to the main compositional idea ... *It is possible and natural for the modern architect's conceptions to yield a form that is asymmetrical or that, at best, has no more than a single axis of symmetry, which is subordinated to the main axis of movement and does not coincide with it.*<sup>20</sup>

Ginzburg's repeated use of organic metaphors in his description of machines at times seems to anticipate the effusive language later employed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their jointly written *Anti-Oedipus*, from 1972.<sup>21</sup> In both cases, an attempt is made to overcome the usual dichotomy of organism versus mechanism. This superficial resemblance is belied, however, by the thoroughgoing modernism of the former's interpretation of history. Not only in *Style and Epoch*, but already his earlier work on *Rhythm in Architecture* from 1923, Ginzburg sought to decipher the principle that essentially unites the apparent multiplicity of historical forms. For him, the core feature underlying all past styles was

nothing other than "rhythm."<sup>22</sup> What distinguished modern architecture from everything that had come before, he contended, was the dynamic quality of its rhythm. It was thus no accident that Ginzburg went on to describe the main body of Dom Narkomfin in Moscow – his undisputed masterpiece, co-designed with Ignatii Milinis in 1928 – as "a ribbon of dwelling units in the shape of a long, uniform volume, with rhythmically repeating elements."<sup>23</sup>

Repetition may be mobilized at the level of the city as well. Urban sites can on the whole be dynamically configured, of course, while still making use of repetitive parts; cities needn't always be arranged according to a grid of rectilinear blocks or a radial agglomeration of concentric rings, both of which abide by fixed relationships of balance or symmetry. Such was the topic Giedion hoped to address in a remarkable article, today virtually unknown, on "Aesthetics and the Human Habitat" (1953), which he presented that year at CIAM 9 in Aix-en-Provence. Giedion insisted that, in addition to new plastic forms of composition, it would be necessary to cultivate new faculties of perception in step with these forms. Modernity, he maintained, "demands a new plastic sensibility: the development of a sense of spatial rhythms and a new faculty of perceiving the play of volumes in space."<sup>24</sup> From simple architectural units, then, a more complex urban fabric is composed. "We accept the use of repetition as an active factor in the creation of a plastic expression," Giedion continued. "Each functional element should express itself by means of a differentiation of form and color which would serve to give both a diversity within the larger ... residential sectors and, at the same time, a certain unity which would contribute a general rhythm throughout the city as a whole."<sup>25</sup> This contemporary urbanistic rhythm is strictly modern, moreover, which (as Giedion made clear) can be distinguished from traditional rhythms based on "equipose."<sup>26</sup>

#### Global Modernity and World History<sup>27</sup>

Repetition is thus reordered into different scales, from architecture up to urbanism down to design. Its particular appearance in any one of these realms is bound up with the universal logic of capitalist development, which it repeatedly embodies and refracts as *materialized ideology*.<sup>28</sup> Lefebvre picked up on this specifically modern rhythm of daily life in the section of *The Production of Space* (1972) devoted to spatial architectonics, in which he first proposed the idea of a "rhythmanalysis."<sup>29</sup> In his posthumously published work on the subject, unfortunately left unfinished, he recorded: "No rhythm without

tends to group together things of the same type. Even when the elements taken in pairs are somewhat different,” he continues, “we find that the structural resemblance dominates these differences. Repetition in any form of rhythm – as much in music as in architecture – is an extremely simple principle of composition which tends to give a sense of coherence.”<sup>4</sup> Musical rhythm, however, already implies a regular cadence or meter indexing its temporality: in short, its tempo. After a certain amount of time has passed in a piece of music, either a change occurs or an element repeats. While the constancy of this interval might seem to indicate stasis (since it determines a set duration), the unfolding of rhythm over time lends it a dynamic character. Is there anything in architecture that offers an equivalent?

### Static and Dynamic Repetition in Architecture

Repetition in architecture could perhaps be divided along lines similar to those found in music: into a purely spatial, static form and a quasi-temporal, dynamic form. The latter, which roughly approximates modern notions of architectural rhythm, may be better understood by contrasting it with the former, which corresponds to the older ideal of architectural harmony (Vitruvian *eurhythmia*).<sup>5</sup> Harmony as a principle of construction is typically thought to consist in the balance achieved between a building’s length, width, and height.<sup>6</sup> Here, *eurhythmia* is essentially a homeostatic concept; its proper domain remains circumscribed within these three dimensions of space, excluding the dimension of time. Its aim, classically speaking, is to bring about a state of “repose,” often in conjunction with symmetry and proportion. Or so it was from architecture’s earliest known origins, down through Semper and Viollet-le-Duc and up to the cusp of the fin de siècle.<sup>7</sup> With Berlage, one can even see this course extending into the opening decades of the twentieth century,<sup>8</sup> as has been pointed out by Reyner Banham.<sup>9</sup> As the French Marxist and sociologist Henri Lefebvre once put it, late in life, *eurhythmia* aspires to an almost glacial timelessness, seeking to sustain “metastable equilibrium” between spatial bodies.<sup>10</sup>

Repetition therefore assumes a more purely spatial form whenever it is used to express a relation of symmetry or equilibrium. One side matches the other, in an immediately graspable fashion. Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, one of France’s leading architects during the Enlightenment, stressed precisely this point in his 1780 text *The Genius of Architecture, or the Analogy of that Art with Our Sensations*: “Symmetry, or the use of repeated and balanced

forms, is essential. Where glass appears on the one side, there must be a glass on the other, of the same dimensions and in a frame of the same shape.”<sup>11</sup> Cut down the middle, each half is inversely proportionate to that from which it was divided. Hermann Weyl argued that a similar principle of static spatial repetition informed Attic and Ionian ceramics in ancient Greece, albeit unconsciously, from the seventh century BCE onward. In his seminal treatise on *Symmetry* (1952), Weyl demonstrated the mathematical underpinnings of a number of vases dating from the aptly named “geometric” period.<sup>12</sup> The repetition exhibited in these pieces, he held, was quite separate from what he had discussed as “one-dimensional *time* repetition” a few pages earlier.<sup>13</sup>



Sanatorium i Szpital Uzdrawiskowy "Równica" in Ustron, Poland was built between 1971-1973. Photo: Nicolas Grosppierre.

Repetition’s quasi-temporal form enters in somewhat later, alongside the development of a “new space conception,” namely space-time, which helped pave the way for modern design.<sup>14</sup> Sigfried Giedion located the decisive moment of this breakthrough at sometime around the turn of the century. It occurred either in 1909, with the publication of Marinetti’s *Futurist Manifesto* (fresh on the heels of Minkowski’s 1908 lecture on “Space and Time”),<sup>15</sup> or in 1911, with the first of Guillaume Apollinaire’s famous essays on *The Cubist Painters* (not long after Einstein’s painstaking definition of simultaneity in his work on electrodynamics).<sup>16</sup> Einstein’s objections to this dubious analogy between art and science are well-documented,<sup>17</sup> but may be set aside for now. The root of Giedion’s error may be traced to

and the centerfold was a pinup girl. However, in other ways *Start* was different: neither strictly political nor strictly porn, neither East nor West, but particularly masculine and particularly feminine. The depiction of women as readily available visual objects of lust was obvious, but to criticize this is tedious, and it limits us to a purely feminist approach. It is worth noting that being liberal (as well as loud and lewd, some might add) wasn’t restricted to the media in Yugoslavia. It was the territory that the whole country claimed for itself, including its art. We may see *Tom, A Proposal for a Sexy Mag* as an echo of this. Or we may follow Leopold and Natter in their understanding of Gotovac’s nudes as a parody of the sexes. Then again, “Tom was Tom” – he was the sole director of the manner in which he wished to be viewed.



Vlado Martek, *Write a Name on Everything You Buy or Own*, 1980. Courtesy Vlado Martek.

In looking at the nine images from the series *Tom, A Proposal for a Sexy Mag*, it is difficult not to see the intimacy between the two collaborators and lovers. Throughout the series, Gotovac has an erection. Similar to the girl’s erect nipples in *One Summer of Happiness*, which foreshadow sex that we don’t get to see, the artist’s erection takes center stage here. Gotovac told Vijatović that being photographed by his wife aroused him. The displayed hard-on is devoted to his wife and also to us as viewers. We get to see what Gotovac sees, what Cazi-Gotovac sees. While taking a shower in one of the images, Gotovac’s eyes are turned up in ecstasy. In the next one, he holds his erect penis and lets the water flow over it. We imagine him enjoying the cooling, sustaining effect. In the next image, the artist has turned his back on us. We see his hairy derriere, and since one leg is lifted, the slit between his ass cheeks is readily available. Yet, inside this vortex of sexual offerings and sexual offers, penetration is not an option. It would break the act. Surprising as it may be to our

gendered gaze, the camera does not serve as a sexual tool, nor is there a phallus one can identify with in order to dominate the situation. This might be the secret of the allure of Gotovac’s nudes: they are not about sex, but sexuality, sexiness, and seduction. They are about lust and desire joined and sustained. Mehdi Belhaj Kacem’s book *Être et sexuation* develops the subversive idea that the joining of lust and desire is not just good for escaping the death drive. It also draws us nearer to the nucleus of sexuality unspoiled by language.<sup>2</sup> He calls such a reconciliation with the sexual nature of the other (whoever that might be) a “singularity.” The assumption that “men are much harder to view” is undermined in *Tom, A Proposal for a Sexy Mag*. Whereas a penis figures as a turnoff to many female and male viewers alike, in the work of Gotovac it serves to assuage us, making sure that our fascination does not run dry. Gotovac does not impersonate travesty, but incorporates sexuality and sexiness as transverse social attitudes. We are directed toward visual pleasures that are not coded yet. They cultivate the singular. Gotovac is our gentleman next door.

Then again, he lived in a country that sanctioned sex in the media but prosecuted any deviation. In 1980 two years after *Tom, A Proposal for a Sexy Mag*, *Polet*, the weekly magazine of the League of Socialist Youth of Croatia, achieved a publicity coup. It featured a cover story showcasing Milan Šarović, the goalkeeper of the football team Dinamo Zagreb, in the nude. The story was dubbed “*Gol-man*” (the man undressed) and was accompanied by photographs taken by Mio Vesović, who helped create *Polet*’s nouvelle vague aesthetic. In the pictures, Šarović enters and exits a pool without trunks, the embodiment of bold athleticism. Another picture captures Šarović’s legs being massaged by a therapist. Since the goalkeeper’s torso and head are left out of this image – a practice typically reserved for female nudes – it is at least as provocative as the full nude picture. After a court ruled that the story was pornographic, the issue was withdrawn from newsstands. The court decision provoked outrage among intellectuals, especially feminists, with the writer Slavenka Drakulić arguing in the next issue of *Start* for egalitarianism in the naked body market. The root of this initial court ruling and subsequent scandal can be found in the cultural script that dictates the correct behavior of football players, a script that is still in force today. It prescribes that a football player must be an idol for the youth. And as Milutin Baltić, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Croatian Alliance of the Communist Party, flagrantly put it, the youth do not idolize a pinup, but “jerk off to it.” Although

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there is an eminent difference between a football player taking off his clothes in a magazine (some say unknowingly), and a football player coming out, a diachronic comparison points us to the regulation of the corrupted relationship between football and its choreography of male sexuality. To this end, the current case of the German football player Thomas Hitzlsperger, who openly spoke about his homosexuality only *after* leaving Bundesliga, assists us in appreciating *Polet's* coming clean with the male nude. Despite the moral double standard of the Yugoslav government and its media, they did initially provide a platform for an exploration of the male nude. The images *were* published; they were withdrawn only after a public and political outcry. In fact, in the aftermath the court lifted the ban and helped loosen censorship. And Šarović continued his successful football career, which would be unimaginable in football today, dominated as it is by FIFA hegemony and fascist fan culture.

In the historic summer of 1989, the same *Polet* featured a “Tomislav Gotovac story.” Gotovac curated the whole issue, using it to promote his work *Paranoia View Art (Homage to Glen Miller)* (1989), an extensive project amalgamating his personal view on his art and the politics of others. On the cover, Gotovac superimposed a shot of himself holding open his trench coat – a glowing five-pointed star cut out of his forehead – over the letters T-O-M. His exposed penis dangles neatly below the Glen Miller T-shirt he is wearing. This Tom character – a cinephile punk – is joined by three other portraits inside the paper: Tom the security agency worker, Tom the pinup, and Tom the superhero. They all pay homage to the absurd adventures of a country facing its brutal fall, while still enjoying the last convulsions of socialism. And it is here that the pinup from *Tom, A Proposal for a Sexy Mag* is finally published and turned into an amusing agent of history: with slightly mocking eyes and an already softened erection, it documents the laissez-faire assertiveness of a generation that in every sense of the word has had a “dick-full.” In a wise bit of foresight, Gotovac produced several cardboard placards bearing his signature and a copyright mark under the phrase “I have a dick-full,” a colloquial expression meaning “I’ve had enough” (*Pun mi je kurac*, 1978). It was a tipping point for nudity as an “attitude toward [the world]” in the arts. Others joined in. In his piece *Write a Name on Everything You Buy or Own* (1980), Vlado Martek brought his conceptual poetry into uncharted territory when he inked “dick” on his penis. The inscription prevents the viewer from ignoring the scribbled letters, forcing her or him to experience the amusement (or shame) of

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lingering too long over the artist’s denomination of ownership down below. On the other hand, in their work *Imponderabilia* (1977) Marina Abramović and Ulay forced visitors to get stuck in the pulpiness of sexual reification by making them squeeze themselves through the vault of their exposed bodies. In *An Attempt at Identification* (1979), Vlasta Delimar and Željko Jerman stood naked on stage with “I” painted on each of their chests, then engaged in a tight embrace to smear the letters. This made it less tactile, but not less itchy, for viewers to surpass the obvious message and lose themselves in relishing the bodies presented. In one way or another, all of these works employed techniques of shaking up sex and stripping it away from cultural scripts. To *have* a “dick-full” meant more than being sick of it all. It meant unleashing *being* a dick to the fullest.

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All images courtesy of Tomislav Gotovac Institute unless otherwise noted.

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Marcus Lyon, *Bric III – Yugo-Zapadnyy Okryg – Moscow*, 2008.

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In studies of repetition blindness, it is unclear whether the failure to recognize recurring items in a sequence owes primarily to an inability to notice similarities the second time something appears. Conflicting evidence indicates that it could just as easily involve an inability to remember the qualities something displayed the first time around. Psychologists are still split over this question.<sup>1</sup>

A person must first be allowed to perambulate a structure, eyes gliding along its surface. György Kepes, a Hungarian painter closely associated with his fellow countryman László Moholy-Nagy, the Bauhaus master, asserted in his 1944 *Language of Vision* that

the orderly repetition or regular alternation of optical similarities or equalities dictates the rhythm of the plastic organization. In recognizing such order one learns when the next eye action is due and what particular neuromuscular adjustment will be necessary to grasp the next unit. To conserve the attentive energies of vision, therefore, the picture surface must have a temporal structure of organization – it must be rhythmically articulated in a way that corresponds, for the eye, to the rhythm of any work process.<sup>2</sup>

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Kepes may have had visual media in mind when he wrote on “the picture surface,” but the observation holds for architecture as well. For the prolific Danish urbanist and critic Steen Eiler Rasmussen, serial repetition offered a quintessential means by which to convey orderliness in design. “The simplest method,” wrote Rasmussen in his 1959 guide *Experiencing Architecture*, “for both the architect and the artisans, is the absolutely regular repetition of the same elements, for example solid, void, solid, void, just as you count one, two, one, two. It is a rhythm everyone can grasp.”<sup>3</sup> Here again, as with Kepes, repeated components operate by establishing a kind of rhythm of intuition, which then structures all subsequent experience. Each passage highlights the peculiar double aspect of repetition in architecture: it is simultaneously an *objective* property of the built work – perceptible to both inhabitants and passersby – and a *subjective* approach to design.

Repetition as “rhythm” suggests a musical analogy. In architecture, however, rhythm is realized in space. Pierre von Meiss, a Swiss architecture theorist of some renown, made this connection explicit in his popular *Elements of Architecture: From Form to Place* (1986). Like Kepes, von Meiss emphasized repetition’s role in the economy of vision by explaining how “the eye

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<sup>1</sup>  
Gotovac in Darko Bavljak’s film *Stupid Antonio Presents* (2006).

<sup>2</sup>  
Mehdi Belhaj Kacem, *Être et sexuation* (Paris: Stock, 2013).

Geert Lovink  
**Hermes on the Hudson: Notes on Media Theory after Snowden**

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Slogans for 2014: “Hope is the mother of fools” (Polish saying) – Search for Yourself – “Views stated in this email are not my own and cannot be used against me” (footer) – *The No-Excuses Truth to Understanding Anarchism* (book title) – Tame Your Junk (three-day course) – “Hardwired for Nonsense” – “Make the most hegemony with a career in Gramsci” (Ian Bogost) – “Why [popular technology] is [unexpected opinion]” (4chan) – Encountering Algorithmic Flags on Content – “not just anti-aesthetic, but anaesthetic” – “you restored our world” – “Why I stopped coding to focus more on my blog,” with 39,123 comments – “Please note: I am not checking my spam folder anymore. If your message is not answered soon, please rephrase and resend.” – Happy Dark Ages – “I have seen dancing soldiers on Facebook” – “Modest and quiet cryptographers have superior ethics over word artists” (John Young) – Yiddish expression: “Man plans, and God laughs.” – Petition to Google shareholders: “Be Sociable, Share!” – “You sound like the drunk guy who won't put down his bottle as though it's stuck in his hand all the while calling alcohol bad and terrible” – “We don't need your aid, please fund our budget deficit” (African saying).

Enlightenment not only promises new knowledge, it also shatters mythologies. The Snowden revelations in June 2013 mark the symbolic closure of the “new media” era. The NSA scandal has taken away the last remains of cyber-naivety and lifted the “internet issue” to the level of world politics. The integration of cybernetics into all aspects of life is a fact. The values of the internet generation have been dashed to pieces: decentralization, peer-to-peer, rhizomes, networks. Everything you have ever clicked on can and will be used against you. In 2014, we've come full circle and returned to a world before 1984. That was not only Orwell's year, but also the moment Apple hit the mediascape with the personal computer. Until 1984, a small conglomerate of multinationals such as IBM, Honeywell-Bull, and GE defined the public imagination of computers with their sterile, corporate mainframes that processed punch cards. Until then, computers had been used by large bureaucracies to count and control populations and had not yet shaken off their military origins. Now, thirty years later, the computer is once again the perfect technical instrument of a cold, military security apparatus that is out to allocate, identify, select – and ultimately destroy – the Other. The NSA, with the active support of Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and allied secret services, has achieved “total awareness.” Precisely at the moment when the PC is disappearing from our desks, large and invisible data centers take their place in the

1  
Zeynep Tufekci, “Is the Internet good or bad? Yes.” Medium.com, February 17, 2014  
<https://medium.com/matter/76d9913c6011>

2  
Alexander R. Galloway, Eugene Thacker, McKenzie Wark, “Introduction: Execrable Media,” in *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 1.

3  
Ibid., 29.

4  
Ibid., 153.

5  
Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 25.

6  
See also the web archive of the nettime mailing list for a more detailed account of the “post-digital” debate, March 2014  
<http://nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-1403/threads.html>

7  
*Excommunication*, 10.

8  
Galloway and Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

9  
See ““Dark Deleuze”: A Glossary,” *Anarchist Without Content*, February 25, 2014  
<http://bit.ly/Nwwolm>

10  
Galloway, “Love of the Middle,” in *Excommunication*, 40.

11  
See Cray, *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (New York: Verso, 2013).

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out how to make us more compliant.” In 2014, we’re torn between the seductive aspect of coming together and the fear that we are consciously producing evidence that will be used against us. Let’s move away from the binary logic of online/offline, of participation/exodus, and instead design other forms of social interaction and organization together, based on sustainable exchanges, strong ties, and a sensual imagination that allows us to transcend the given cultural formats (from edu-factory formats to Facebook).

What we need now are philosophical responses to the cult of selfies, more interventions in the moral panic over the loss of attention and the presumed distraction epidemic, further investigations into the 24/7 economy and sleep deprivation (with Jonathan Crary as a brilliant start<sup>11</sup>), a straight-on confrontation with the contemporary arts system over its digital blindness, a further strengthening of New Materialism and similar investigations into hybrids of the real and the virtual, drone aesthetics, Internet of Things politics, and the role of gender in programming. How can media theory jump over its own shadow? *Excommunication* is an attempt to find new inroads. If there ever was a Media Question, it is now reaching its existentialist moment.

x

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Geert Lovink is a Dutch-Australian media theorist and critic. He is Professor at the European Graduate School, Research Professor at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam, where he is founding director of the Institute of Network Cultures, and Associate Professor in Media Studies (new media), University of Amsterdam. Lovink is author of *Dark Fiber* (2002), *My First Recession* (2003) and *Zero Comments* (2007). He recently co-organized events and publications on Wikipedia research, online video and the culture of search. His forthcoming book investigates the rise of "popular hermeneutics" inside Web 2.0, large scale comment cultures and the shifting position of new media (studies) inside the humanities.

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Edward Snowden appears as a telepresence robot at a TedTalk2014 presentation. Photo: Ryan Lash

collective techno-imaginary.

The Turkish-American web sociologist Zeynep Tufekci reflects on the new state of affairs:

Resistance and surveillance: The design of today's digital tools makes the two inseparable. And how to think about this is a real challenge. It's said that generals always fight the last war. If so, we're like those generals. Our understanding of the dangers of surveillance is filtered by our thinking about previous threats to our freedoms.<sup>1</sup>

She calls on us to update our nightmares. Let's take this call seriously. In what ways can we still read our terrifying dreams with (Freudian) tools based on ancient Greek myths? In the age of smartphones, archetypal layers have been rewired and have mutated into a semi-collective techno-subconscious. We never dream alone. The digital is being pushed into the realm of the subliminal. The subject-as-user, the one who takes selfies, can indeed no longer productively distinguish between real and virtual, here and there, day and night. What is citizen empowerment in the age of the driverless car?

The University of Chicago Press recently released the third volume of its Trios series. *Excommunication* contains three extended essays written on the brink of the Snowden affair by three New York-based new media scholars – theory royalty who belong to the digital nineties generation: Alex Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark. The “three inquiries in media and mediation” open with the widely shared discontent that “new media” has become an empty signifier: “One of the things the trio of us share is a desire to cease adding ‘new media’ to existing things.”<sup>2</sup> As the nineties slogan says: new media are tired, not wired. Or, to put it in eighties theory jargon: new media have moved from the schizoid revolutionary pole to the paranoid, reactionary pole. Fashion over, next hype? If so, how do we deal with the Media Question, knowing that it is over but hasn't gone away? To put it in the German context, what's media theory after Friedrich Kittler? This question has been with us for some time. It is not enough that the historical wing – media archaeology – is doing well. Can we speak of a next generation that grew up under postmodernism, matured in the post-Cold War era of digital networks, and is currently taking over? Taking over what? There is a lot to say for the thesis that the height of speculative media theory was in the 1980s. The rest has been implementation – a boring and predictable collision with the existing political economy of

global capitalism. This leaves us with the question of the mandate and scope of today's media theory – if there is anything left. Are you ready to hand over the “new media” remains to the sociologists, museum curators, art historians, and other humanities officials? Can we perhaps stage a more imaginative “act of disappearance”? Are we ready to disguise ourselves amidst the new normality?

There are many ways to read *Excommunication*. One way would be to see this trio as a possible trend. Are new media theorists ready to become the next generation of public intellectuals following the example of Evgeny Morozov? It is hard to speak of an “emerging” New York School of Media Theory. It would be cool, but that's not really what's happening. What ingredients do we need in order to speak of a school? A program? Large quantities of research money? Institutional power? Influential academic positions, such as chairs? None of these seem to be present now. There are – not yet – distributed schools. Instead of endlessly comparing New York to LA, London, Paris, or Berlin as part of the city marketing logic, it makes more sense to return to the eighteenth-century model of philosophy as correspondence – through email lists, forums, blogs, Twitter. Pick your platform and start to insert the ideas of this print collaboration into the digital domain.

Is it the task of media (theory) to explain the world? The New York Three seem to have given up on this idea. Not only do they have doubts about the very possibility of communicating, there is also a growing uncertainty that theory can unfold the truth about our technological objects and processes. What does it mean in the context of “new media” that hermeneutics is, as Alex Galloway writes, in crisis? “Why plumb the recesses of the human mind, when the neurological sciences can determine what people think? Why try to interpret a painting when what really matters is the price it demands at auction?”<sup>3</sup>

As was noted in the 1990s, most media theory had been speculative in nature and projected its concepts into the future in the hope of cashing out at some stage. Already two decades ago, theory was incapable of understanding chips, computer code, and related interfaces (with the odd exception of Friedrich Kittler and a few others). The inability of theory to take apart the prime drivers of our civilization has caused a self-marginalization of the arts and humanities.

So what if we've lost our faith in media's future, and we are left to our devices in the cold storage of Big Data? The contrast with 1980s film analysis, dominated by semiotics, postmodern philosophy, and psychoanalysis, couldn't be

The post-media tendency results in a withdrawal of theory in favor of largely uncritical tools and methods that are eagerly being implemented by mainstream social science, which has long been on the lookout for new fields of employment. The digital humanities can be seen as a distraction – a pragmatic but desperate gesture to hold off the disappearance of the humanities. Digital potency is not a unique selling point for shrinking disciplines such as history, philosophy, and literature. It is not the task of media theory to build visualization tools that prove the usefulness of ideas. We can rest assured: the Big Data wave will be over soon, but the related questions will remain.

Why hammer out concepts, be it speculative, critical, or pragmatist, if there is a meta-authority overseeing it all? Why conspire in the light? In a variation of Pink Floyd, we could say: we don't need no Second God. Big Brother and his Little Sister have arrived, and are here to stay, unless we have the collective courage to dismantle the installed technical infrastructure. We need to develop dissident knowledge of how to bring down drones, detect sensors, hack servers, distort GPS signals, and disrupt Google by fooling its algorithms. Forget the next innovation cycle. If the common hacker's paranoia informs us correctly, we lost the war years ago and are surrounded. Soon we will be called to surrender, one by one.

To put it in Deleuzian terms, is it still our task to create concepts, or do we switch and spend our time destroying worlds? Over the past decade, the affirmative, light part of this French philosopher has been emphasized. Now the pendulum moves to the dark side.<sup>9</sup> Are we in the process of un-becoming, disassembling identities, withdrawing from the overexposed public realms, unfolding the networks, interrupting the flows of links and likes, putting the joyous production of signs on hold?

The trio rightly states that what's at stake is the destiny of media theory *an sich*. Old or new, visual or literary, digital or post-digital, what media theory invites you to do is read the past in a different way. But why must it be the case that if we merge media with theory, we're inevitably drawn into the past? We may as well posit the thesis that the media angle results in speculative tinkertoy theory, and the perfect critical tool to dissect the present.

“Media are forever those things foreign to us,” Galloway says in *Excommunication*.<sup>10</sup> The vitalist impulse has left the media sphere. Media is dead, long live the pure and direct experience. Have the three removed themselves from the scene? I beg to differ. After all, they wrote a book, they tweet, and so forth. Exodus ain't no withdrawal. Dionysian darkness helps us to step

out of the unbearable lightness of transparency. Theory and criticism need to claim their own space in the debate, next to Reddit, Hacker News, and Verge, where ZDNet, Wired, Slashdot, and TechCrunch were in the past. Will Medium, the newest startup by the founder of Twitter, be a gesture in this direction?

Theory might spin off into its own realm and lose touch with the current issues that cry for critical interventions. We cannot afford to withdraw. As we speak, there is an assault on theory happening in the form of Big Data hype, which threatens to marginalize both speculative and critical approaches. Why study concepts and their origins if you can indulge in a sea of data? We desperately need a counterattack, starting with an overall rejection of “digital humanities.” In this *Methodenstreit* 2.0, we need to go beyond the pitiful bourgeois defense of “liberal arts” and demonstrate that there is no software without concepts. The weakness of software studies is widely felt. Where is software studies now that we need it?

Bernard Stiegler's pharmacological approach, on the other hand, seems capable of counterbalancing the exodus sentiment. Despite his dark analysis, Stiegler remains one of the few contemporary thinkers who works with both an online and offline strategy, without trying to construct an artificial synergy between the two. Likewise, Evgeny Morozov, the Eastern European migrant to the United States who refuses to submit to the American Dream, has written about Silicon Reality and its alternatives, which are all presumably infected by hegemonic concepts, including NSA backdoors. His uncompromising attacks work, and the uptake of his recent term, “solutionism,” is remarkable. Digital disgust is out there, and the impulse of offline romanticism is widely felt. But for the NSA, these are irrelevant sentiments. The security complex is agnostic about our movement back and forth between the online and offline worlds.

From Gezi Park to Brazil and Ukraine, we are indeed turning into furies and delinquent packs (to use Wark's terms). Our enigma is known: Are the uprisings occurring despite or because of social media? Tufekci advises that the “state-of-the-art method for shaping ideas is not to coerce overtly but to seduce covertly, from a foundation of knowledge.” How can theory play a role in this seduction? A temporary break might seem inevitable, to cut routines. *Excommunication* as a strike against meaning, a boycott of messaging. Tufekci explains: “Internet technology lets us peel away layers of divisions and distractions and interact with one another, human to human. At the same time, the powerful are looking at those very interactions, and using them to figure

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commodity, we should not be surprised that we burn through these platforms quickly and abandon them so easily.

Social media without the libidinous drive is a deadly boring routine. The playful dialectics between anonymous voyeurism and the exhibitionist display of the selfie have driven the hypergrowth of social media. Once this productive couple becomes a routine, user statistics tumble and mass migration to the next platform sets in. The crisis caused by Snowden is one of an entirely different nature. To submit emails to a non-responding, deserted cyberspace is death; the non-responding Other is Hell. This has now expanded from email and linking to the social media realm: What happens when re-tweets and the like dry up and the frantic 24/7 obsession becomes meaningless? It has proven to be not enough to follow and have followers. The act of following remains passive and invisible as long as there is no communication. To refrain from commenting equals death.

There is an emerging consensus that “the internet is broken.” It is becoming harder for the Googles and Facebooks to go back to business as usual. In this historical moment, it is of strategic importance to hear the voices of technically

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competent public intellectuals. Slavoj Žižek, with all his shortcomings, is able to effectively raise his in the cases of Pussy Riot, Occupy Wall Street, Snowden, and demonstrations in Bosnia. When it comes to (new) media, Žižek inevitably falls back into a 1980s film analysis of Hollywood. Jodie Dean does a better job with her analyses of blogging and “communicative capitalism,” but in the end remains trapped in the ghetto of American academia.

The state of radical disillusionment we find ourselves in also calls for a reassessment of the role of theory. If we look around us, the role of theorists has been taken over by commentators and journalists. As in most countries, there is only a weak institutional representation of media theory in the US, and the fact that most internet critics in the US are not (established) academics (Carr, Lanier, Keen, Morozov, Pariser, among others) says it all. We can make similar observations about the new media (arts) programs and festivals that are on their way out. It is not hard to see that traditional film and television programs have won the game. Digital humanities won't help us out here. Neither will “communication science” with its applied PR knowledge. In this context, we have to read the Greek gods for allegories of media theory.

greater. New media was, and still is, speculative and not hermeneutic. This is precisely because it has become so difficult to lay out the object of study, to put computer code, network architectures, user interfaces, and so forth, on the dissection table and spread them out in order to be able to read the material, with the aim of pouring out details that would reveal the bigger picture. The Will to Exegesis might still be there, but the black box cannot be dissected. This is the real hermeneutics crisis. This is the case in part because theorists have not learned to code, and also in part because the objects of study are simply not available (think of all the corporate algorithms).

A narrative reconstruction of a deeper meaning is hard to pull off in the digital media age, not least because in this McLuhan era, no one walks into the trap of content analysis. The message of the medium is its underlying structure, and both Google and Facebook are perfect examples of this law.

This is the background of the Greek turn in New York media theory, where the internet gets interpreted through comparisons to Hermes, Iris, and Fury (as well as through fashionable channels such as Badiou, Laruelle, Nancy, and others). As Wark summarizes: “Hermes stands

for the hermeneutics of interpretation, Iris for the iridescence of immediacy, and the Furies for the swarm of the distributed network.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus *Excommunication* takes the liberty of stepping back from the political everyday of the Snowden scandals to turn to a highly coded language that uses Greek mythological names to speak to the revolutionary few. According to Leo Strauss, persecution gives rise to a peculiar type of literature “addressed ... to trustworthy and intelligent readers only.”<sup>5</sup> Is this the form and address that Wark, Galloway, and Thacker have in mind? Are they under surveillance and in danger? Do they encrypt their conversations in order to protect themselves from both the NSA and the constant barrage of banalities on Twitter and Facebook? Who knows. Suppression of independent thought through self-censorship has a long history, as Strauss explains. Could we call it a voluntary act of self-marginalization? Or rather, a desire to be accepted by established philosophers? Is it the overflow of social media that urged the authors to “combine understanding with caution,” or is it ostracism? Whatever the case, the question remains as to what discourse can revitalize freedom of speech in a digital age. I don't want to read between the lines. With so much at stake, instead of dragging

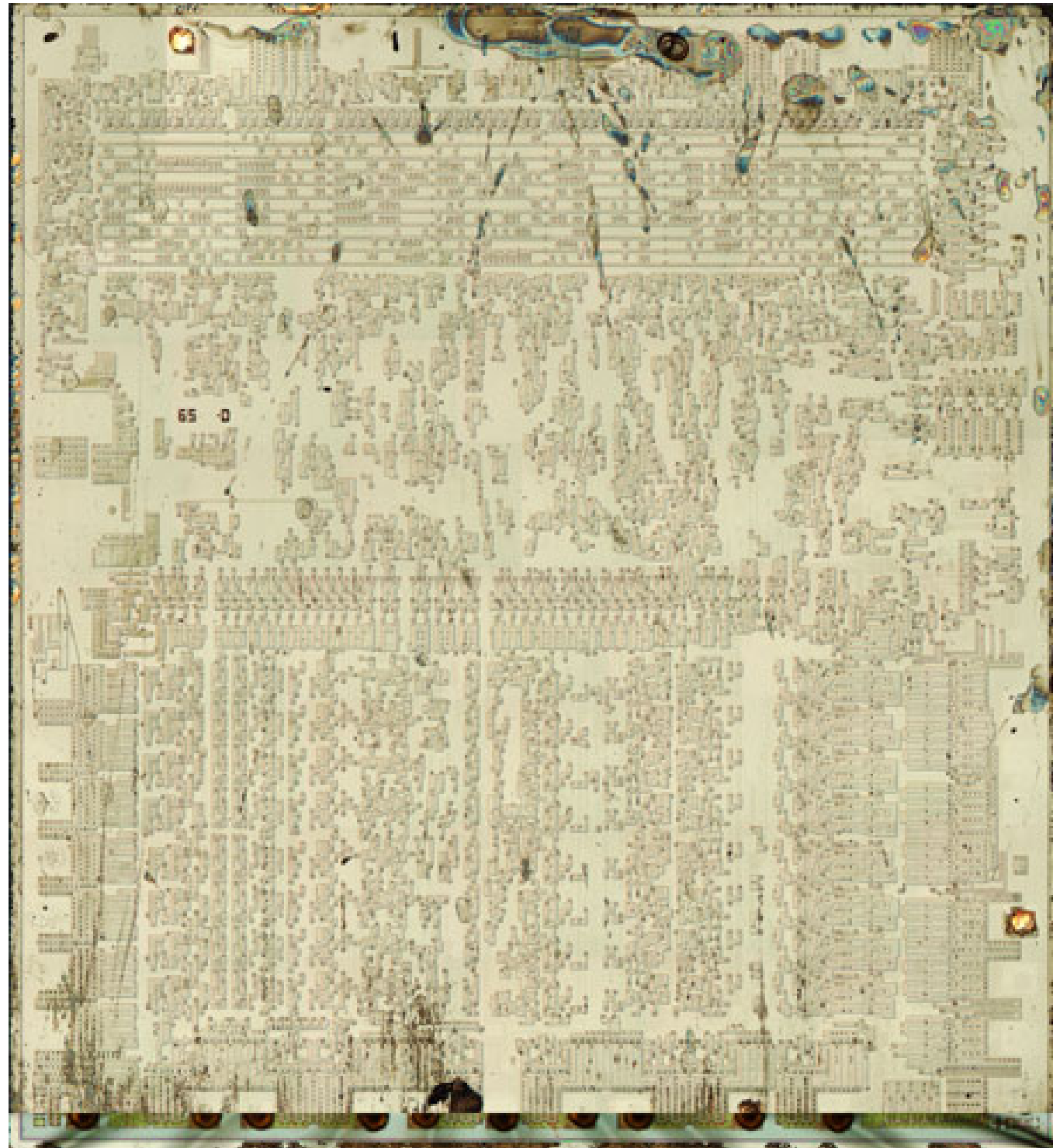
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Possibly the first selfie in space: an astronaut on the NASA spaceship ISS015 attempts a self-portrait.



A server advertisement addresses potential bank clients in an airport in China.



A MOS 6502 revision D chip was photographed in high definition as part of visual6502.org's media archeology project.

this text into a pool of misinterpretations, I propose to open up the debate. Can we say that media theory as such is regarded as suspect by the majority? Because of the growing gap between computer use (and similar devices) and the stagnation of new media theory coming from academia, we need to take this question seriously.

The informal critique from German circles that *Excommunication* does not move beyond the level of a German high school essay is a statement that I cannot verify. I have missed Michel Serres's impressive work on Hermes. Ulysses does not run through my Dutch-Anglo veins. The fact remains that our German friends have failed to invest in translating their work into English so that a proper international dialogue can take place (recent examples would be Sybille Krämer's study on media and messengers and Kittler's last works on music and mathematics, both exclusively positioning their ideas inside ancient Greek philosophy). Contemporary German theorists are still rare in international discourse, and are usually in their fifties or sixties before they get translated. To dismiss the New York trio as would-be continentals that speak in a Greek tongue avoids the debate that's really at stake here. Kill all your darlings, or, how to say farewell to new media.

There are so many pressing issues in this climate of stagnation, rage, and depression, during a time when no one cares about newness anymore. The trend in media theory of moving away from its own object of study can be traced back to a wild variety of sources: from Neil Postman, to Adilkno's *Unidentified Theory Objects* in its 1998 Media Archive collection, to George Steiner's *Real Presences*, to Goffey and Fuller's ambivalent *Evil Media* strategies, to Florian Cramer's *Anti-Media*, to Lüneburg's Post-Media Lab (a collaboration between *Mute* magazine and Leuphana University that produced *Provocative Alloys: A Post-Media Anthology*), to comparable incarnations of the "post-digital" concept. As its promoter, Florian Cramer explains: "Anti-media is what remains if one debunks the notion of media but can't get rid of it."<sup>6</sup>

For the New York trio, the key question is: "What is mediation?" To pose this question means to imagine the opposite: there is no communication without excommunication. What if we stop mediating? Instead of digging into the ongoing rise of the connected world, the authors favor studying the "insufficiency of mediation," and "modes of mediation that refuse bi-directionality, that obviate determinacy, and that dissolve devices entirely."<sup>7</sup> Not everything that exists has to be represented and mediated.

To what extent is this different from the

traditional "deconstruction" agenda, the "glitch" aesthetics à la Rosa Menkman, or even the "exploit" philosophy as formulated by Galloway and Thacker themselves?<sup>8</sup> Already at that point the authors argued in favor of a "counterprotocol," an "anti-web," or, to put it in philosophical parlance, an "exceptional topology." If we exclude offline romanticism, how could we translate this analysis into a workable political program? It is one thing to imagine a specific aesthetic. There are multitudes of artists working in this direction. In the post-Snowden age, it is no longer sufficient to call for open-source alternatives that merely copy the corporate premises of the dominant platforms (the friends logic and so on). The social graph order itself has to be questioned. Can we bring together a collective intelligence that is capable of formulating the very principles of another communication order?

*Excommunication* is not just a reference to a world after media, to post-media or the post-digital, as some characterize this next phase. We also must perform a literal reading of acts of power. We are excommunicated from the new media paradise and suddenly confronted with the cold logic of Big Politics. A generation thought it was possible to refine the very terms under which they were communicating. One impulse, do-it-yourself, brought together punks, geeks, and entrepreneurs. The radical disillusionment after Snowden should be classified as a secular version of the late-nineteenth-century discovery that God is Dead. However, the ecclesiastical censure of this age is non-technological in nature. We have not been expelled from the networks. Smartphones and tablets have not been confiscated. The problem is neither increasing censorship nor advanced filter techniques that we are only half aware of. Technological blockades can be circumvented. We can armor ourselves with layers of crypto protection, but the problem goes much deeper. What the NSA revelations have unleashed is the existential uncertainty that comes along with "everything you say can and will be used against you." The long-term implications of such destruction of informal exchange are yet unknown. Will online communication become more formal? Will there be fewer trolls? In short, will new cultures of conflict arise, or be suppressed from the start – or not show up in the first place?

We are not excluded from the communion of believers. Rather, we excommunicate ourselves because the consensual thrill has dried up. Many feel the social pressure of Facebook and Twitter, and withdraw, or shut up and turn the "participatory culture" into a silent nightmare of presence. When community becomes a