

# Bogota. City on the edge

23.11.2013-19.01.2014

Opening:

22.11.2013, 18.00

CSW ŁAŻNIA, Jaskółcza 1  
Gdańsk Dolne Miasto

**The Visions of Colombia.**

**The screening of documentaries**

23-24.11.2013

Kinoport, Strajku Dokerów 5, Gdańsk Nowy Port

More about presentations: [www.laznia.pl](http://www.laznia.pl)



Project supported by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland

Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego



o.pl

indexart

teatr.pl



e-flux journal



issue #49

11/2013

*e-flux journal* is a monthly art publication featuring essays and contributions by some of the most engaged artists and thinkers working today. The journal is available online, in PDF format, and in print through a network of distributors.

**Editors**

Julieta Aranda  
Brian Kuan Wood  
Anton Vidokle

**Copy Editor/Proofreader**

Michael Andrews

**Managing Editor and Distribution**

Mariana Silva

**Graphic Design**

Jeff Ramsey

**Layout Generator**

Adam Florin

For further information, contact  
[journal@e-flux.com](mailto:journal@e-flux.com)

[www.e-flux.com/journals](http://www.e-flux.com/journals)

01/01

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013  
Colophon

Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

02 pp. **Editorial—“Pieces of the Planet” Issue Two**

Sven Lütticken

13 pp. **World History and Earth Art**

Hito Steyerl

10 pp. **Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?**

Hu Fang

08 pp. **Dear Navigator, Part II**

Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, Manal Al Dawayan, Parag Khanna, Turi Munthe

09 pp. **Freezone: Dubai**

Walid Raad

05 pp. **Walkthrough, Part II**

Gleb Napreenko

06 pp. **On the Format of the Divine**

Nato Thompson

12 pp. **The Insurgents, Part II: Fighting the Left by Being the Left**

01/01

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013  
Contents

Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan  
Wood, Anton Vidokle  
**Editorial –  
“Pieces of the  
Planet” Issue  
Two**

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle  
Editorial – “Pieces of the Planet” Issue Two

01/02

In 2003, Slavoj Žižek made a very prescient observation to explain how the US under George Bush used a plot twist borrowed from Alfred Hitchcock to justify the invasion of Iraq.<sup>1</sup> He called it the “Iraqi MacGuffin.” Now, what is a MacGuffin? Exactly. The example Žižek gives: Two men run into each other on a train. One carries a suitcase. When asked what the suitcase contains, the carrier replies, “It is a MacGuffin.” But what is a MacGuffin? “It is a device used for killing leopards in the Scottish Highlands.” But there are no leopards in the Scottish Highlands. “Well, then that’s not a MacGuffin, is it?” Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction were never found, and somehow the fact that they did not actually exist was secondary to their enormous value as a narrative device for producing a precondition for going to war in Iraq.

Žižek’s piece goes on to list a chain of geopolitical ironies circulating at the time between statements and intentions, from the outsourcing of torture to protect the veneer of democracy to the US support of patently religious states such as Israel or anti-democratic monarchies such as Saudi Arabia. It is almost quaint to read now, at a time when these inconsistencies have become status quo. But how did this happen? We all remember Donald Rumsfeld’s RAND-corporation style stumble into metaphysics when he announced the existence of known unknowns and unknown unknowns – the things we know we don’t know and the things we don’t know we don’t know.<sup>2</sup> And looking back at Žižek’s illuminating metaphor, it starts to become clear that something happened a decade ago, perhaps in parallel with the internet becoming a major actor in the transmission of geopolitical events across vast distances at incredible speeds. Narration emerged as the primary means of explaining events or justifying political acts. On the one hand, we can, and we must, fault the Bush government for using an absurd fiction to justify war. But the absurdity of the act released something else that was always hidden behind the need for political will to control the narrative. It recognized and released an enormous space within the political field where legitimacy is produced by means of narration rather than evidence or a court order. While artists were struggling to locate political agency in works of art, the actual political sphere had already gone fully cinematic in its approach.

Hitchcock is often called the Master of Suspense. And suspense is a funny thing. It has a lot in common with Kant’s sublime, as a sense of mastery over an impending disaster that one has the luxury of witnessing but not the power to stop. It is a narrative device that outsources responsibility to an author’s shadow game of concealing and revealing at intervals, allowing

12/12

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Nato Thompson  
The Insurgents, Part II: Fighting the Left by Being the Left

1  
Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 28.

2  
Benjamin C. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1991). See <http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2006/R4042.pdf>.

3  
See <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf>.

4  
Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 266.

5  
See <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/>.

6  
Adam Curtis, "How to Kill a Rational Peasant," *The Medium and the Message* (blog), BBC.co.uk, June 16, 2012. See [http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/posts/how\\_to\\_kill\\_a\\_rational\\_peasant](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/posts/how_to_kill_a_rational_peasant).

7  
David Galula, "From Algeria to Iraq: All But Forgotten Lessons from Nearly 50 Years Ago," *RAND Review* Vol. 30, No. 2 (Summer 2006). See <http://www.rand.org/pubs/periodicals/rand-review/issues/summer2006/algeria.html>.

8  
Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Random House, 2010 [1971]), 127–30.

9  
See <http://humanterrainssystem.army.mil/about.html>.

10  
"American Anthropological Association's Executive Board Statement on the Human Terrain System Project," American Anthropological Association, Nov. 6, 2007. See [http://www.aaanet.org/pdf/EB\\_Resolution\\_110807.pdf](http://www.aaanet.org/pdf/EB_Resolution_110807.pdf).

11  
McFate and Jackson, "An Organizational Solution to DOD's Cultural Knowledge Needs," *Military Review* (July–August 2005), 18–21. See <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/mcfate2.pdf>.

12  
McFate, "Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of Their Curious Relationship," *Military Review* (March–April 2005): 24–38. See [http://www.army.mil/professionalWriting/volumes/volume3/august\\_2005/7\\_05\\_2.html](http://www.army.mil/professionalWriting/volumes/volume3/august_2005/7_05_2.html).

13  
Matthew B. Stannard,

"Montgomery McFate's Mission: Can One Anthropologist Possibly Steer the Course in Iraq?" April 29, 2007, [sfgate.com](http://www.sfgate.com/magazine/article/Montgomery-McFate-s-Mission-Can-one-2562681.php#page-1). See <http://www.sfgate.com/magazine/article/Montgomery-McFate-s-Mission-Can-one-2562681.php#page-1>.

14  
Ibid.

15  
Noah Shachtman, "'Human Terrain' Chief Ousted," June 15, 2010, [wired.com](http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2010/06/human-terrain-chief-ousted/). See <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2010/06/human-terrain-chief-ousted/>.

16  
Pelton, "Afghanistan: The New War for Hearts and Minds," *Men's Journal* (Feb. 2009). See <http://www.mensjournal.com/magazine/afghanistan-the-new-war-for-hearts-and-minds-20130625?page=1>.

for a confusion that never compromises continuity. It is a machine that produces chains of cause and effect, and with those, it writes history. It is a mechanism for producing the foundations for speaking, much like any decent work of art. How then to counteract the abuse of this incredible power that narration has gained in recent years? Many of us are familiar with how Gulf States such as the United Arab Emirates are now directing a vast fortune towards subsidizing a cultural sector advertising humanistic values alongside a record of monarchic and nondemocratic rule. And it is happening through artworks and the participation of artists who specialize in the production of legitimacy and narrative. In a sense, we are all playing the same game of unknown unknowns on a board with many dimensions. The production of legitimacy and causality from nothing. What is that in your suitcase? It is the world. No it's not. I would really love to know.

x

02/02

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle  
Editorial – "Pieces of the Planet" Issue Two

1  
See <http://www.lacan.com/iraq1.htm>.

2  
See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiPe10iKQuk>.

# Sven Lütticken World History and Earth Art

01/13

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 [Sven Lütticken](#)  
World History and Earth Art

In the last decade of the twentieth and the first of the twenty-first century, the nascent discourse on “global” art took two seemingly incompatible forms. On the one hand, “the end of art history” as a discipline dependent on Western narratives was pronounced, while on the other, some scholars sought to reinvent the discipline beyond Western parameters and forge a “global art history.” Hans Belting represents the first approach, noting in 2009 that “global art often escapes the arguments of art history, as it no longer follows a master narrative and contradicts modernity’s claim to be or to offer a universal model,” and seeing in various attempts to engage in global art history only so many confirmations of his diagnosis that “global art has continued art’s exodus from art history.”<sup>1</sup>

Such debates now seem largely obsolete, overtaken by the facts of “actually existing globalization” in the art world. Nonetheless, some of the issues raised obviously remain. As Belting put it, “global art carries an internal antagonism with it, as it strengthens resistance and turns identity claims against the ‘free’ flux of media and markets in the age of ‘hypermodernity.’ ... The planetarization of information may have removed old borderlines but the same media make old and new contrasts even more visible.”<sup>2</sup> Antagonism and information, and antagonism as information: Belting’s words could function as an introduction to Jonas Staal’s smartphone app, *The Venice Biennale Ideological Guide 2013*.<sup>3</sup> Antagonism on a large scale (rather than between isolated individuals) means history. Not, perhaps, art history in any traditional sense, but still a form of history in which art may play some role. What art is and what it can do, however, is itself transformed in the process.<sup>4</sup> The guide partakes in that transformation, but it merely hints at some crucial questions that I will try to develop a bit further.

## 1. Art of the Nation-State, Art of Global Capital

The Venice Biennale is an anachronism in the strong sense of the term: rather than being simply obsolete, it derives a form of heightened contemporaneity from its partial outmodedness.<sup>5</sup> As a world’s fair with national pavilions, the Biennale is clearly a product of the classic era of the nation-state and of imperialism. The point of departure for the *Ideological Guide* is that the Venice Biennale’s topography forms a topological world map that is a truer representation of the global division of power than conventional maps. Indeed, the countries with the largest, most central, and most bombastic pavilions are the giants of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century colonial

thousand troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan. By the end of 2012, thirty-five thousand more would be withdrawn. Then on June 30, 2011, David Petraeus was confirmed as the director of the Central Intelligence Agency. He left his post in Afghanistan. The priorities of the US military had radically shifted.

From here the story gets fairly tabloid-esque. Steve Fondacaro had already been let go in June 2010. Then it was discovered that Montgomery McFate, writing under the pseudonym “Pentagon Diva,” was the person behind the entertainingly titled blog *I luv a man in Uniform*. The blog gushed over the hotness of the commanders of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The last post, written on June 15, 2008 reads, “Why is Dave Kilcullen so totally, spankily HOT? Is it because he’s an Australian Army officer with a PhD in anthropology and operational experience in multiple theaters? Is it because he gives full body contact hugs? Is it because he was instrumental in Petraeus’ surge strategy in Iraq?” Needless to say, this discovery might have been a contributing factor in McFate’s dismissal from the Human Terrain System program in August of 2010.

The tabloid story doesn’t end there. Famously, Petraeus was outed as having an extra-marital affair with his biographer, Paula Broadwell. This happened after Tampa Bay socialite Jill Kelley, a friend of Petraeus, received threatening emails regarding her friendship with the general. She turned the emails over to the FBI. The internet trail eventually led back to Paula Broadwell. The scandal culminated in the resignation of Petraeus. It also took down General Paul Allen, who had taken over Petraeus’s position in Afghanistan. Emails between himself and Jill Kelley came to light, and although Allen was cleared of any wrongdoing, he stepped down a few months later.

## Means and the End

It might seem counterintuitive to compare the arts and the military. Apples and oranges for sure. But while the ends pursued by these two spheres are radically different, aspects of their means are startlingly similar. Comparing examples according to means and not ends offers a new method for understanding formal approaches to the construction of a public. As the manipulation of culture becomes a major priority across a range of disciplines, it might prove instructive to overlook disciplinary boundaries and simply compare methodologies.

The cultural turn in the military was no small initiative. It reshaped the war in Iraq and put thousands of troops on the ground in Afghanistan. While its urgency has waned for the

moment, the interest in military force operating on the level of culture will only grow as wars increasingly take place in urban environments characterized by mediated cultural relations. This is the territory of all cultural actors, be they artists, police officers, marketers, or pedagogues. The different ends may or may not justify the means, but the means themselves bear a remarkable resemblance.

This comparison comes out of a sense of urgency. The militarization of social relationships and its concomitant violence would not be happening if they were not in some way effective. That is to say, the tools of counterinsurgency are not going away. They are powerful instruments for all sides. It might seem inappropriate to learn from the forces of power that use them, but hopefully, in seeing the cultural turn in the military as a descendent of the techniques of colonialism, one can begin to place methods of resistance in a new methodological light.

x

11/12

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 [Nato Thompson](#)  
The Insurgents, Part II: Fighting the Left by Being the Left

was a major proponent of turning art into life: “The line between the Happening and daily life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible.” But turning art into life is not such an easy task when the political realities of daily life often diminish the public sense of what constitutes art. When Lacey was studying under Kaprow in the mid-’70s, second-wave feminism was taking hold in the arts, especially on the West Coast.

In 1977, Lacy created the project *Three Weeks in May*, which focused on violence against women. She described it as an “extended performance” occurring over three weeks. The project unfolded in a series of life-like activities that mimicked the techniques of a community organizing campaign. Speeches by politicians, press events, radio interviews, art performances, and self-defense workshops were all choreographed movements in this theater of political life.

Lacey built upon the work of Kaprow by attempting to tackle political issues – by bringing art not only into daily life, but also into political and social life. She tried to address the contextual realities of power. This places her work in conversation with other discourses that have attempted to shape everyday life – that regard people as the center of gravity. Lacey and the likes of David Galula, Saul Alinsky, and David Petraeus employ community organizing techniques to mold the “human terrain.”

#### It Isn't Easy

Easier said than done. Changing public attitudes is no mean feat, particularly when you are an invading, colonizing force. With the perceived success of the surge in Iraq, the US refocused on Afghanistan, with an even larger emphasis on the role of Human Terrain Teams (HTTs). The fit was less than ideal. Poorly trained anthropologists trying to blend in with and give advice to highly trained soldiers came with its own culture clash. According to retired colonel Steve Fondacaro, who headed up the Human Terrain System program, “We’re like a germ in the body of [the Army] ... All of their systems are sending white blood cells to puke me up.”<sup>15</sup>

The US is not a monolithic machine. It is a cumbersome infrastructure with competing if not outright conflicting interests. As much as the stated desire to protect and study the population was part of the mandate of the HTTs and the overarching COIN operations in general, these operations often found themselves working alongside the vast brutality that is the legacy of US military conquest.

Recruiting for the HTTs wasn't easy, even with the fairly large paycheck that was offered. Initially, the ideal candidate spoke Arabic and

had a PhD in anthropology with a focus on the Middle East. But the qualifications were quickly relaxed to include anyone with a graduate degree in anthropology, and soon enough, anyone with a graduate degree in almost any related field. As one might imagine, having a graduate degree in sociology doesn't exactly prepare one for learning about the intricacies of Pashtun tribal culture in the midst of a war. Journalist Robert Young Pelton followed an HTT around Afghanistan and learned just how odd the fit was:

HTTs are supposed to bring down the cultural barrier between the military and the locals, but the biggest enemy is the natural inclination of troops to be troops, not social workers. Strangely enough, the Taliban is far more expert at meeting the basic needs of Afghans: namely, by fighting the corrupt central government and providing justice and security. Until that changes, the Afghans will be more inclined to identify with the “enemy” than the well-intentioned guests.<sup>16</sup>

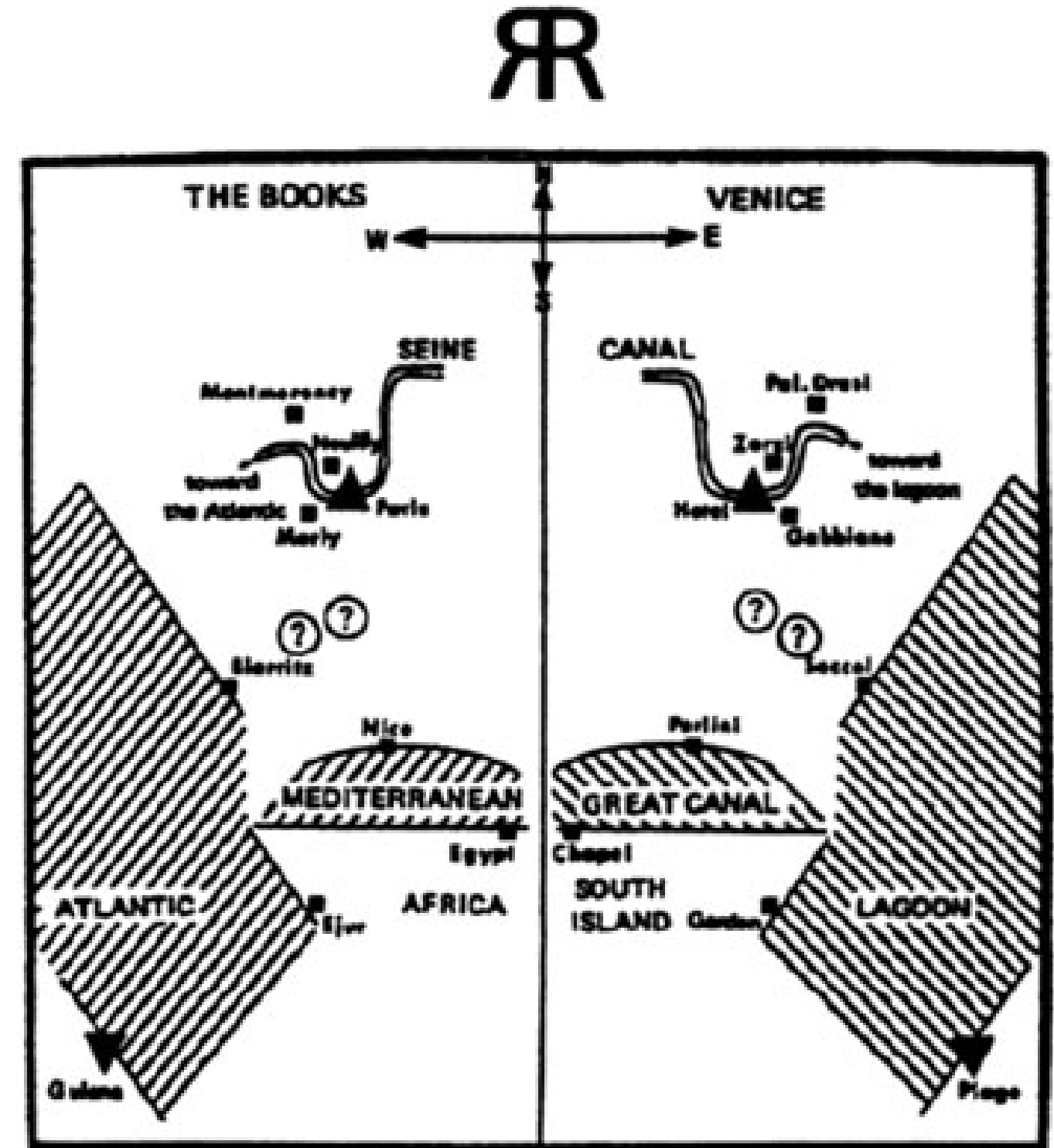
A bad fit in a war zone doesn't just lead to bad information, but also to the loss of life. On November 4, 2008, thirty-six-year-old HTT member Paula Loyd was conducting routine surveys in a village in Kandahar Province. She had graduated from Wellesley with a degree in anthropology and had spent years as a development worker in the region. But all her training did not prepare her for the man she was interviewing to suddenly douse her in gasoline and set her on fire. She died from her burns a few months later. Her attacker, Abdul Salam, was shot while in custody by Loyd's HTT colleague and hired mercenary Don Ayala. Ayala was put on trial and found innocent.

The story is gruesome and bewildering. Of course war is violent and the death of one HTT member isn't exactly a condemnation of the program. But just such a narrative took hold in the media. There was something about a blonde-haired do-gooder being set on fire that didn't sit well with the news-watching public. It produced a backlash of skepticism regarding the effectiveness of the Human Terrain System program.

On May 2, 2011, at 11:35 p.m., President Obama announced that US troops had raided a compound in Pakistan and killed Osama Bin Laden. It was perhaps the first time a US President could claim an unqualified victory in 9/11-related military expedition. It was enough to put the brakes on COIN operations in Afghanistan. On June 22, 2011, President Obama announced that by the end of the year, ten

10/12

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Nato Thompson  
The Insurgents, Part II: Fighting the Left by Being the Left



This diagram from Mathews and Perec's "Roussel and Venice" purports to show "a point-to-point correspondence" between the topography of Raymond Roussel's books and that of the city in which his alleged love affair took place.

expansion: the United Kingdom and France, the troublesome latecomer Germany, and the earliest – and by the nineteenth century, largely defunct – colonial Empire, Spain. It was only after the era of Japanese colonialism, after World War II, that Japan joined, even though the Italian fascist regime tried to get its ally to commit to a pavilion in the 1930s.<sup>6</sup>

If the absolutist state of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries treated its inhabitants as subjects who just “happened” to live on its territory, the modern conception of the state as a nation sees it as the objective form given to “a people,” expressing that people’s rights, historical destiny, and characteristic traits.<sup>7</sup> Decisive steps toward the modern nation-state were taken in the Americas, where, as Benedict Anderson had argued, “imaginary communities” were formed in the public sphere produced by print capitalism: in this way, the inhabitants of the European absolutist states’ foreign dominions came to think of themselves as Americans, as Venezuelans, as Brazilians, whose interests were not those of the “motherland.”<sup>8</sup> American colonies asserting their independent statehood thus represented a crucial moment in the early history of the nation-state, yet in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the latter inherited the crown of colonialism from its absolutist predecessor.

The French Revolution imported this model to Europe and radicalized it to an extent that produced a conservative backlash, with the Vienna Congress seemingly restoring order to the continent. The European nation-state hovered between particularism and universalism, supposedly uniting a consistent population, a people, a *Volk* – yet happily conquering other *Völker*, and depriving them of their nationhood. Such conquests could be justified either by the nation’s universal mission, as in the case of France after the Revolution, or by the innate superiority of its particular people, as in Nazi ideology – or by an admixture of the two, as in the notion that it was Europe’s mission to bring civilization to benighted Africans. The European nation-state was thus as cultural as it was political a concept; it aestheticized the political as it ideologized the cultural. The state may not always have been democratic, but the creative potential of “the people” supposedly manifested itself in an art that was seen as intrinsically national; German art, in particular, was insistently defined in opposition to French art, with the later being frivolous and sensual, and German art “deep.”

Today, we find ourselves in a world dominated by capital without borders, in which companies such as Starbucks and Amazon manage to get along by hardly paying any tax at

all, and in which a band such as U2 uses Holland as a de facto tax haven while its singer plays the role of concerned Citizen of the World.<sup>9</sup> However, as Hardt and Negri have rightly stressed, this does not mean a real retreat of the state; in fact, it marks an apex of Big Government, as legislation is crucial in facilitating the circulation of international capital. Even while the welfare state and the cultural infrastructure of European countries are being dismantled, the state proves its indispensability by creating not a situation in which “the market” can act according to quasi-natural and universal rules, but in which the right rules allow for certain types of business and financial practices to flourish. Of course, this “Big Government” is itself formed under the pressure of lobbying and a relentless ideological barrage, and the resulting capitalist globalization does exactly what it is meant to do: instead of making “labor relationships equal in countries throughout the world,” it “[generalizes] the perverse mechanisms of unevenness and inequality everywhere.”<sup>10</sup>

One symptom of the perverse mechanisms of inequality at the Venice Biennale that sadly exceeds the bounds of the *Ideological Guide* is the flotilla of mega-yachts moored just off the Giardini. Whereas the prize-winning Japanese pavilion celebrated precarious collaboration and community in the face of disaster, the Big Boats speak a different language, that of global wealth redistribution from bottom to top – of accumulation by increasing inequality, as the widening of the income gap comes to function as an alternative for actual economic growth.<sup>11</sup> Blue-chip art becomes the perfect investment in such an economy. As Marina Vishmidt put it,

The “spectrality” of value in an age where accumulation is more typically pursued via finance than production contributes to an “abstraction” of social life where the material conditions for the reproduction of life, such as labour, are de-valorised, and notions such as “creativity” and “community” are held up as ideas. Art then becomes a sphere where these two tendencies, the ideality of money and the ideality of community, come to take a central place.<sup>12</sup>

Particularly during the preview and opening days, the Venice Biennale becomes in the process an impromptu community of lived abstraction and frantic accumulation; a market for the sharing of information that may or may not have to do directly with the art on display.

Capitalist globalization has produced a warped geography of art, in which museums scramble to open franchises in Gulf States. With

03/13

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Sven Lütticken  
World History and Earth Art

09/12



Suzanne Lacy, *Three Weeks in May*, 1977. Performance. In this image, a hotline activist works front of the *Rape Map*. See for more info See more at: <http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/join-suzanne-lacy-to-demand-that-rape-ends-here/#sthash.6v1RKnnq.dpuf>



counterculture icons such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Jack Kerouac. It is not surprising, then, that McFate took her own counterculture journey through the 1980s Bay Area punk scene. According to her childhood friend and now accomplished author Cintra Wilson, “She walked in the door one time and it was all black jeans, black combat boots, tight black sweater and this big black hat with a big black veil. It was this great look ... we called her ‘Satan’s beekeeper’ ... She was goth before anybody was goth.”<sup>14</sup> Like many a young Bay Area punk, Carlough/McFate found her way to UC Berkeley in 1985 and took up the study of anthropology.

McFate went on to use her rhetorical skills to point out the disastrous inefficacy of both academia and the military. Surprisingly, it was the military that was more amenable to listening. They made a department for her – the Human Terrain System.

#### Life: An Extended Performance

What COIN projects like the Human Terrain System attempt to accomplish is something that myriad fields are trying to achieve: shaping the opinions and actions of a group of people, the premise being that social relationships have a medium and can be shaped toward a form. The cultural turn in the military over the last thirty

years has coincided with a cultural turn in a variety of other fields, from anthropology to marketing to socially engaged art to policing and community organizing.

It is 1993. Black youth in Oakland have a public image problem. The war on drugs is in full effect and the mainstream media’s portrayal of black youth relentlessly presents a class of people as pathologically violent. Enter the artist Suzanne Lacy, who has been volunteering in Oakland public high schools teaching classes on media literacy. She organizes a series of conversations with teachers and students – not unlike something Alinsky would organize. Some of the students are interested in having their voices heard in the media sphere, a realm from which they are usually locked out. Working with Lacy, they produce an event they hope will allow them back in. The performance, titled *The Roof is on Fire*, features 220 high school students sitting in parked cars on a roof talking about their lives. It is an odd encounter, but the audience and news crews in attendance hear the concerns of these kids first hand. The performance is part media stunt, part community organizing effort, part art project.

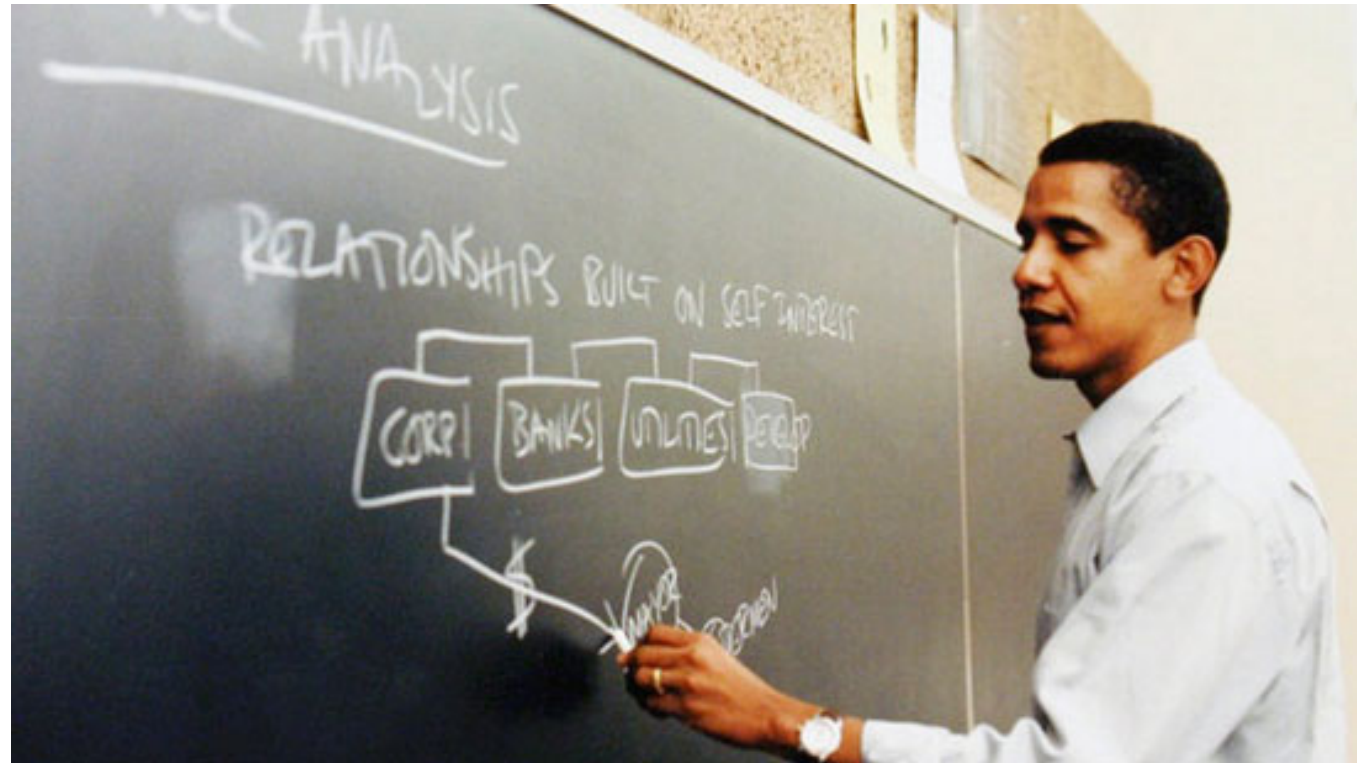
Suzanne Lacy studied under artist Allen Kaprow at the University of California at San Diego. Kaprow was renowned for his Happenings, a hybrid form of participatory performance. He

the basic outline of the Giardini reflecting a previous moment of globalization, dominated largely by a few Western states, the Venice Biennale is, again, in part anachronistic.<sup>13</sup> Yet Staal’s contention that it is a “better” world map than conventional maps is valid precisely because of the temporal dimensions and the historical layers that accrue when “rising” states, or indeed subaltern states and non-states, demand visibility in Venice and need to be accommodated within or on the margins of the old imperialist geography. The result is a unique, scrambled topography that oddly doubles the “topological” nature of Venetian urban fabric as described by Harry Mathews and Georges Perec, who noted that in Venice “one is never quite sure which way is north or south, where the link between two points is a matter of continuity and/or discontinuity of surface, just like the space of topology, which disregards direction and measurement.”<sup>14</sup>

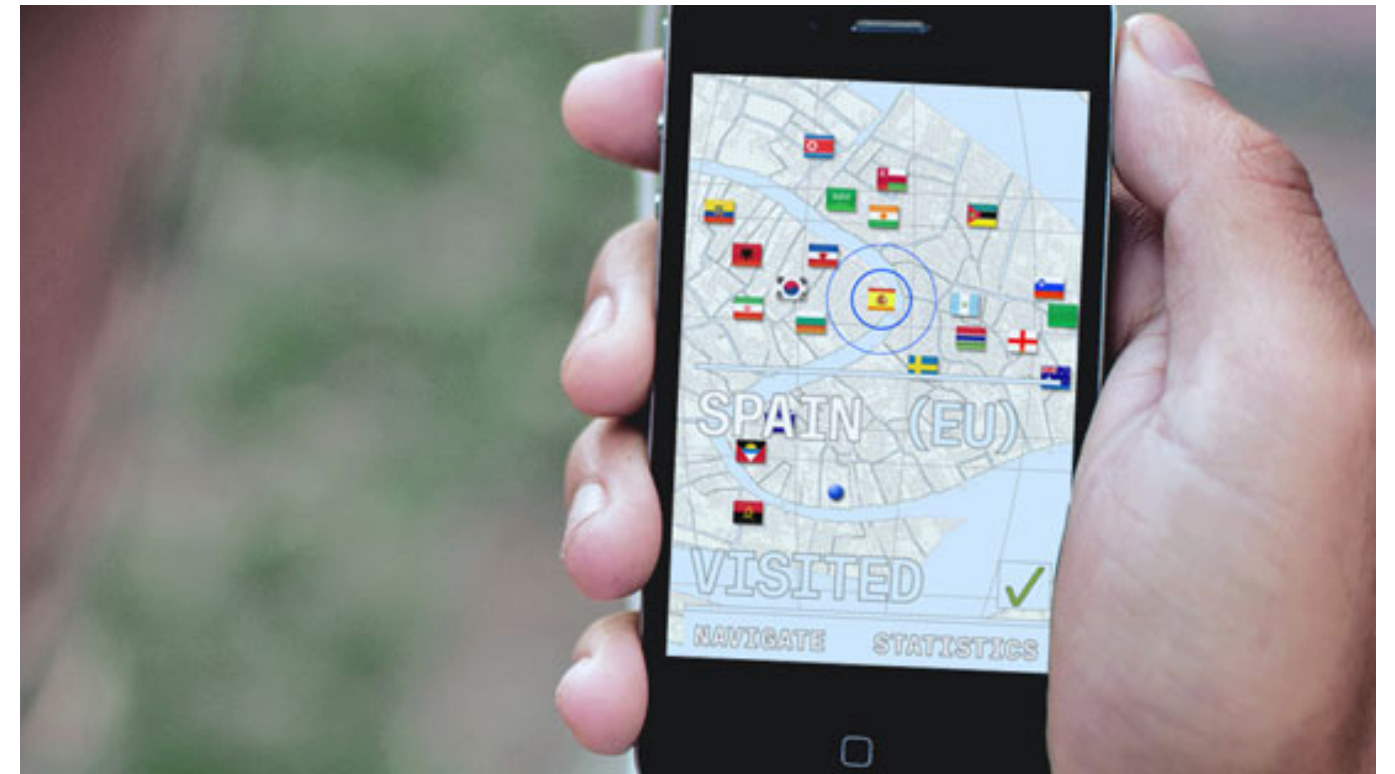
Mathews and Perec’s 1977 essay “Roussel and Venice” takes as its starting point a (fictitious) prose sketch for a play allegedly written by Raymond Roussel in the wake of a (fictitious) 1895 visit to Venice with his mother, during which the eighteen-year-old is said to have met (and fallen for) the sixteen-year-old Ascanio Grifalconi. On the basis of this text and of Roussel’s work in general, Mathews and Perec

propose a “secret topology.” Not only did Roussel discover in Venice, “for the only time in his life, a place that embodied his own sense of reality: an illusory theater carved in stone.” He discovered this theater in the company of Ascanio, and Mathews and Perec pretend to surmise that this young Venetian was the only real lover Roussel had in his whole life. Venice became Roussel’s world map, and while his books with all their grotesque events may be set somewhere else – for instance in Africa – these locations are really topological projections of the Venetian geography. “There are then two superimposed topographies in Roussel. One corresponds to the world of his books and generally respects geographical reality (there are imaginary towns and countries, but the continents are all in place); the other is the secret world of his Venetian life.” Mathews and Perec obligingly provide a mirrored map that shows how this works. The Africa of the *Impressions d’Afrique* in this way is just an “othered” part of Venice, a part south of the Canal Grande that used to have luxuriant gardens, where Roussel may or may not have found sexual fulfillment. Appropriating the language of colonial exoticism, the authors conclude that “he made this place his ‘Inner Africa,’ the dark nocturnal continent of his desire.”<sup>15</sup> Mr. Kurtz, I presume?

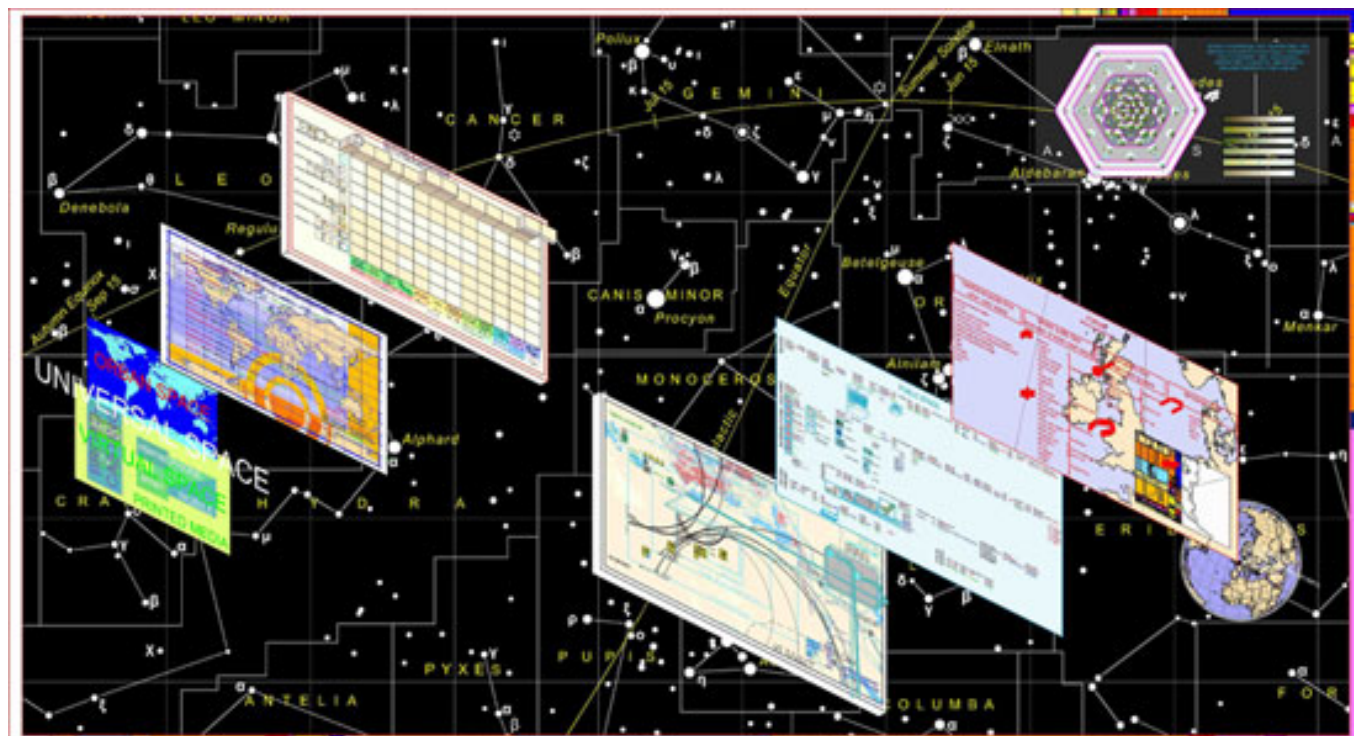
In the *Ideological Guide*’s text on France,



This undated photo, released by Obama for America, shows Barack Obama teaching at the University of Chicago Law School. The image has also been captioned as Obama teaching Alinsky’s tactics. Photo: AP/Obama for America/File.



A user browses the smartphone app of the Venice Biennale 2013 Ideological Guide.



Luc Deleu – T.O.P. office, *Urban Space: Panels*, 2006 –2013. Photo: Luc Deleu – T.O.P. office. The image represents Deleu's attempt to map global public space on all possible scales as a precondition for design on an "urban" scale in which the urban coincides with the orbis.

### Human Terrain

The Human Terrain System (HTS) was launched in February 2007 by the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). Its name reveals plenty about its aspirations. Just as the military needs to understand the landscape of the countries it invades, so too does it need to understand the complexity of the people that live there.

According to its website, "The Human Terrain System develops, trains, and integrates a social science based research and analysis capability to support operationally relevant decision-making, to develop a knowledge base, and to enable sociocultural understanding across the operational environment."<sup>9</sup> The program had an initial budget of \$20 million, which funded five teams in Iraq and Afghanistan. These "Human Terrain Teams," which included translators and anthropologists, were supposed to gather intelligence by meeting face to face with community leaders and latching onto military operations.

HTS met with almost immediately controversy, especially in the halls of academe. The militarization of anthropology and anthropologists went over like a lead balloon. In November 2007, the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association issued a formal rebuke of the HTS program:

In the context of a war that is widely recognized as a denial of human rights and based on faulty intelligence and undemocratic principles, the Executive Board sees the HTS project as a problematic application of anthropological expertise, most specifically on ethical grounds. We have grave concerns about the involvement of anthropological knowledge and skill in the HTS project. The Executive Board views the HTS project as an unacceptable application of anthropological expertise.<sup>10</sup>

However, this strong condemnation from one of anthropology's most distinguished bodies didn't stop some anthropologists from participating in HTS. Certain academics who normally would never find themselves at the center of military culture were suddenly thrust into the limelight, as the desperation for new solutions on the part of the US military forced atypical cross-disciplinary relationships to emerge. Such was the fate of the enigmatic figure Montgomery McFate.

In 2005, Montgomery "Mitzy" McFate co-wrote, with Andrea Jackson, a short piece titled "An Organizational Solution to DOD's Cultural

Knowledge Needs." It argued for the creation of a new department to consolidate cultural information during a war effort. "Establishing an office for operational cultural knowledge would solve many of the problems surrounding the effective, expedient use of adversary cultural knowledge."<sup>11</sup> The timing was perfect, as interest in COIN was growing among the military brass. McFate, perhaps knowingly, was clearing a path for a future department in which she would play an important role.

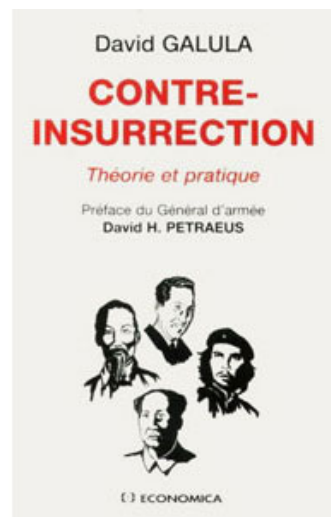
Holding a PhD in anthropology from Yale and a law degree from Harvard, Montgomery McFate took a circuitous route to the inner sanctum of the Department of Defense. In the same year that she published the article on the DOD, she also published an odd article titled "Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of their Curious Relationship." Here McFate made a series of zigzagging rhetorical maneuvers to demonstrate that anthropology's fear of replicating colonialism had led the discipline down a path of self-flagellating irrelevance. McFate argued that fear of complicity had forced anthropology to run from any kind of political relevance – such as cooperation with the US military:

The retreat to the Ivory Tower is also a product of the deep isolationist tendencies within the discipline. Following the Vietnam War, it was fashionable among anthropologists to reject the discipline's historic ties to colonialism ... Rejecting anthropology's status as the handmaiden of colonialism, anthropologists refused to "collaborate" with the powerful, instead vying to represent the interests of indigenous peoples engaged in neocolonial struggles.<sup>12</sup>

Most of the academic community and many in the broader media saw McFate's arguments as a rationalization of a position of power, but McFate, who wasn't afraid to challenge the hermetic nature of academia, argued that in fact helping the military could lead to saving lives. "If you understand how to frustrate or satisfy the population's interests to get them to support your side in a counterinsurgency, you don't need to kill as many of them. And you certainly will create fewer enemies."<sup>13</sup>

To digress briefly, because biography has a way of exhibiting its own cultural turns: McFate's story is demonstrative of an evolution in the uses of culture. Montgomery McFate was first Montgomery Carlough, born in 1966 to bohemian parents living on a houseboat in Sausalito, California, just north of San Francisco. Her parents were acquaintances of Bay Area

landscape of everyday life – whether in Baghdad or in Oakland – culture, the built environment, politics, and media are all inextricably intertwined. In this situation, the methods of counterinsurgency have civic overtones.



The French edition of David Galula's *Counterinsurgency*, with a preface by Petraeus, was published in 2008.

The strategy of getting to know people is employed by all kinds of activist groups, from grassroots organizations, to church organizations (the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses know a thing or two about going door to door), to community-based artists, NGOs, and civic organizations. While it's unlikely that very many of these do-gooder groups have studied the writings of David Galula, they have probably been influenced by the writings of Saul Alinsky.

Born in 1909 to Russian Jewish immigrants in Chicago, Alinsky, like so many others, became radicalized during the lean years of the Great Depression. He organized in the predominantly Slavic neighborhood known as Back of the Yards, made famous by Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. A dirty mess of meat packing plants, the working conditions there were the kind of grave injustice that fueled Alinsky's visionary pragmatism. He was a realist and refused allegiance to any ideology. His efforts became the foundation for what has become contemporary community organizing.

Not at all unlike the community-building strategies described in the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24* or in the writings of David Galula, Alinsky's community organizing methodology relied heavily on the creation of a network of councils whose combined interests resulted in real political power. The politics and tactics of the movement were often crafted in face-to-face meetings among community members. Alinsky's community organizing had the feel of a mobilized network of focus groups.

His style was combative and nonviolent, and he regarded the battle for public opinion as fundamental to successful community organizing. Here are his thirteen principles of community organizing, from his seminal book *Rules for Radicals*:

1. Power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have.
2. Never go outside the experience of your people.
3. Whenever possible, go outside the experience of the enemy.
4. Make the enemy live up to their own book of rules.
5. Ridicule is man's most potent weapon.
6. A good tactic is one that your people enjoy.
7. A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag.
8. Keep the pressure on.
9. The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself.
10. The major premise for tactics is the development of operations that will maintain a constant pressure upon the opposition.
11. If you push a negative hard and deep enough it will break through into its counterside.
12. The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative.
13. Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.<sup>8</sup>

Similar to Mao Tse-tung's dictum that people are the sea that revolution swims in, Alinsky's rules for radicals come out of a deep understanding of how to manipulate public perception in an uneven playing field. In essence, Alinsky's rules describe how to organize a *nonviolent insurgency*, which is one way to characterize community organizing and socially engaged art. Perhaps it is no wonder then that the current organizing methods of the Tea Party have been said to follow Alinsky's sage examples.

While Petraeus didn't exactly organize community meetings to improve labor standards, as he took over the war in Afghanistan he was primed to organize meetings with tribal leaders. His credibility after Iraq was at an all-time high, and the Obama Administration was eager to claim victory in the country where the Soviet Union famously failed. With support increasing in the White House for Petraeus's hearts-and-minds strategy, so too did the budget for more advisors, translators, social programs, and payoffs. One of the most talked-about and controversial of these programs was called the "Human Terrain System."

that "middle power in spectacular decline," Stephen Wright connects the autonomy given to France's colonies with the autonomy allotted to art: "Geopolitically, France has colonies in every time zone of the planet; the legitimacy for maintaining these 'overseas territories' within the colonial fold relies on the claim that they enjoy some degree of administrative 'autonomy' – a logic that requires a particularly elastic understanding of 'autonomy.'" Wright polemically connects this elastic understanding to art: for the French elites, "the less traction autonomy is liable to gain in a given sector, the more it is to be encouraged. And the paradigmatic sector is that of art."<sup>16</sup> The promise of emancipation is thus betrayed in geopolitics and cultural policy alike, and art must live with the suspicion that its autonomy is tolerated and even feted to the extent that it is *purely art, just art, only art*.

Stabilization, the slowing-down of decline through a considered and non-controversial selection, seems to be the secret watchword for the Dutch as well as the French pavilion. Among other things, *The Ideological Guide to the Venice Biennale* is also a move within the Dutch culture wars. It is a virtual counter-pavilion, and in that sense not too dissimilar from the way in which alumni of the Jan Van Eyck academy have created a Berlin-based association whose aim is to continue the kind of work that has become largely impossible at the current, reprovincialized Jan van Eyck academy.<sup>17</sup> A well-behaved and normalized culture is once more called to the rescue; if it is not quite to unify "the people," it can at least perhaps unify the national art world, as Jonas Staal and Vincent van Gerven Oei argue in their polemical text in the *Ideological Guide*. As an artist who prides himself on "being non-political," an "artist celebrated for his craftsmanship, commercial entrepreneurship and poetic construction," Mark Manders is practically "an artist with no enemies, suitable to facilitate each and every political agenda. Manders is thus the perfect instrument for the Dutch cultural sector in demise to regain its respect from politics. How else can we perceive this solo exhibition than as a tool to re-establish the authority of the Dutch cultural elite?"<sup>18</sup>

This elite, some may remember, was shaken by the hold that right-wing populism came to have on Dutch cultural politics, and by the ensuing cutbacks, but on the whole decided to effect a return to a semblance of normality, content to keep playing the game of diminishing returns as long as possible. This involved clinging to compromised forms as only partially believable but oddly reassuring signs of subjectivity and interiority. Manders's installation, with its fragmentary monumental sculptural faces, was like a return to the

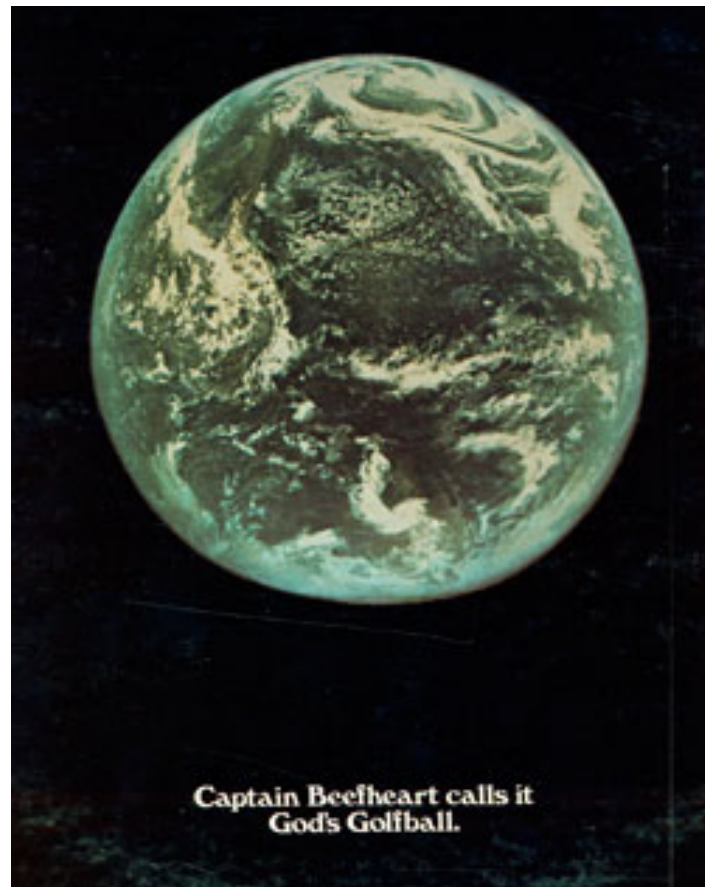
anguished and fractured language of interwar "rappel à l'ordre" art – for instance the "magical realism" of Dutch artists such as Carel Willink or Pyke Koch. In a new time of crisis, art once again takes on the form of "an implicit and explicit restoration of privileged forms of experience, a quest whose reactionary implications are instantly plausible." As the author of this remark, Benjamin Buchloh, admits, "shoring up what is being threatened with disappearance might be a perfectly fine *private* motivation," but hardly a promising "strategy of cultural and critical politics."<sup>19</sup>

The problem with retrograde moves such as these is not so much that they are problematic, but that they are *not problematic enough*. It was symptomatic that just about every other conversation I had in Venice at one point derailed into discussions about Renzo Martens and his Institute for Human Activities, culminating ultimately in a long talk with Martens himself. Taking on the antinomies of uneven development, of actually existing globalization, but presenting the logic of gentrification as the only available alternative for developing a former plantation in Congo, the Institute project cannot only be attacked (which it often is) for perpetuating colonial relationships, but also for equating development with the purposive economic rationality of Richard Florida-style gentrification ideology.<sup>20</sup> If Martens is able to shed or at least modify and modulate the persona in which he has become entrapped, and if the project ultimately manages to go beyond some late-postmodern fatal strategy of ironical overidentification and to problematize its own contradictions without grinding to a halt, it could become truly problematic; exemplary. Even in its present, tentative form, its spectral presence in Venice constituted a kind of virtual counter-pavilion much like the *Ideological Guide* itself, and in dialogue with it.

## 2. The World is Not Enough

The *Ideological Guide* is an alternative and interactive world map. It shows the world, but not the earth. In Sabu Kohso's words, the world and the earth "are different existential and epistemological dimensions and there are fissures or folds in-between." The world historical process is a process of representation, whereas the earth is not representable in principle; it is a Deleuzian body without organs, or "our absolute unconscious" which "resurfaces only on the occasion of catastrophic disaster or revolutionary insurrection."<sup>21</sup> In an essay written in the aftermath of Fukushima, Kohso notes that the "global nuclear regime" teeters "between revolution and disaster. First of all they both derive from the same capitalist expropriation ...

one is positive and one is negative; one is identifiable ... one is human and another is non-human (or the earth).”<sup>22</sup> The revolution and disaster are “one Event in the ultimate dimension” – the dimension where the world and the earth interact.<sup>23</sup>



Detail of cover art for the LP *Whole Burbank Catalog*, a 1972 Warner Bros. Records. The sampler album parodies the *Whole Earth Catalog*.

Kohso lambasts “the world historical process” as a “totalizing process or a dialectic process which inexorably and tacitly assumes a synthesis, while the planetary movement is not a totalizing process, but an omnipresence.”<sup>24</sup> States are the protagonists or vehicles of world history par excellence. While Hegel defined “world history” as “*der Fortschritt im Bewußtsein der Freiheit*,” this progressive movement of Spirit manifested itself in its objective form in the state, in successive states, going from despotic to bourgeois and enlightened. Incidentally, Deleuze and Guattari, who opposed the earth to the territory, noted that the state is not purely on the side of reterritorialization; it also has a deterritorializing function. As in the era of colonialism, in the age of globalization the state is an agent of the deterritorialization of capital, while producing new territories of poverty and exploitation in the process.<sup>25</sup> As the subject of world history, the state spoliates the earth. Thus it acts in what I would call the dialectic of earth

and world; between capitalist accumulation and the natural and human potential it depends on, produces and exploits, transforms and stunts.

The *Ideological Guide* shows us – and allows us to performatively explore – world history as an asynchronous mess. Alliances, entanglements; we’re stuck with “actually existing world history.” With its focus on nation-states, including “blocked” nation-states such as Palestine, the guide’s map is the opposite of the “Whole Earth” image that had such galvanizing force in the 1970s – and which has recently been re-excavated in a number of projects, from David Senior’s archival presentation at the MoMA to Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke’s *The Whole Earth* exhibition to Wouter Davidts and Stefaan Vervoort’s project on Luc Deleu and T.O.P. Office, whose practice took the Whole Earth icon as its point of departure.<sup>26</sup> NASA’s “Whole Earth” photo, which provided a “holistic” image of the world as an integrated system, did not of course show the states and the ideological blocks that were engaged in a nuclear stalemate; it showed the earth, not the world. In the age of Fukushima, world history in the guise of the state (say, the Japanese state, or the French, both dependent on nuclear energy) threatens to annihilate or mutate the earth.

Around 1970, in the heyday of systems theory, moon landings and photographs taken from space appeared to make visible the earth as a single, unified system. In fact, physically speaking, the earth has characteristics of both open and closed systems, as it exchanges energy with the universe, but usually not matter. Smithson emphasizes its closed aspect and underlines the fact that human acts increase its entropic drive, leading to disequilibrium and systemic collapse. “Perhaps, the moon landing was one of the most demoralizing events in history, in that the media revealed the planet Earth to be a limited closed system, not unlike the island in *Lord of the Flies*. As the Earth thickens with blood and waste, as the population increases, the stress factor could bring ‘the system’ to total frenzy.”<sup>27</sup> In Smithson’s apocalyptic scenario, the earth-as-system in the end all but coincides with the world-as-system, resulting in a socio-natural ecology in disrepair. Peter Fend and Ocean Earth would draw drastic conclusions from Smithson’s work and “Earth Art” in general: artists had to take the lead in monitoring (via satellite) and intervening in the global ecosystem. Lessons learned from the art of the 1960s and early 1970s now had to be applied on a large scale and with practical effects in mind, for instance by creating marshlands to shape birds’ migratory patterns or by devising ways to harvest kelp.<sup>28</sup>

If the guide – to reiterate this point –

05/12



A Special Forces soldier gives an Afghan boy a coloring book in Kandahar Province. This image was later to become the cover of *Soldiers* magazine (November 2009). Photo: Steve Hebert.

[Kilcullen] listed ten things they needed to do, chief among them: "Secure the people where they sleep" (because securing them only in the daytime will make them more vulnerable to revenge by insurgents at night). Another point: "Get out and walk." Armored vehicles were necessary to get from one place to another, but once you're there, mingle among the people; the vehicles offer self-protection but "at the cost of a great deal of effectiveness"; patrolling by foot is the only way to build trust, and building trust is essential to gathering reliable intelligence.<sup>4</sup>

04/12

A militarized campaign of "getting to know people" was under way. The surge didn't produce immediate results, and over the first few months, casualties among US soldier actually spiked (due in large part to their greater presence on the ground). But after the first half of 2007, civilian and troop casualties declined dramatically. Progress, from the US perspective, was finally occurring in an embattled landscape. Admittedly, the term "progress" is cynical from the start. The US effort in Iraq has left over 115,072 civilians dead, according to the Iraqi Body Count project.<sup>5</sup>

With the perceived success in Iraq, Petraeus emerged as a miracle worker. In the eyes of administration officials, he had taken an impossible situation and somehow turned it around. On April 23, 2008, President Bush nominated Petraeus to run US Central Command (USCENTCOM), located in Tampa Bay, Florida. Then, two years later, on June 23, 2010, President Obama nominated Petraeus to replace General Stanley McChrystal as the head of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan – the thinking being that if COIN could work in Iraq, maybe it could work in Afghanistan as well. Petraeus's kinder, gentler form of warfare also seemed to fit perfectly with the public image of President Obama, who had run his campaign in large part on the American public's frustrations with the bellicose blundering of George W. Bush.

When it came to COIN, the most important influence on the thinking of David Petraeus was a French military strategist named David Galula, who many regard as the historic expert on counterinsurgency. His 1964 book *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* lived in relative obscurity until the US military rediscovered COIN in the early 2000s. Galula lived one of those peculiar lives marked by consistently being in the center of historic events. A French citizen born in Tunisia in 1919 and raised in Casablanca, he graduated from the prestigious Saint Cyr military academy in 1939. In 1941, he was expelled from the officer corps

under the Vichy governments ban on Jews. He relocated to North Africa. There he joined the French Resistance during World War II, and then rejoined the French military. In 1945, he was deployed to China, where he witnessed first hand the Communist revolution headed by Mao Tse-tung, who was battling the Koumintang nationalists. Galula wound up being captured and held for a week. It was in captivity that he began to notice that Mao was fighting a very different kind of war. As Adam Curtis writes,

Put simply – there was no conventional army any longer, the new army were the millions of people the insurgents moved among. And there were no conventional victories any longer, victory instead was inside the heads of the millions of individuals that the insurgents lived among. If they could persuade the people to believe in their cause and to help them – then the conventional forces would always be surrounded – and would be defeated no matter how many traditional battles they won.<sup>6</sup>

In 1956, Galula volunteered to fight in the Algerian War. He wanted to test out a series of ideas he had been formulating on counterinsurgency. He deployed them in a mountain village, where he hoped to talk the revolutionaries into changing their minds:

In March 1957, I was well in control of the entire population. The census was completed and kept up to date, my soldiers knew every individual in their townships, and my rules concerning movements and visits were obeyed with very few violations. My authority was unchallenged. Any suggestion I made was promptly taken as an order and executed. Boys and girls regularly went to school, moving without protection in spite of the threats and terrorist actions against Moslem children going to French schools. Every field was cultivated. As they recognized the difference between their prospering environment and those surrounding areas still in the grip of hostilities, villagers were easily convinced of the need to preserve their peace by helping to prevent rebel infiltration.<sup>7</sup>

Counterinsurgency is a method – a method of talking and coercing people. If you take away the use of violence (which is like taking the flour out of a cake), COIN bears a remarkable similarity to that left-wing, walking-the-beat technique known as grassroots organizing. In the current

appears to be solidly on the side of the world, disregarding the dialectic of world and earth, there are still significant, symptomatic acknowledgements of this dialectic, as well as symptomatic elisions. Just like the guide reads many pavilions against the grain, as symptoms of a country's political and economic situation, in this respect one has to submit the guide itself to a similar operation. The text on Japan mentions that Toki Tanaka "[recontextualizes] the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster in 2011" and "tries to make ultra-diplomatic conversation with the viewers on our behavior and its uncertainty," while the text on Iraq stresses that "commissioner Chalabi is known as an author, but more widely as the daughter and supporter of, her father, Ahmed Chalabi, perhaps most notorious for being on the CIA's multi-million dollar payroll for decades and playing a central role in advocating and pushing for the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq."<sup>29</sup> This obviously ties into the global hunt for resources and the neocolonial use of Iraq for primitive accumulation via Halliburton and Co. – though the guide does not develop this. As in the conflicts that are publicly re-performed in Jonas Staal's *New World Summit*, in which representatives of illegal organizations make

08/13

their case, we are dealing with a form of world history that wavers between catastrophe and revolution.

For one of the more interesting off-site pavilions, that of the Maldives, the guide has not yet provided a main article at the time of writing, but the rubric "Ongoing Disputes and Conflicts" notes: "Political and religiously motivated unrest. In 2012, in the wake of opposition protests, the first democratically elected president resigned. He later declared he had resigned at gunpoint and he does not recognize the new government."<sup>30</sup> However, the guide largely leaves out the ecological dimension that most people in the West now associate with the Maldives, as the country that will be the first to drown due to rising sea levels. This narrative is questioned in the pavilion by Khaled Ramadan's video *Maldives to Be or Not*, which suggests that the political ecology of the country is much more disastrous than the environmental ecology. It is precisely the intersection and interaction between the two that Ramadan's video explores, while the guide – even if one acknowledges that its task cannot be to duplicate the pavilion – drops the ball. If, in the case of Japan, the text discusses Fukushima, the guide has no separate rubric for nuclear energy – rather, more

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Nato Thompson  
The Insurgents, Part II: Fighting the Left by Being the Left



Khaled Ramadan's 2013 film, *Maldives to Be or Not*, explores the interaction between the country's political and environmental ecologies.

specifically, a category stating whether a country has a “nuclear force” or not. In the case of Japan, of course, the answer is “no.” After Chernobyl, in 1986, a post-Situationist pamphlet argued that it is a fatal mistake to differentiate between military and civilian or “peaceful” uses of nuclear energy; it is in both cases a matter of warfare, of war against the global population in the service of a world-economical system that perpetuates itself at all costs.<sup>31</sup>

It is perhaps worth recalling that at the end of WWII, the nuclear bomb briefly came to function as a kind of anticipatory mockery of the Whole Earth image: it’s not the whole earth but the bomb that will bring us together. Shortly after the end of World War II, the Swiss author Denis de Rougemont, who was to become one of the mainstays of the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom, published his *Lettres sur la bombe atomique*. In this book, de Rougemont reports on the final months of 1945, which he spent on the American East Coast, where he encountered two cultures: that of art, as exemplified by Marcel Duchamp, and that of (nuclear) science. Duchamp, identified here only (and rather misleadingly) as “a surrealist painter,” did not let the explosion of the first nuclear bombs change his convictions: science is nothing but a mythology, its “laws” are man-made myths and have no bearing on reality. The explosion of the Bomb did not prove that science had actually penetrated the core of reality: “Some proof – they had arranged for it!”<sup>32</sup>

During a stay in Princeton, de Rougemont found himself surrounded by the scientists who had “arranged” the explosion; here Einstein – the Moses of the atomic Earth – walked by his window. For de Rougemont, the Bomb heralded the end of war and contained “possibilities for a global union.”<sup>33</sup> What was needed in the face of global nuclear annihilation was a “planetary thinking”: “To the planetary weapon thus corresponds a universal community that relegates nations to the status of mere provinces. Let yourself get carried away for a moment in this revolving game of symbols: the Earth, the Globe, the Ball, the Head, the Bomb, and the Unit regarded always and everywhere as a round object – apple, sphere or golden scepter, whether the Universe, or the Empire, or the Atom. Here, extremes mirror each other.”<sup>34</sup> As many science-fiction films would reiterate, it takes a planetary threat to create global unity. Illustrated by Matta – who, as the introduction states, “was always drawn to modern physicists’ work on wave propagation and radiation, and to the huge transformations that scientists had imposed on matter” – with drawings of emaciated beings in some non-Euclidian forcefield.<sup>35</sup> De Rougemont’s manifesto stands as a compromised attempt to

think global unity not through the earth but through its worldly and otherworldly double, the Bomb.<sup>36</sup>

If one project in the Japanese pavilion proposes “unplugged painting” – painting made and seen without the use of electric light – the reality is of course that the Japanese pavilion, the Biennale as such, and the *Ideological Guide* are hugely dependent on electricity, and hence to some extent on nuclear as well as fossil energy. The Global Village foretold in the ’60s by McLuhan, a notion that was eagerly picked up by the counterculture and fed into the *Whole Earth Catalog*, is a global village of uneven distribution and use and abuse of resources, in which seemingly “clean” technology is in fact hugely energy-consuming.<sup>37</sup> As an app and a web site, the *Ideological Guide* is itself the product of a technoscience that has at least some of its roots in Californian “Whole Earth” culture. As Franke’s “Whole Earth” show stressed – taking cues from Fred Turner – the *Whole Earth Catalog*, with its “access to tools,” appealed to a fractured and contradictory counterculture in which romantic “back to nature” ecology coexisted with an interest in information technology as the basis for a new horizontal and networked DIY culture.<sup>38</sup> Stewart Brand himself falls firmly into the camp of libertarian techno-enthusiasts (with a New Age touch), and for him the lesson of the Whole Earth image was *not* that this Blue Planet is all we have. In the 1970s, Brand became an ardent proponent of space colonization, working in tandem with (then and current) California governor Jerry Brown.

While gently mocking techno-utopians who claimed that space colonization could solve all problems on earth, Brand was in fact far more derisive of environmentalists who rejected the idea out of hand, suggesting that the whole earth did indeed have to be left behind by a new breed of pioneers:

The use of the term “Space Colony” has been expressly forbidden by the US State Department because of anti-colonial feelings around the world. So NASA has shrugged and adopted “Space Settlements” – unpoetic terminology since the last thing you do in Space is settle. We’re sticking to “Space Colonies.” It’s more accurate; this time there’s a difference in that no Space natives are being colonized; and the term reminds us of things that went badly and went well in previous colonizations. If we’re lucky we may enact a parallel with what happened in Europe when America was being colonized. Intellectual ferment – new lands meant new possibilities; new possibilities meant

09/13

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Sven Lütticken  
World History and Earth Art



Propoganda leaflets urging the defection of Vietcong and North Vietnamese during the Vietnam war, c. 1970s.

Brigadier General Fred Woerner, who headed up the military strategy team in El Salvador, “drafted a National Campaign Plan that addressed what he called ‘the root causes’ of the insurgency. It laid out a program of rural land reform, urban jobs, humanitarian assistance, and basic services for a wider segment of the population.”<sup>1</sup> Ironically, these were precisely the kind of policies the rebels were fighting for.

The language surrounding the means of winning the revolution by General Woerner sounds eerily like the FMLN's intended ends. As a 1991 RAND paper aptly summarized,

In El Salvador, as in Vietnam, our help has been welcome but our advice spurned, and for very good reason. That advice – to reform radically – threatens to alter fundamentally the position and prerogatives of those in power. The United States, with its “revolutionary” means of combatting insurgency, is threatening the very things its ally is fighting to defend. Those reforms that we have deemed absolutely essential – respect for human rights, a judicial system that applies to all members of Salvadoran society, radical land redistribution – are measures no

government in El Salvador has been able to achieve because they require fundamental changes in the country’s authoritarian culture, economic structure and political practices.<sup>2</sup>

In January 2007, Petraeus replaced General George Casey as commanding general in Iraq. During his confirmation hearings, Petraeus articulated his idea for “the surge,” which he saw as his opportunity to put into practice everything he had laid out in the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24*.<sup>3</sup> The US military would firm up the new Iraqi government, provide safety for its citizens, separate the extremists from the moderates, and bolster local police forces. He also brought in several advisors who had long supported the growth of COIN thinking within the US military, including an Australian lieutenant colonel named David Kilcullen. Kilcullen had written a widely circulated document titled “Twenty-Eight Articles,” which condensed the lessons of counterinsurgency into a how-to guide for soldiers. Petraeus asked Kilcullen to again write up a simple list explaining COIN strategy to soldiers involved in the surge. According to Fred Kaplan,

new ideas. If you can try things you think up things to try.<sup>39</sup>

In the year 2013, space travel is being privatized at breakneck speed, with a kind of space tourism for the 1 percent seemingly around the corner. Bob Geldof has paid a Dutch company \$100,000 to become the first Irishman in space, and over five hundred future passengers of Richard Branson’s Virgin Galactic have paid a deposit of at least \$20,000, with over half of those having already paid the full ticket price of \$200,000.<sup>40</sup> If this Virgin service comes perilously close to charter flights, the next step is foreseeable – and the mega-luxury yachts in Venice come to look like already rather unreal prefigurations of future space yachts à la the Heart of Gold, the space cruiser in Douglas Adams’s *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. The world has run out of earth. Once more, if on a small scale, space appears to offer a way out – not for colonization, perhaps, but for distantiation, for having your very own “whole earth” moment at what may very well be the far end of world history. If the *Ideological Guide* doggedly stays with the world, it may be precisely because at present, to look away from world history is to be on the side of disaster.

### 3. Too Much Information

Goethe’s 1827 pronouncements that “nowadays, national literature doesn’t mean much” and “the age of world literature is beginning” echo through recent literary theory.<sup>41</sup> As Pascale Casanova puts it, “Goethe was the first to intuit the direct link between the appearance of a *Weltliteratur* and the emergence of a new economy founded on the specific struggles of international literary relations: a market ‘where all nations offer their wares’ and a ‘general intellectual trade.’”<sup>42</sup> World literature, then, as ultimately still dependent on the nation-state – a world’s fair or Venice Biennale of cultural competition; of cultural competition in the age of the *Kulturindustrie*. But as Franco Moretti has argued, in a planetary system of world literature, old forms of literary scholarship and criticism may no longer suffice. In the face of a profusion of texts, one can no longer engage in the close reading of a small number of canonized masterpieces, but rather in the *distant reading* of a large corpus: “A patchwork of other people’s research, *without a single direct textual reading*. Still ambitious, and actually even more so than before (world literature!); but the ambition is now directly proportional to the distance from the text: the more ambitious the project, the greater must the distance be.”<sup>43</sup>

This leads to quantitative research into, for instance, the length and nature of the titles of both Western and Chinese novels, and the

relative success of Hollywood genres on the global market – research as pattern recognition, focusing on the creation of a database of metadata. The *Ideological Guide*, too, engages in distant reading. In this, it follows the logic of institutional critique, which has long sought to unmask the sensuous plenitude of the artwork as being, in fact, a form of impoverishment: the “aesthetic experience,” narrowly conceived, leaves out all kinds of social and ideological factors that contribute to the framing – and indeed the production – of the artwork. In recent work by Andrea Fraser, this statistical drive has been intensified. When a lot of art seems to be made precisely to function as data on a kind of artistic stock market, albeit a singularly opaque one – with “algorithmic collectors” using computer programs to shape their collections, with is to say their investments. In this situation the proper response is not to revert to some realm of privileged and falsely concrete experience, but to take the datascape as material that is as aesthetic as it is economical and political.<sup>44</sup>

Rather than analyzing the artworks in any detail, with attention to their particular aesthetic strategies and effects, most texts written for the guide analyze the pavilion and the choice of artist in terms of a country’s current geopolitical and ideological situation. As Alice Haddad, a student who compiled data for the guide, put it in her report,

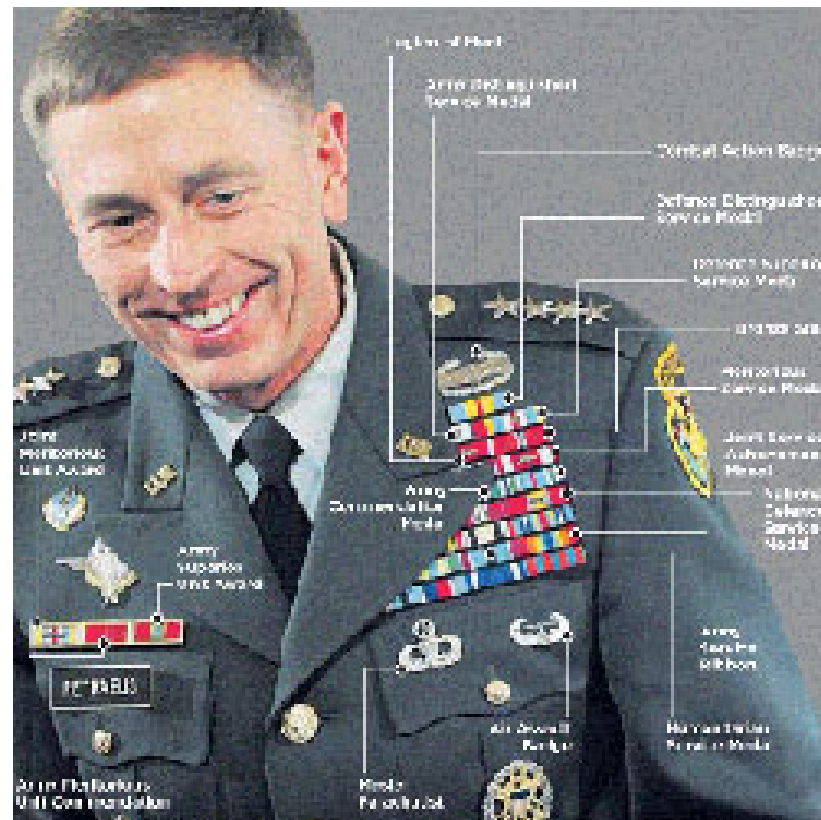
The app only traces the artwork’s process as a pre-existing static blueprint; it is not capable to show its potential for producing something new, not that I believe this issue could have been put into mere data, in fact, generally only experience allows to fully capture the effect of a work of art, but a set of politically relevant criteria could have been suggested as a support to detect the artwork’s agency, and evaluate if it is swallowed by or, on the contrary, confronting or subverting the procedures to which it is subjected.<sup>45</sup>

While suggesting a set of politically relevant criteria is rather tricky, as successful works will likely make extant criteria obsolete or reveal their partial nature, the potential for aesthetic resistance in specific practices and artworks is indeed crucial. Here it falls to the individual user (or to couples or groups of users) to develop a dialogue between the guide’s data and context, and the presence of art – a presence that may at times reveal itself powerless and purely defensive, and at other times more than that.

The quantitative and statistical turn is of course not limited to art and literature. A prime

02/12

10/13



Petraeus rose steadily from Second Lieutenant in 1974 to General in 2005. Here are his medals, decoded.

commodity today is the mass of data and metadata that every denizen of the industrialized and post-industrial parts of the world produces; a data trail that is as interesting to Amazon as it is to the NSA, as vital for insurance companies as it is for the CIA. The Snowden revelations uncovered the extent to which global but ultimately American corporations collude, either willingly or unwittingly, with “national” agencies that seem completely out of bounds and beyond control. By moving through Venice with the app on one’s smartphone, one is also a moving dot, creating a data trail – locating oneself in a worldwide grid. One is producing – producing information – even by walking. Using the guide may help one to become a critical viewer, but this critical viewer is also a thoroughly implicated one. The implications of this remain to be worked out.

11/13



This rendering of 2005 international phone-call traffic from telecommunications research firm, Telegeography, maps the globe's international telephone traffic flows through the United States. Image: Telegeography.

If various historical and neo-avant-gardes have stressed qualitative experience over the alienating quantifications of capitalism, now the qualitative has become “embedded in daily life,” the abstract so concretized, that – in McKenzie Wark’s words – “the qualitative avant-gardes have to re-imagine possible spaces for alter-modernities based on this transformation of everyday life in all its forms into a gamespace of quantified data.”<sup>46</sup> There is no substantial technological difference between using any other GPS-based map and the guide, but as an exercise in radical cartography the guide attempts to transform seemingly immovable quantities into uncertain qualities. The suspicion of appearances that this breeds must also be turned against the guide itself, against its presuppositions and its perhaps unintentional effects.

×

Upcoming issues of *e-flux journal* will feature further essays developed around the *Ideological Guide to the Venice Biennale*, a project by Jonas Staal in the form of a free iPhone and Android app providing insight into the political, economic, and general ideological infrastructure of the Biennale. The guide offers critical reflections by prominent

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Sven Lütticken  
World History and Earth Art

artists, curators, and theoreticians that help the user to explore the ideological framework of each national pavilion. Additional data provides further commentary on the political background, selection procedure, and financing of each of the exhibitions on display and their relation to each other. *The Ideological Guide to the Venice Biennale* is supported by: Kadist Art Foundation, Paris; Center for Visual Art, Rotterdam; Farook Foundation, Dubai; PhDArts, Leiden; and Promoveren in de Kunsten, Amsterdam. The travel grant is a co-initiative of Casco, e-flux, and Kadist Art Foundation.

## Nato Thompson The Insurgents, Part II: Fighting the Left by Being the Left

01/12

*I have to thank Rijin Sahakian for a reasonable rebuttal to the first half of my essay. It is certainly unreasonable for me as someone who resides in the United States to gloss over the violence and destruction of the Iraq War. It was not my intention to say that the efforts of COIN were in fact effective in actually “protecting the population,” but instead to point out a methodology of social relationships that worked in tandem with violence. I have no desire to be a provocateur in regards to the horrible atrocities of Iraq or El Salvador, for that matter. I admit my essay could have made this point much more transparent. That said, I hope the readers find the move toward social relationships across a range of political aspirations instructive. As Brian Kuan Wood said to me, “What is worse? Killing people or making friends and then killing them?”*  
– Nato Thompson

*Continued from “The Insurgents, Part I: Community-Based Practice as Military Methodology”*

The lessons that General David Petraeus deployed in Mosul came out of a combination of research and first-hand experience. Although the Iraq War was his first time in combat, he had traveled to El Salvador in 1985 with General Jack Galvin to see up close what a counterinsurgency campaign looked like. The US under Carter and Reagan was determined to stop the spread of left-wing governments worldwide, fearing Cuban and Soviet interference in both El Salvador and Nicaragua. In El Salvador, they sent in military “trainers” (they balked at the term “advisors” due to its association with the Vietnam War) and weapons (nearly \$5 billion in aid, total) to support the right-wing government that was decimating the revolutionary movement of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). The US trainers facilitated a conflict that came to be regarded universally as a human rights nightmare. One million people were displaced and, according to the United Nations, seventy-five thousand people were killed in a nation of roughly 5.5 million. The lessons of counterinsurgency that Petraeus witnessed in El Salvador, with its back-end reliance on personal violence such as torture, certainly foretold an experience in Iraq. In State Department circles, however, the conflict in El Salvador was viewed as somewhat of a success since the FMLN didn’t come to power.

The US generals and advisors behind the counterinsurgency (or “COIN” in military speak) in El Salvador had to engage in perverse double-speak, since the right-wing government they were supporting not only lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the people of the country, but also in the eyes of the US military. According to Fred Kaplan,

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Nato Thompson  
The Insurgents, Part II: Fighting the Left by Being the Left



Gleb Napreenko is a Russian art critic and art historian, born in Moscow, 1989. He has studied in the Art History Department of the Moscow State University and has published his writings on websites such as openspace.ru, colta.ru, and periodicals such as *Art magazine*, *Artchronika*, *Dialog of arts* among others.

06/06

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Gleb Napreenko  
On the Format of the Divine

1  
Mikhail Nesterov (1862–1942),  
major Symbolist painter.

Sven Lütticken teaches art history at VU University Amsterdam, where he coordinates the Research Master's programme Visual Arts, Media and Architecture (VAMA). Sternberg Press published his book *Idols of the Market: Modern Iconoclasm and the Fundamentalist Spectacle* (2009) and *History in Motion: Time in the Age of the Moving Image* (2013).

12/13

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Sven Lütticken  
World History and Earth Art

1  
Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate," in *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets and Museums*, eds. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddesieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 38–73. Text online at <http://www.globalartmuseum.de/media/file/476716148442.pdf>.

2  
Ibid.

3  
Disclosure: With Andrea Fraser and Henk te Velde, I'm supervising Jonas Staal's PhD at PhDarts in The Hague. My partner, Binna Choi, is director of Casco, which sponsored the *Ideological Guide* travel grants.

4  
Both my partner and I were unable to install the guide app on our phones during our Biennale visit. I had finally bought my first ever smartphone, but didn't have a working internet connection yet; my wife's phone was too old and did not have the right operating system. I am thus writing on the basis of my use of the guide after the visit in order to arrive at some general considerations (that would no doubt have been enriched if I'd gotten the thing to work in Venice).

5  
In use the term "anachronism" here in the non-pejorative sense, that of "anachrony," as it has been developed by Georges Didi-Huberman.

6  
See <http://venicebiennale2013.ideologicalguide.com/pavilion/japan/>.

7  
On the absolutist state, see Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 2013 [1974]).

8  
Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991 [1983]): 37–46.

9  
The band moved its publishing entity to the Netherlands, thus avoiding having to pay tax on their songwriting royalties. See <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/u2-not-feeling-the-love-over-tax-29331241.html>.

10  
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (London: Penguin, 2005): 164.

11  
Gopal Balakrishnan analyzes the situation in terms of a looming "stationary state"; Foster and McChesney in terms of stagnation. See Balakrishnan, "Speculations on the Stationary State," *New Left Review* 59 (Sept.–Oct. 2009): 5–26; John

Bellamy Foster and Robert W. McChesney, *The Endless Crisis: How Monopoly-Finance Capital Produces Stagnation and Upheaval from the USA to China* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012).

12  
Marina Vishmidt, "Situation Wanted: Something about Labour," *Afterall* 19 (Autumn/Winter 2008): 22.

13  
A further complication is that modern art has been largely metropolitan rather than *völkisch* or *national*; "for the avant-garde, Paris is closer to Buenos Aires than to Lyon; Berlin more akin to Manhattan than to Lübeck." (Franco Moretti, "Modern European Literature: A Geographical Sketch," in *Distant Reading* [London: Verso, 2013], 34.) The British Pavilion is de facto the London Pavilion and the French Pavilion the Paris Pavilion.

14  
Harry Mathews and Georges Perec, "Roussel and Venice: Outline of a Melancholic Geography," in Harry Mathews, *Immeasurable Distances: The Collected Essays* (Venice, CA: Lapis Press, 1991), 91.

15  
Ibid., 90, 91, 95.

16  
Steven Wright, "The Autonomy Archipelago," *The Venice Biennale Ideological Guide 2013*. See <http://venicebiennale2013.ideologicalguide.com/pavilion/france/>.

17  
See <http://www.janvaneyckassociation.org/>.

18  
Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei and Jonas Staal, "Suppressing the Extreme-Right: Mark Manders as Unifier of the Dutch Cultural Elite," *The Venice Biennale Ideological Guide 2013*. See <http://venicebiennale2013.ideologicalguide.com/pavilion/netherlands/>.

One should add, however, that the art-world elite criticized in this text is in a defensive position vis-à-vis a cultural bureaucracy whose heroes are figures like Daan Roosegaarde (designer of sustainable dance floors and "smart highways") rather than an artist such as Manders. Staal's project rejects this dismal false alternative; it is aimed both against a fatally limited conception of artistic autonomy and against the Stalinist-Neoliberal embrace of heteronomy in the name of "the creative industries," which supposedly can rescue Holland from terminal post-industrial decline.

19  
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Que

Faire?," *Texte zur Kunst* no. 81 (March 2011), 150.

20  
The project's website is at <http://www.humanactivities.org/>.

21  
Sabu Kohso, "Apocalyptic Capitalism and Planetary Omnipresence," lecture at the Studium Generale of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, March 13, 2013.

22  
Sabu Kohso, "Fangs Hiding in the Green: Between Revolution and Disaster, The World and the Earth," in various authors, *Fukushima Mon Amour* (New York: Autonomedia, 2011), 52.

23  
Ibid., 53.

24  
Kohso, "Apocalyptic Capitalism and Planetary Omnipresence."

25  
"States and Cities have often been defined as territorial, as substituting a territorial principle for the principle of lineage. But this is inexact ... State and City, on the contrary, carry out a deterritorialization because the former juxtaposes and compares agricultural territories by relating them to a higher arithmetical Unity, and the latter adapts the territory to a geometrical extensiveness that can be continued in commercial circuits." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994): 86.

26  
See "Access to Tools: Publications from the Whole Earth Catalog, 1968–1974," MoMA, 2011; Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke, *The Whole Earth: California and the Disappearance of the Outside* (Berlin: HKW/Sternberg Press, 2013); Wouter Davidts, Guy Chatel, Stefaan Vervoort, *Luc Deleu – T.O.P. Office: Urban Space* (Amsterdam/The Hague: Valiz/Stroom, 2012).

27  
Robert Smithson, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium" (1970), in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 135

28  
See the sections "Prior Theory" and "Founding Documents" in *Ocean Earth, 1980 bis heute*, ed. Peter Weibel (Graz: Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 1993), 2–18.

29  
Anonymous, "Welcome... To Which Iraq?," *The Venice Biennale Ideological Guide 2013*. See <http://venicebiennale2013.idologicalguide.com/pavilion/>

iraq/.

30  
See <http://venicebiennale2013.idologicalguide.com/pavilion/maldives/>.

31  
Anonymous, *Tchernobyl. Anatomie d'un nuage* (Paris: Éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1987).

32  
"La belle preuve – on avait tout arrangé pour cela!" Denis de Rougemont, *Lettres sur la bombe atomique* (New York: Brentano's, 1946): 19. See also Denis de Rougemont, *Journal d'une époque* (1926–1946) (Paris: Gallimard, 1968): 562–571.

33  
In the French original: "possibilités d'union mondiale." (translations from the French by Michael Andrews)

34  
De Rougemont, *Lettres sur la bombe atomique*, 90, 110

35  
In the French original: "À l'arme planétaire correspond donc une communauté universelle, qui relègue les nations au rang de simples provinces. Laissez-vous entraîner quelques instants dans ce jeu gravitant de symboles: la Terre, la Globe, la Boule, la Tête, la Bombe, et l'Unité considérée partout et de tout temps comme objet rond, pomme, sphère ou sceptre d'or, que ce soit l'Univers, ou l'Empire, ou l'Atome. Ici les extrêmes se reflètent." Robert Tenger, "Note de l'éditeur," *Lettres sur la bombe atomique*, 11. Matta always maintained that he had given André Breton the idea for the "Great Transparent Ones," but whereas Breton interpreted them more literally as enormous invisible beings, for Matta they were wave-forms: "That's what had interested Breton, the idea of 'great transparencies' that I spoke about. The great transparencies in these paintings were like waves – they were, for example, economic, social, and political upheavals. [C'est ce qui avait intéressé Breton, l'idée que je parlais de grandes transparences. Ces grandes transparences, dans ces toiles-là, c'est comme des ondes, c'est-à-dire que ce sont par exemple les bouleversements économiques, sociaux, politiques.]" (Christian de Maussion, "Mythomattaque. Entretien avec Matta," *L'Autre journal* 9 [1986]: 39.) To this list, one surely has to add nuclear "events." However, the illustrations for de Rougemont's book reflect an anthropomorphic turn, characterized by emaciated figures Matta often referred to with the term "vitreux." These "vitreux" inhabit the universe of the *Grand Transparents*.

36  
"à toujours été attiré par les travaux des physiiciens

37  
For McLuhan, of course, the notion of the Global Village had a specific meaning that became lost as the phrase turned into a meme; the Global Village was truly to be a return to the old tribal village on a global scale, as electronic media inaugurated a new age of orality and myth.

13/13

modernes sur la propagation des ondes et les radiations, et par les transformations gigantesques que les savants viennent de faire subir à la matière"

37  
For McLuhan, of course, the notion of the Global Village had a specific meaning that became lost as the phrase turned into a meme; the Global Village was truly to be a return to the old tribal village on a global scale, as electronic media inaugurated a new age of orality and myth.

38  
See Fred Turner, "The Politics of the Whole: Circa 1968 – and Now," in *The Whole Earth*, 43–48.

39  
Stewart Brand, "The Sky Starts at Your Feet," in *Space Colonies*, ed. Stewart Brand (Hardmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 5.

40  
See Dan P. Lee, "Welcome to the Real Space Age," *New York Magazine*, May 19, 2013. See <http://nymag.com/news/features/space-travel-2013-5/>; Sean Michaels, "Bob Geldof Set to Become First Irishman in Space," *The Guardian*, Sept. 11, 2013. See <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/sep/11/bob-geldof-first-irishman-space>.

41  
"Nationalliteratur will jetzt nicht viel sagen, die Epoche der Weltliteratur ist an der Zeit, und jeder muß jetzt dazu wirken, diese Epoche zu beschleunigen." From the *Gespräche* with Eckermann, January 31, 1827. Goethe used this concept repeatedly in the late 1820s and early 1830s.

42  
Pascale Casanova, "Literature as a World," *New Left Review* 31 (Jan.–Feb. 2005): 83.

43  
Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *Distant Reading*, 48

44  
The collector Eduard Pomeranz cheerfully admits to buying Paul Chan's work mostly as a bit of art-market speculation, and being guided by algorithms in his purchases. See Almuth Spiegler, "Extrem berechnend und unglaublich berührend," *Die Presse* (Vienna), May 23, 2012. Available online at [http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/kunst/760017/Sammler\\_Extrem-berechnend-und-unglaublich-beruehrend](http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/kunst/760017/Sammler_Extrem-berechnend-und-unglaublich-beruehrend).

45  
Alice Haddad, internship report, VU University Amsterdam, May 2013.

46  
McKenzie Wark, "Celerity: A Critique of the Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics." See <http://syntheticeidifice.word>

press.com/2013/06/28/celerity-a-critique-of-the-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/.

But let's look at ourselves as employees of the culture industry: corporate ethics are no less rife with active repression, the flipside of their smugness no less of a nightmare. Service in the culture industry, with its cult of stars, its laws of loyalty to sponsors and potential consumers, inevitably engenders humiliating compromise. But on the strength of social, biographical, and psychological predilections, some find it easier to reconcile themselves to this illusion rather than another. And anyway, divine goodness has a tendency to turn into something nauseating. This is what Chekhov was writing about in "The Teacher of Literature," in the second part of which everything that seemed so good in the first part turns out to be a fake decoration that needs to be kept intact in order to continue living somehow. For some, Russian Orthodoxy is the only way to stave off collapse.

There is a structural similarity between the logic of the creative industries, legal proceedings, and the Shevkunov's of this world, and it characterizes our time. Giving some incidental support to the institution of the family, Tikhon kept comparing man's relation to God with a child's relation to his or her parents. Man was made in God's "image and likeness," he continued, but man has fallen astray of his source. In his deliberations, the necessity of clinging to the "image and likeness" of God-as-creator-and-parent turned out to be equivalent to the necessity of fully identifying with power, power in its political sense. That, according to Shevkunov, is the basis of a broad popular consensus: identification with a common Father. This is why it was a terrible sin to insult the Romanovs or to call Nikolai II by his diminutive "Nikolashka"--a sin that led Russia down the path of revolution, where it lost its soul; a sin that drives the contemporary "opposition" and its "liberal-Bolshevik terror." It is the structure of the state that upholds spirituality. Taking this reasoning to its logical conclusion, one might say that the structure of the state *is* spirituality, while "the image and likeness" dictated to man are more important than man himself.

This is typical of conservatism. Form has priority over meaning. Structures are more important than the people who inhabit them. To put it in "creative" terms, format reigns over content, packaging over products, the magazine cover over what's inside. The "image and likeness" of God is yet another format, an outer frame, a frame of conservatism. The "image and likeness" of God is packaging for yet another commodity. And vice versa: the cult of the commodity form reproduces the logic of conservatism. Every copywriter and every journalist like me aids and abets Shevkunov through his or her activity. The culture industry is

religion in its most conservative form. Capitalism is the religion of institutions.

I am a descendant of apes in the body of an ape. I came from apes, and I'm proud of it: let that be my content, if you want to give me a form. I was born and raised in this rotting, self-eating nature, endlessly caught up in constantly becoming something more, eternally and palpably setting out towards somewhere else (and not always upward). Whatever I produce is not just made for some ready-made package, it's also the obscure fruit of obscure investigations. Emancipation is the return of form to content. That is, the return to humanity. Throw off your garment, young Sergei!



Russian President Putin lays next to the holy relics of St. Sergius of Radonezh in the Trinity Cathedral, Holy Trinity Monastery of St Sergius. Photo: Presidential Press and Information Office.

Of course, anarchist impulses of irritation in the spirit of Celine's novels – destructive, sexualized, and subversive – are not enough to change the situation, as enlivening as they might be. But this impulse merely points toward the boiling up of the repressed and the discarded. What can we do so that to this boiling up isn't just "bourgeois culture turned inside out"? How do we keep it from being reduced to the convulsion of delirium that falls upon the first victim at hand ("clammy palms," "inner smile," "voluptuous Russian Orthodoxy")?

We need another system to give rise to meaning, one that does not delimit form from content, a delimitation that has the triumph of form as its consequence. Not the power of consensus, not the power of an ossified party or a church, not the power of capital or the image-makers. It's time to grow flowers on garbage. That was the basis for hope once vested in the revolutionary role of the proletariat.

×

Translated from the Russian by David Riff. This text was first published in Russian at colta.ru.

05/06

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Sven Lütticken

World History and Earth Art

Gleb Napreenko  
On the Format of the Divine

04/06



Mikhail Nesterov, *Hermit*, 1888-1889. Oil on canvas.

## Hito Steyerl Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?

Is the internet dead?<sup>1</sup> This is not a metaphorical question. It does not suggest that the internet is dysfunctional, useless or out of fashion. It asks what happened to the internet after it stopped being a possibility. The question is very literally whether it is dead, how it died and whether anyone killed it.

But how could anyone think it could be over? The internet is now more potent than ever. It has not only sparked but fully captured the imagination, attention and productivity of more people than at any other point before. Never before have more people been dependent on, embedded into, surveilled by, and exploited by the web. It seems overwhelming, bedazzling and without immediate alternative. The internet is probably not dead. It has rather gone all-out. Or more precisely: it is all over!

This implies a spatial dimension, but not as one might think. The internet is not everywhere. Even nowadays when networks seem to multiply exponentially, many people have no access to the internet or don't use it at all. And yet, it is expanding in another direction. It has started moving offline. But how does this work?

Remember the Romanian uprising in 1989, when protesters invaded TV studios to make history? At that moment, images changed their function.<sup>2</sup> Broadcasts from occupied TV studios became active catalysts of events – not records or documents.<sup>3</sup> Since then it has become clear that images are not objective or subjective renditions of a preexisting condition, or merely treacherous appearances. They are rather nodes of energy and matter that migrate across different supports,<sup>4</sup> shaping and affecting people, landscapes, politics, and social systems. They acquired an uncanny ability to proliferate, transform, and activate. Around 1989, television images started walking through screens, right into reality.<sup>5</sup>

This development accelerated when web infrastructure started supplementing TV networks as circuits for image circulation.<sup>6</sup> Suddenly, the points of transfer multiplied. Screens were now ubiquitous, not to speak of images themselves, which could be copied and dispersed at the flick of a finger.

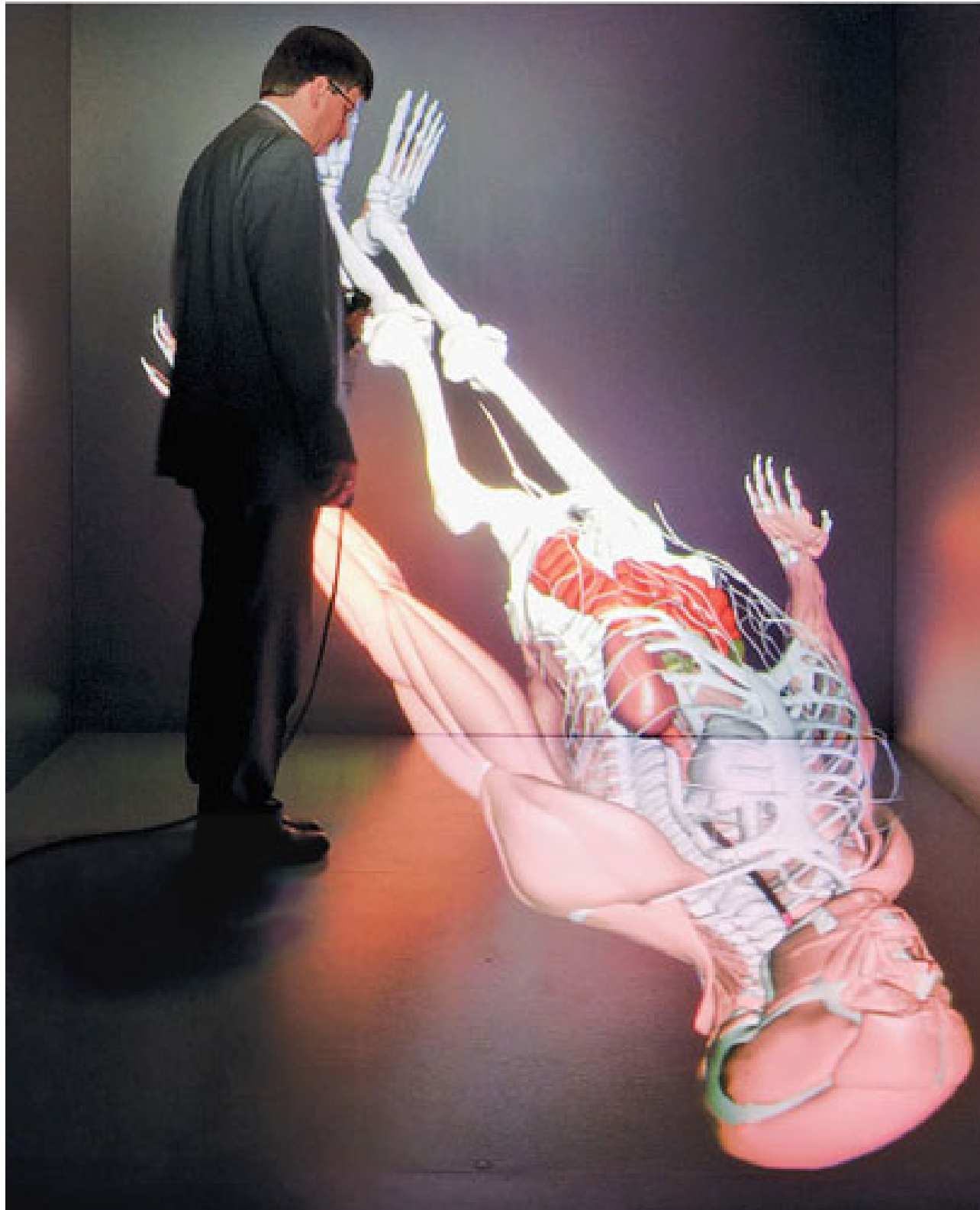
Data, sounds, and images are now routinely transitioning beyond screens into a different state of matter.<sup>7</sup> They surpass the boundaries of data channels and manifest materially. They incarnate as riots or products, as lens flares, high-rises, or pixelated tanks. Images become unplugged and unhinged and start crowding off-screen space. They invade cities, transforming spaces into sites, and reality into reality. They materialize as junkspace, military invasion, and botched plastic surgery. They spread through and beyond networks, they contract and expand, they

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Hito Steyerl  
Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?

01/10



Mikhail Nesterov, *The Soul of the People*, 1916. Oil on canvas.



CAVEman is a 3-D virtual patient projected onto a holodeck which allows doctors to visualize and diagnose ailments in high-definition. Here scientist Christoph Sensen is pictured looking at his creation.

omniscience of a universal man of God. He knew the essence of art (God vested man with the need to create, and man must realize this divine gift, praising his creator, etc.). He had grasped the logic of history and the meaning of human existence. Such an urge to cover all of human reality with a system of coordinates has its analogy in the legal system as it strives to systematize and account for all nuances of human behavior, becoming a totality, which is why Shevkunov's speeches reminded me so much of a prosecutor's argument in a court of law.

Moreover, Shevkunov's customized conservative worldview is aptly constructed according to the laws of the human psyche, for example by using what Freud would have called "condensation." Hence the expression "liberal-Bolshevik terror." Shevkunov repeated it several times, referring to a generalized image of the enemies of "traditional values." Such games played with the laws of consciousness mean that Tikhon is not so much a prosecutor as a copywriter.



A lecture with Archimandrite Tikhon, titled "Creative Meeting with the Archimandrite...", was held at the Russian Academy of Arts.

Shevkunov is a great illustration for conservatism's most elementary logic. Order and the state are good. Revolution is bad. The statist and nationalist pathos of Father Tikhon (our father who art ...) is most readable when he exploits the image of the Byzantine Empire and says that the Russian Empire and to an extent even the Soviet Union are its heirs. This associative connection finds its apogee in Shevkunov's acclaimed film *The Fall of an Empire: The Byzantine Lesson*, in which the realia of Byzantium before the fall of Constantinople in 1453 serve as a ruse for the interpretation of recent Russian history. It is interesting that there are similarities between Shevkunov's concept of

the USSR and that found in Mikhail Nesterov's painting. Both recognize the USSR for its great loners, its "spiritual people." For Nesterov, these are the heroes of his portraits: figures like Pavlov, the Korin Brothers, Vera Mukhina, Shchusev, Yudin ... To a contemporaneous viewer, Nesterov's series of portraits surely looked conservatively stoic against the background of a contradictory epoch. But in Shevkunov, the idea that there were a few truly spiritual people who made the USSR into something good becomes a method for the retrospective affirmation of "eternal values"--those same Byzantine values, it would seem.

The air was stuffy. Patiently listening, the docile audience was made up of old academic painters (I noticed the artist Valentin Sidorov, for example) and Shevkunov's young admirers, and there were even a few students from my art history department at the Historical Faculty of Moscow State University who seemed to have come on their own time to listen to the Archimandrite. Stern young men and modest young women, Russian Orthodoxy at its best, replete with the smugness of patriarchy. There were works by Gor Chakhal, Konstantin Khudyakov, and Nikolai Mukhin on the walls along with copies of Byzantine mosaics, and Shevkunov's cadences were slow and measured. Once I'd gotten over the initial shock, I was overwhelmed by the monstrosity of the repressed that constituted the other side of this smugness, stuffiness, and moderation. It made me think of war propaganda for an Orthodox Russia: Nesterov's canvas *To Russia: The Soul of the People* from 1916, where a sister of mercy takes by the hand a Russian soldier blinded in World War I and leads him to join the host of pilgrims in search of Christ. Lose your eyesight and perish for the Tsar, all for the promise of paradise! I also remembered the attitude of the police at the Russian Parliament during a picket protesting the law against propaganda about "untraditional" sexual orientations. They remained calm and even affable as they packed LGBT activists into police vans without so much as touching the fundamentalist activists waving their Bibles, crosses, eggs, and bottles of urine. Without anybody really noticing it, the police created a homosexual homo sacer, rejected and unprotected by the law.

Shevkunov made a joke. The permanently tender inner smile of a girl watching him out of the corner of her eye now took on the contours of rapture. Her lips quivered, and a body tensed up in voluptuous Russian Orthodoxy appeared under her kerchief and ankle-length dress. Throw off your garment, young Sergei! I am the descendant of apes.

His arguments were those of a prosecutor.

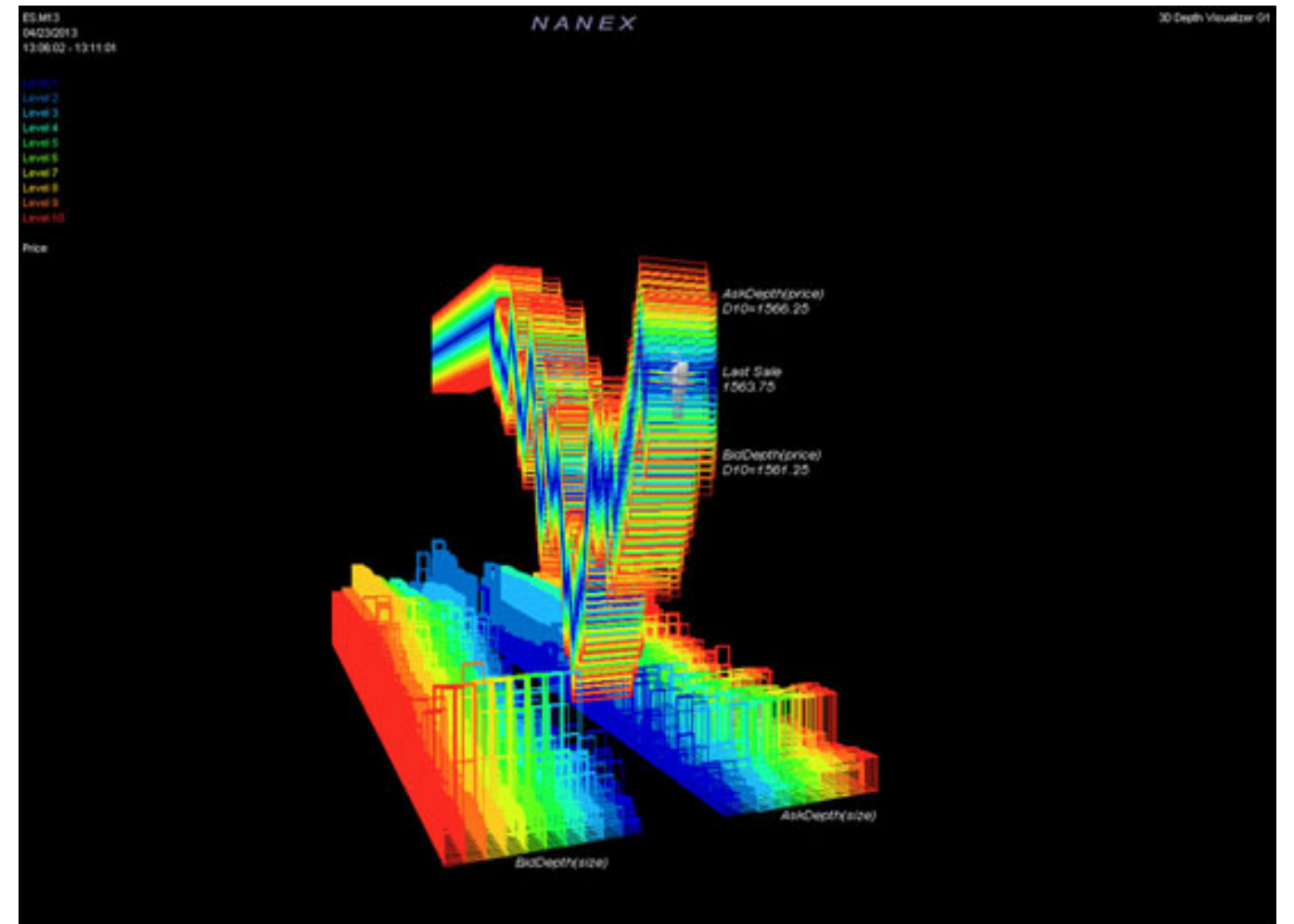
02/06



Patriarch Kirill encourages young talent at the Orthodox National Unity Day exhibition at the Manezh Exhibition Hall, Moscow.

11.12.13 / 15:04:05 EST

03/10



The market briefly lost \$136 billion on April 23rd, 2013, when the Associated Press' Twitter feed was hacked and tweeted that the White House had been attacked and that President Obama had been injured.

11.07.13 / 02:50:22 EST

stall and stumble, they vie, they vile, they wow and woo.

Just look around you: artificial islands mimic genetically manipulated plants. Dental offices parade as car commercial film sets. Cheekbones are airbrushed just as whole cities pretend to be YouTube CAD tutorials. Artworks are e-mailed to pop up in bank lobbies designed on fighter jet software. Huge cloud storage drives rain down as skylines in desert locations. But by becoming real, most images are substantially altered. They get translated, twisted, bruised, and reconfigured. They change their outlook, entourage, and spin. A nail paint clip turns into an Instagram riot. An upload comes down as shitstorm. An animated GIF materializes as a pop-up airport transit gate. In some places, it seems as if entire NSA system architectures were built – but only after Google-translating them, creating car lofts where one-way mirror windows face inwards. By walking off-screen, images are twisted, dilapidated, incorporated, and reshuffled. They miss their targets, misunderstand their purpose, get shapes and colors wrong. They walk through, fall off, and fade back into screens.

Grace Jones's 2008 black-and-white video clip "Corporate Cannibal," described by Steven Shaviro as a pivotal example of post-cinematic affect, is a case in point.<sup>8</sup> By now, the nonchalant fluidity and modulation of Jones's posthuman figure has been implemented as a blueprint for austerity infrastructure. I could swear that Berlin bus schedules are consistently run on this model – endlessly stretching and straining space, time, and human patience. Cinema's debris rematerializes as investment ruins or secret "Information Dominance Centers."<sup>9</sup> But if cinema has exploded into the world to become partly real, one also has to accept that it actually did explode. And it probably didn't make it through this explosion either.

### Post-Cinema

For a long time, many people have felt that cinema is rather lifeless. Cinema today is above all a stimulus package to buy new televisions, home projector systems, and retina display iPads. It long ago became a platform to sell franchising products – screening feature-length versions of future PlayStation games in sanitized multiplexes. It became a training tool for what Thomas Elsaesser calls the military-industrial-entertainment complex.

Everybody has his or her own version of when and how cinema died, but I personally believe it was hit by shrapnel when, in the course of the Bosnian War, a small cinema in Jajce was destroyed around 1993. This was where the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was founded

during WWII by the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ). I am sure that cinema was hit in many other places and times as well. It was shot, executed, starved, and kidnapped in Lebanon and Algeria, in Chechnya and the DRC, as well as in many other post-Cold War conflicts. It didn't just withdraw and become unavailable, as Jalal Toufic wrote of artworks after what he calls a surpassing disaster.<sup>10</sup> It was killed, or at least it fell into a permanent coma.

But let's come back to the question we began with. In the past few years many people – basically everybody – have noticed that the internet feels awkward, too. It is obviously completely surveilled, monopolized, and sanitized by common sense, copyright, control, and conformism. It feels as vibrant as a newly multiplexed cinema in the nineties showing endless reruns of *Star Wars Episode 1*. Was the internet shot by a sniper in Syria, a drone in Pakistan, or a tear gas grenade in Turkey? Is it in a hospital in Port Said with a bullet in its head? Did it commit suicide by jumping out the window of an Information Dominance Center? But there are no windows in this kind of structure. And there are no walls. The internet is not dead. It is undead and it's everywhere.

### I Am a Minecraft Redstone Computer

So what does it mean if the internet has moved offline? It crossed the screen, multiplied displays, transcended networks and cables to be at once inert and inevitable. One could imagine shutting down all online access or user activity. We might be unplugged, but this doesn't mean we're off the hook. The internet persists offline as a mode of life, surveillance, production, and organization – a form of intense voyeurism coupled with maximum nontransparency. Imagine an internet of things all senselessly "liking" each other, reinforcing the rule of a few quasi-monopolies. A world of privatized knowledge patrolled and defended by rating agencies. Of maximum control coupled with intense conformism, where intelligent cars do grocery shopping until a Hellfire missile comes crashing down. Police come knocking on your door for a download – to arrest you after "identifying" you on YouTube or CCTV. They threaten to jail you for spreading publicly funded knowledge? Or maybe beg you to knock down Twitter to stop an insurgency? Shake their hands and invite them in. They are today's internet in 4D.

The all-out internet condition is not an interface but an environment. Older media as well as imaged people, imaged structures, and image objects are embedded into networked matter. Networked space is itself a medium, or

## Gleb Napreenko On the Format of the Divine

Legal proceedings, sermons, and the creative industries; the universal applicability of law, the consensus of the flock, and corporate ethics. All of them require that you forget or repress something, that you pay a price for the (im)possibility of joining the fold. But what if you are in a court of law, or maybe listening to a sermon, or sitting at an office, and you can't afford the fee? You start to suspect that the silent majority around you has already paid up, that they have become one with the laws of the state, God, or commerce, and this stirs your soul with anarchist protest: your imagination calls for riot and transgression. You want to subvert the serenity of all those present, all those who agree.

"There is so much of the repressed in this painting," Sasha Novozhenova told me in front of *The Venerable Sergei in His Youth*, at an exhibition by Mikhail Nesterov<sup>1</sup> in the Tretyakov Gallery: a scrofulous lad in a monk's habit once again rolls his eyes ecstatically in the midst of Russian Nature, nothing but a frail vessel for the grace of God to fill his pretty boy's body, as he waits with pale, clammy palms ... It's better to stop here, lest we give rise to too copious a stream of perverted fantasies and garbled fragments of the returning repressed: sex, femininity, and violence. It isn't very hard to poke fun at Nesterov's religious masterpieces at the exhibition "In Search of My Russia," just like it isn't hard to poke fun at Tikhon Shevkunov, the shifty archimandrite rumored to be Putin's spiritual mentor. Yet neither are simply examples of an obscurantism utterly alien to this article's enlightened readers. Instead, both are symptoms of modernity, a symptom of a condition that is very much our own--that we all have in common.

At a "creative meeting" with Archimandrite Tikhon at the Russian Academy of the Fine Arts, I could observe the production of consensus, a conservative consensus in this case. Tikhon managed to formulate all of his messages to this cultivated public in the most obvious, mediocre terms, as affirmations so rife with compromise that they would seem beyond the shadow of a doubt to anyone. It would seem that you'd heard all the twists and turns of his inquisitor's reasoning many times before: Nikolai II was a saint as a family man, though not as a statesman; the USSR was a great power but lacked spirituality; Marx is Lenin's forerunner and Lenin was the worst of villains (much worse than Ivan the Terrible!), but God will be his judge, and so on. These are the kind of banalities that you cannot question because you do not even notice them, though they mask a rigid and brutal structure of injunctions sometimes called ideology.

Shevkunov wove a subtle web, answering all of the audience's questions with the reconciled

04/10

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Hito Steyerl  
Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?

01/06

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Gleb Napreenko  
On the Format of the Divine

East, but at least they will certainly establish an eastern outpost for it there.

I must say that I don't care to sort through these caricatures, and I don't care to find out whether the sheikhs and sheikhas in Abu Dhabi and Qatar are enlightened, sincere, or cynical. I assume these are complex people, and like all complex people, they make contradictory decisions. I assume that they are sincere, cynical, and enlightened at the same time. I don't know. In fact, I am quite sure that I will never know.

But there is one thing that I do know for sure – one thing about which I am absolutely certain.

At the opening of the Guggenheim Museum in Abu Dhabi, or Qatar, or elsewhere in the Gulf, sometime between 2017 and 2024, a proud local resident rushes the entrance only to find that he is unable to proceed. Why can't he proceed? Why doesn't he go in?

Is it because he is dressed in jeans and a black t-shirt and sneakers, and this is a black-tie affair? He feels underdressed. Is this why he does not go in? No.

It must be the thugs who are shielding the ruling dynasty, a ruling class that is attending the event en masse to showcase its benevolence and refined sensibilities, pubescent-future-rulers in tow. Do the thugs prevent his access? No.

He simply feels that if he walked in, he would certainly "hit a wall." That he would literally hit a wall.

On the spot, he turns to face the onrushing crowd and screams: "Stop. Don't go in. Be careful!"

Within seconds, the security services arrive. They beat him severely, handcuff him, and send him to a psychiatric facility.

The very next day, I open the newspaper, turn to page six, and look at the bottom right-hand corner. I read the following headline: "Demented Man Disturbs Opening: Claims World Is Flat."

This event has already happened. This headline has already been written. About this, I am absolutely certain.

x

This text is (here and there) a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. The text transcribes the walkthrough/presentation component of Walid Raad's exhibition *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow*, recently presented at dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel.

05/05

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 [Walid Raad](#)  
Walkthrough, Part II

Walid Raad is an artist and an Associate Professor of Art in The Cooper Union (New York, USA). Raad's works include *The Atlas Group*, a fifteen-year project between 1989 and 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*.

05/10



This protest banner in Rio de Janeiro from June 17 reads, "We are the social network!" See →.

whatever one might call a medium's promiscuous, posthumous state today. It is a form of life (and death) that contains, sublates, and archives all previous forms of media. In this fluid media space, images and sounds morph across different bodies and carriers, acquiring more and more glitches and bruises along the way. Moreover, it is not only form that migrates across screens, but also function.<sup>11</sup> Computation and connectivity permeate matter and render it as raw material for algorithmic prediction, or potentially also as building blocks for alternate networks. As Minecraft Redstone computers<sup>12</sup> are able to use virtual minerals for calculating operations, so is living and dead material increasingly integrated with cloud performance, slowly turning the world into a multilayered motherboard.<sup>13</sup>

But this space is also a sphere of liquidity, of looming rainstorms and unstable climates. It is the realm of complexity gone haywire, spinning strange feedback loops. A condition partly created by humans but also only partly controlled by them, indifferent to anything but movement, energy, rhythm, and complication. It is the space of the rōnin of old, the masterless samurai freelancers fittingly called wave men and women: floaters in a fleeting world of images, interns in dark net soap lands. We thought it was a plumbing system, so how did this tsunami creep up in my sink? How is this algorithm drying up this rice paddy? And how many workers are desperately clambering on the menacing cloud that hovers in the distance right now, trying to squeeze out a living, groping through a fog which may at any second transform both into an immersive art installation and a demonstration doused in cutting-edge tear gas?

### Postproduction

But if images start pouring across screens and invading subject and object matter, the major and quite overlooked consequence is that reality now widely consists of images; or rather, of things, constellations, and processes formerly evident as images. This means one cannot understand reality without understanding cinema, photography, 3D modeling, animation, or other forms of moving or still image. The world is imbued with the shrapnel of former images, as well as images edited, photoshopped, cobbled together from spam and scrap. Reality itself is postproduced and scripted, affect rendered as after-effect. Far from being opposites across an unbridgeable chasm, image and world are in many cases just versions of each other.<sup>14</sup> They are not equivalents however, but deficient, excessive, and uneven in relation to each other. And the gap between them gives way to speculation and intense anxiety.

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Hito Steyerl  
Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?

06/10

Under these conditions, production morphs into postproduction, meaning the world can be understood but also altered by its tools. The tools of postproduction: editing, color correction, filtering, cutting, and so on are not aimed at achieving representation. They have become means of creation, not only of images but also of the world in their wake. One possible reason: with digital proliferation of all sorts of imagery, suddenly too much world became available. The map, to use the well-known fable by Borges, has not only become equal to the world, but exceeds it by far.<sup>15</sup> A vast quantity of images covers the surface of the world – very in the case of aerial imaging – in a confusing stack of layers. The map explodes on a material territory, which is increasingly fragmented and also gets entangled with it: in one instance, Google Maps cartography led to near military conflict.<sup>16</sup>

While Borges wagered that the map might wither away, Baudrillard speculated that on the contrary, reality was disintegrating.<sup>17</sup> In fact, *both* proliferate and confuse one another: on handheld devices, at checkpoints, and in between edits. Map and territory reach into one another to realize strokes on trackpads as theme parks or apartheid architecture. Image layers get stuck as geological strata while SWAT teams patrol Amazon shopping carts. The point is that no one can deal with this. This extensive and exhausting mess needs to be edited down in real time: filtered, scanned, sorted, and selected – into so many Wikipedia versions, into layered, libidinal, logistical, lopsided geographies.

This assigns a new role to image production, and in consequence also to people who deal with it. Image workers now deal directly in a world made of images, and can do so much faster than previously possible. But production has also become mixed up with circulation to the point of being indistinguishable. The factory/studio/tumblr blur with online shopping, oligarch collections, realty branding, and surveillance architecture. Today's workplace could turn out to be a rogue algorithm commandeering your hard drive, eyeballs, and dreams. And tomorrow you might have to disco all the way to insanity.

As the web spills over into a different dimension, image production moves way beyond the confines of specialized fields. It becomes mass postproduction in an age of crowd creativity. Today, almost everyone is an artist. We are pitching, phishing, spamming, chain-liking or mansplaining. We are twitching, tweeting, and toasting as some form of solo relational art, high on dual processing and a smartphone flat rate. Image circulation today works by pimping pixels in orbit via strategic sharing of wacky, neo-tribal, and mostly US-American content. Improbable

04/05



Walid Raad, *Views from Inner to Outer Compartments*, 2012. Exhibition view Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna. Copyright: Jakob Polacsek



Frank Gehry. The same island will have a Louvre Abu Dhabi museum designed by Jean Nouvel. The same island will have a Sheikh Zayed National Museum designed by Foster and Partners. Saadiyat Island will also host a Maritime Museum designed by Tadao Ando, a performing arts center designed by Zaha Hadid, a New York University campus designed by Rafael Vinoly, a few marinas, seven-star hotels, restaurants, golf courses, and so on. We know how such islands are erected.

But it is also important to note that Abu Dhabi is not just hiring architects to build cultural meccas that the emirate will then fill with high-end, market-tested Arab, Iranian, Turkish, Islamic, North African, and Southeast Asian art in the hope that this alone will attract millions of tourists. No. Abu Dhabi plans a broad infrastructure that will not only include museums, universities, and colleges, but also art magazines, art journals, art prizes, art foundations, private and public art collections, art handlers, insurers, writers, critics, galleries, archives, and so on, and so on. And Abu Dhabi is also well-aware that when students come to study at NYU and the other colleges, they will likely bring with them alternative lifestyles and cultures. As such, I was not surprised to meet someone who had been charged with designing Abu Dhabi's alternative arts scene.

I must say that all of this, for me as an artist, an Arab, or even as an American, is truly fascinating. How long have we been waiting for an Arab government to actually spend its wealth on art, education, health care and culture? It is happening today. And not just in Abu Dhabi. This is happening in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and to a lesser extent, in other Arab states as well.

But then every time you ask the question: Why are these sheikhs and sheikhas in the Gulf all of a sudden so interested in the arts? Why are they all of a sudden spending all this money on culture and the arts? Every time you ask this question, you should also be ready to hear the two dominant and weighty caricatures that have emerged to make sense of all this.

The first caricature states that all this investment in culture and the arts in the Arabian/Persian Gulf is a cynical move undertaken by a bunch of autocrats seeking to shift their economies away from petrochemical dependence and towards tourism, all the while camouflaging and veiling their stay-in-power-longer, get-even-richer schemes under the "civilizing" cloak of culture.

Moreover, this sudden love of the arts and culture by the Emirati sheikhs and sheikhas simply aims to curry favor with restless and suspicious foreign powers such as France, the UK, and the US – powers whose protection will

surely be needed should things get out of hand with a nuclear-armed Iran.

In other words, the sheikhs and sheikhas in Abu Dhabi and Qatar don't give a damn about the arts. They only care about more power and more money. And if, in the midst of their negotiations with the French government for some Mirage fighter jets and military bases, they need to add a Louvre, then so be it. What's a billion dollars for a Louvre? This is, by the way, what the government of Abu Dhabi agreed to pay the French government in order to license the Louvre brand for thirty years – \$1 billion. What's a billion dollars for the government of Abu Dhabi? It's a small fraction of the interest earned by their sovereign wealth fund annually. It's Emirati pocket change.

The second caricature states that there is nothing cynical in all of this spending. In fact, it says that all of this investment in the arts and culture is the sign of an Arab renaissance, of young new rulers seeking to assert the complexity and diversity of Arab, Islamic, and Emirati values, especially after 9/11.

We are told that this renaissance is led by Western-bred visionaries who are tired of the old ways, and who are wholeheartedly trying to first democratize the taste of their subjects via the arts, and then they will democratize all aspects of civil and political life in their intellectually thirsty but socially conservative lands.

Yes, they may be licensing Western brands such as the Louvre and the Guggenheim, but let's give these leaders a break. We should give them a break for no other reason than that we know very well that these are the same people who only a few years ago would have spent their petro-dollars buying more Ferraris and Bentleys than they could drive; these are the same people who only a few years ago were buying yet more high-end properties in New York, London, Tokyo, and Paris; these are the same people who only a few years ago would have invested most if not all of their wealth in foreign lands, but who are today investing in culture and health care and education, and most importantly, who are doing all this investment at home; and they are, after all, only trying to do in ten or twenty years in the twenty-first century what it took their Western counterparts one hundred years to put in place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Who established the Metropolitan Museum of Art after all? Was it not robber barons? Let's call them American sheikhs. Was it not American sheikhs who established the Met over one hundred years ago, and who helped shift the center of modern art from Paris to New York seventy years ago? Why can't Arab sheikhs do the same for Arab culture today? They may not shift the center of the contemporary art world to the

objects, celebrity cat GIFs, and a jumble of unseen anonymous images proliferate and waft through human bodies via Wi-Fi. One could perhaps think of the results as a new and vital form of folk art, that is if one is prepared to completely overhaul one's definition of folk as well as art. A new form of storytelling using emojis and tweeted rape threats is both creating and tearing apart communities loosely linked by shared attention deficit.

### Circulationism

But these things are not as new as they seem. What the Soviet avant-garde of the twentieth century called productivism – the claim that art should enter production and the factory – could now be replaced by circulationism. Circulationism is not about the art of making an image, but of postproducing, launching, and accelerating it. It is about the public relations of images across social networks, about advertisement and alienation, and about being as suavely vacuous as possible.

But remember how productivists Mayakovsky and Rodchenko created billboards for NEP sweets? Communists eagerly engaging with commodity fetishism?<sup>18</sup> Crucially, circulationism, if reinvented, could also be about

short-circuiting existing networks, circumventing and bypassing corporate friendship and hardware monopolies. It could become the art of recoding or rewiring the system by exposing state scopophilia, capital compliance, and wholesale surveillance. Of course, it might also just go as wrong as its predecessor, by aligning itself with a Stalinist cult of productivity, acceleration, and heroic exhaustion. Historic productivism was – let's face it – totally ineffective and defeated by an overwhelming bureaucratic apparatus of surveillance/workfare early on. And it is quite likely that circulationism – instead of restructuring circulation – will just end up as ornament to an internet that looks increasingly like a mall filled with nothing but Starbucks franchises personally managed by Joseph Stalin.

Will circulationism alter reality's hard- and software; its affects, drives, and processes? While productivism left few traces in a dictatorship sustained by the cult of labor, could circulationism change a condition in which eyeballs, sleeplessness, and exposure are an algorithmic factory? Are circulationism's Stakhanovites working in Bangladeshi like-farms,<sup>19</sup> or mining virtual gold in Chinese prison camps,<sup>20</sup> churning out corporate consent on

03/05

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Walid Raad  
Walkthrough, Part II



A 2008 Smithsonian Museum of Natural History advertisement targets teenage audiences. Design by Holly Harter graphic design.

07/10

digital conveyor belts?

### Open Access

But here is the ultimate consequence of the internet moving offline.<sup>21</sup> If images can be shared and circulated, why can't everything else be too? If data moves across screens, so can its material incarnations move across shop windows and other enclosures. If copyright can be dodged and called into question, why can't private property? If one can share a restaurant dish JPEG on Facebook, why not the real meal? Why not apply fair use to space, parks, and swimming pools?<sup>22</sup> Why only claim open access to JSTOR and not MIT – or any school, hospital, or university for that matter? Why shouldn't data clouds discharge as storming supermarkets?<sup>23</sup> Why not open-source water, energy, and Dom Pérignon champagne?

If circulationism is to mean anything, it has to move into the world of offline distribution, of 3D dissemination of resources, of music, land, and inspiration. Why not slowly withdraw from an undead internet to build a few others next to it?

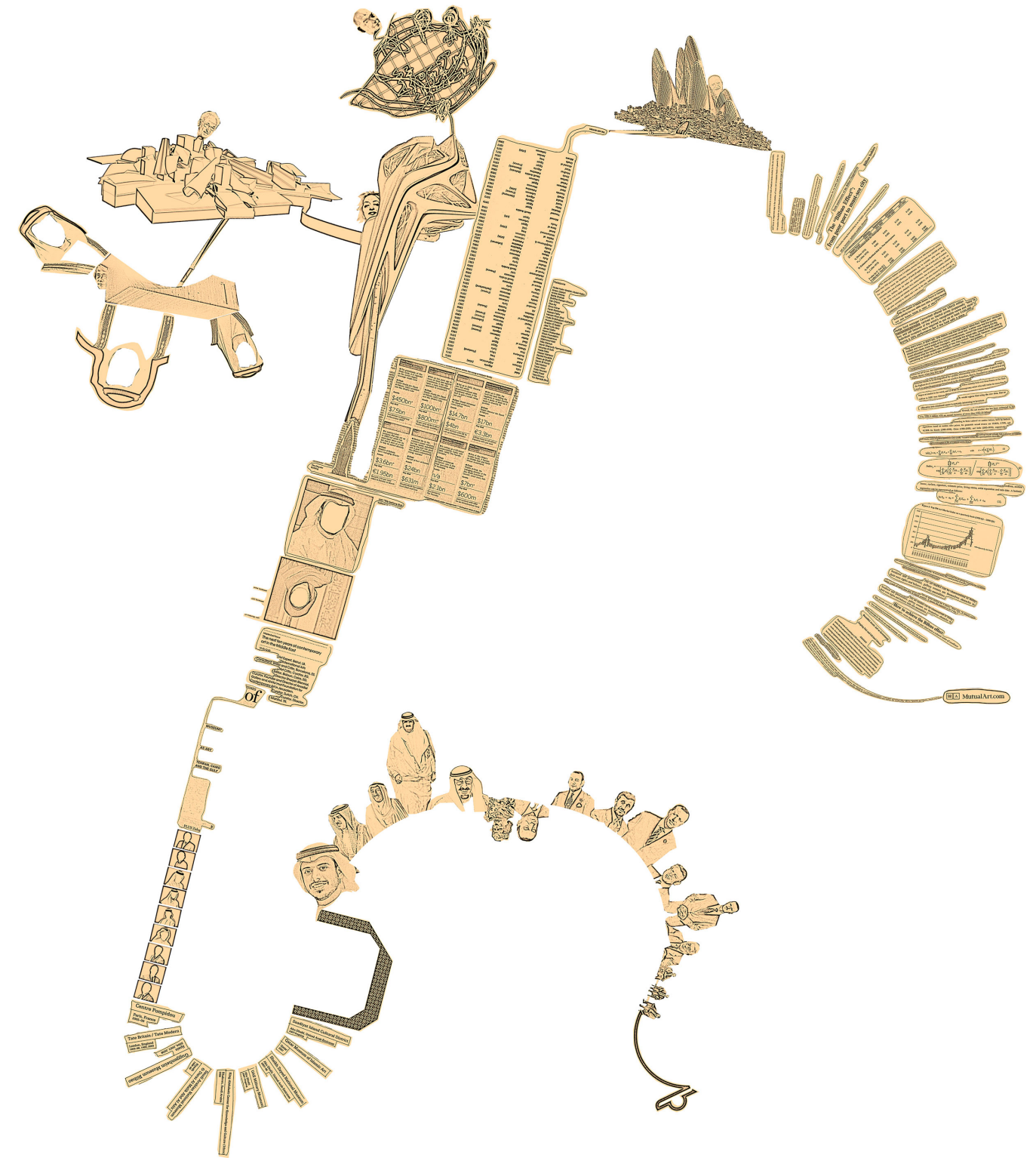
×

This text comes from nearly two years of testing versions of it in front of hundreds of people. So thanks to all of you, but mostly to my students, who had to endure most of its live writing. Some parts of this argument were formed in a seminar organized by Janus Hom and Martin Reynolds, but also in events run by Andrea Phillips and Daniel Rourke, Michael Connor, Shumon Basar, Christopher Kulendran Thomas, Brad Troemel, and exchanges with Jesse Darling, Linda Stupart, Karen Archey, and many others. I am taking cues from texts by Redhack, James Bridle, Boris Groys, Jörg Heiser, David Joselit, Christina Kiaer, Metahaven, Trevor Paglen, Brian Kuan Wood, and many works by Laura Poitras. But the most important theoretical contribution to shape this text was my collaborator Leon Kahane's attempt to shoplift a bottle of wine for a brainstorming session.

08/10

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 [Hito Steyerl](#)  
[Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?](#)

**Hito Steyerl** is a filmmaker and writer. She teaches New Media Art at University of Arts Berlin and has recently participated in Documenta 12, Shanghai Biennial, and Rotterdam Film Festival.



Detail of sketch for Walid Raad's project "Scratching on Things I Could Disavow," 2007-ongoing.

# Walid Raad Walkthrough, Part II

01/05

*Continued from "Walkthrough, Part I"*

During the past decade or so, I've been hearing more and more about Arab artists, about contemporary Arab art, modern Arab art, Islamic art, Middle Eastern art, its makers, sponsors, consumers, genres, and histories.

I've also been fascinated by the increasing number of festivals, workshops, museums, galleries, residencies, exhibitions, prizes, foundations, schools, and journals emerging in Arab cities such as Beirut, Doha, Cairo, Alexandria, Marrakech, Tangiers, Ramallah, Sharjah, and especially the United Arab Emirates – the UAE.

The UAE, in fact, presents a fascinating case study.

The UAE (and I apologize if I repeat here some of the dumb facts you already know) is composed of seven emirates (Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Quwain). Abu Dhabi is the capital of the UAE, and in terms of resources and wealth, it is also the richest of the seven emirates. Just to give you a sense of its wealth: The UAE holds between 3 and 5 percent of the world's proven natural gas reserves, at around 215 trillion cubic feet, which is the seventh largest natural gas deposit in the world. Ninety-four percent of these reserves are in Abu Dhabi.

The UAE also has between 6 and 9 percent of the world's proven oil reserves. That's the seventh largest in the world at around 97.8 billion barrels, and it is important to note that 94 percent of those reserves are in Abu Dhabi. At an average price of \$110 per barrel of oil, Abu Dhabi netted \$120 billion from oil in 2012.

Abu Dhabi also has the third largest (after Norway and Saudi Arabia) sovereign wealth fund in the world, valued at around \$630 billion. This sovereign wealth fund generates loads of dollars for the emirate every year. It has a twenty-year annual rate of return of around 6.9 percent, and a thirty-year annual rate of return of 8.1 percent.

In other words, Abu Dhabi is not just rich. It is very, very rich.

But Abu Dhabi also seems to know that its wealth depends too much on petro-chemical products. In the past two decades or so, Abu Dhabi has tried to diversify its hydrocarbon-dominated economy. It has invested heavily in aerospace, health care, biomedical technology, education, finance, and as you may have heard, in culture and the arts.

The main investment in culture and the arts is the well-publicized Saadiyat Island: a twenty-seven-square-kilometer island (that's half the size of Bermuda) where Abu Dhabi has planned a \$27 billion development project. On this one island, Abu Dhabi is about to build the largest-to-date Guggenheim Museum, to be designed by

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Walid Raad  
Walkthrough, Part II

1  
This is what the term "post-internet," coined a few years ago by Marisa Olson and subsequently Gene McHugh, seemed to suggest while it had undeniable use value as opposed to being left with the increasingly privatized exchange value it has at this moment.

2  
Cf. Peter Weibel, "Medien als Maske: Videokratie," in *Von der Bürokratie zur Telekratie. Rumänien im Fernsehen*, ed. Keiko Sei (Berlin: Merve, 1990), 124–149, 134f.

3  
Cătălin Gheorghe, "The Juridical Rewriting of History," in *Trial/Proces*, ed. Cătălin Gheorghe (Iași: Universitatea de Arte "George Enescu" Iași, 2012), 2–4. See [http://www.arteias.ro/ita/publ/Vector\\_CercetareCriticalnContext-TRIAL.pdf](http://www.arteias.ro/ita/publ/Vector_CercetareCriticalnContext-TRIAL.pdf).

4  
Ceci Moss and Tim Steer in a stunning exhibition announcement: "The object that exists in motion spans different points, relations and existences but always remains the same thing. Like the digital file, the bootlegged copy, the icon, or Capital, it reproduces, travels and accelerates, constantly negotiating the different supports that enable its movement. As it occupies these different spaces and forms it is always reconstituting itself. It doesn't have an autonomous singular existence; it is only ever activated within the network of nodes and channels of transportation. Both a distributed process and an independent occurrence, it is like an expanded object ceaselessly circulating, assembling and dispersing. To stop it would mean to break the whole process, infrastructure or chain that propagates and reproduces it." See <http://www.seventeengallery.com/exhibitions/motion-ceci-moss-tim-steer/>.

5  
One instance of a wider political phenomena called transition. Coined for political situations in Latin America and then applied to Eastern European contexts after 1989, this notion described a teleological process consisting of an impossible catch-up of countries "belatedly" trying to achieve democracy and free-market economies. Transition implies a continuous morphing process, which in theory would make any place ultimately look like the ego ideal of any default Western nation. As a result, whole regions were subjected to radical makeovers. In practice, transition usually meant rampant expropriation coupled with a radical decrease in life expectancy. In transition, a bright neoliberal future marched off the screen to be realized as a lack of health care coupled with personal bankruptcy, while

Western banks and insurance companies not only privatized pensions, but also reinvested them in contemporary art collections. See <http://transform.eipcp.net/correspondence/1145970626#redir>.

6  
Images migrating across different supports are of course nothing new. This process has been apparent in art-making since the Stone Age. But the ease with which many images morph into the third dimension is a far cry from ages when a sketch had to be carved into marble manually. In the age of postproduction, almost everything made has been created by means of one or more images, and any IKEA table is copied and pasted rather than mounted or built.

7  
As the New Aesthetic tumblr has brilliantly demonstrated for things and landscapes (see <http://new-aesthetic.tumblr.com/>), and as the Women as Objects tumblr has done to illustrate the incarnation of image as female body (see <http://womenasobjects.tumblr.com/>). Equally relevant on this point is work by Jesse Darling and Jennifer Chan.

8  
See Steven Shaviro's wonderful analysis in "Post-Cinematic Affect: On Grace Jones, Boarding Gate and Southland Tales," *Film-Philosophy* 14.1 (2010): 1–102. See also his book *Post-Cinematic Affect* (London: Zero Books, 2010).

9  
Greg Allen, "The Enterprise School," *Greg.org*, Sept. 13, 2013. See [http://greg.org/archive/2013/09/13/the\\_enterprise\\_school.html](http://greg.org/archive/2013/09/13/the_enterprise_school.html).

10  
Jalal Toufic, *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Catastrophe* (2009). See [http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads/Jalal\\_Toufic\\_The\\_Withdrawal\\_of\\_Tradition\\_Past\\_a\\_Surpassing\\_Disaster.pdf](http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads/Jalal_Toufic_The_Withdrawal_of_Tradition_Past_a_Surpassing_Disaster.pdf).

11  
"The Cloud, the State, and the Stack: Metahaven in Conversation with Benjamin Bratton." See <http://mthvn.tumblr.com/post/38098461078/thecloudthe-stateandthestack>.

12  
Thanks to Josh Crowe for drawing my attention to this.

13  
"The Cloud, the State, and the Stack."

14  
Oliver Laric, "Versions," 2012. See <http://oliverlaric.com/versions.htm>.

15

09/10

Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1999): 75–82. "In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography." Suárez Miranda, *Viajes de varones prudentes*, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lérida, 1658."

16  
L. Arlas, "Verbal spat between Costa Rica, Nicaragua continues," *Tico Times*, Sept. 20, 2013. See <http://www.ticotimes.net/More-news/News-Briefs/Verbal-spat-between-Costa-Rica-Nicaragua-continues-Friday-September-20-2013>. Thanks to Kevan Jenson for mentioning this to me.

17  
Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988): 166–184.

18  
Christina Kiaer, "Into Production!": The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism," *Transversal* (Sept. 2010). See <http://eipcp.net/transversa/0910/kiaer/en>. "Mayakovsky's advertising jingles address working-class Soviet consumers directly and without irony; for example, an ad for one of the products of Mossel'prom, the state agricultural trust, reads: 'Cooking oil. Attention working masses. Three times cheaper than butter! More nutritious than other oils! Nowhere else but Mossel'prom.' It is not surprising that Constructivist advertisements would speak in a pro-Bolshevik, anti-NEP-business language, yet the picture of the *Reklam-Konstruktor* advertising business is more complicated. Many of their commercial graphics move beyond this straightforward language of class difference and utilitarian need to offer a *theory* of the socialist object. In contrast to Brik's claim that in this kind of work they are merely

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Hito Steyerl  
Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?

'biding their time,' I propose that their advertisements attempt to work out the relation between the material cultures of the prerevolutionary past, the NEP present and the socialist *novyi byt* of the future with theoretical rigor. They confront the question that arises out of the theory of Boris Arvatov: What happens to the individual fantasies and desires organized under capitalism by the commodity fetish and the market, after the revolution?"

19  
Charles Arthur, "How low-paid workers at 'click farms' create appearance of online popularity," *The Guardian*, Aug. 2, 2013. See <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/aug/02/click-farms-appearance-online-popularity>.

20  
Harry Sanderson, "Human Resolution," *Mute*, April 4, 2013. See <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/human-resolution>.

21  
And it is absolutely not getting stuck with data-derived sculptures exhibited in white cube galleries.

22  
"Spanish workers occupy a Duke's estate and turn it into a farm," *Libcom.org*, Aug. 24, 2012. See <http://libcom.org/blog/spanish-workers-occupy-duke%E2%80%99s-estate-turn-it-farm-24082012>. "Earlier this week in Andalusia, hundreds of unemployed farmworkers broke through a fence that surrounded an estate owned by the Duke of Segorbe, and claimed it as their own. This is the latest in a series of farm occupations across the region within the last month. Their aim is to create a communal agricultural project, similar to other occupied farms, in order to breathe new life into a region that has an unemployment rate of over 40 percent. Addressing the occupiers, Diego Canamero, a member of the Andalusian Union of Workers, said that: 'We're here to denounce a social class who leave such a place to waste.' The lavish well-kept gardens, house, and pool are left empty, as the Duke lives in Seville, more than 60 miles away."

23  
Thomas J. Michalak, "Mayor in Spain leads food raids for the people," *Workers.org*, Aug. 25, 2012. See <http://www.workers.org/2012/08/24/mayor-in-spain-leads-food-raids-for-the-people/>. "In the small Spanish town of Marinaleda, located in the southern region of Andalusia, Mayor Juan Manuel Sánchez Gordillo has an answer for the country's economic crisis and the hunger that comes with it: He organized and led the town's residents to raid supermarkets

to get the food necessary to survive." See also <http://theextinctionprotocol.wordpress.com/2012/08/25/economic-crisis-riots-food-raids-and-the-collapse-of-spain/>.

10/10

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 [Hito Steyerl](#)  
[Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?](#)

*Economically, one could argue that the free zones of homeownership helped create the real estate crash of 2008. Will this dependence on free zones serve Dubai's long-term interests?*

**Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla:** It has already served Dubai hugely. The question of sustainability always comes up with the Dubai model, which a lot of people doubt. How sustainable is the Dubai model? Dubai has proven time and again that this is a sustainable model for two reasons. One, you had the crash of 2008. It was a very difficult time. People said, this is the end of Dubai. This is the end of the Dubai model, the Dubai dream. But Dubai is back now. It's up and running. Hence, I think the way it managed to handle that crisis has proven, beyond a doubt, that this model has its own weaknesses and its own problems, but at the end of the day, it is sustainable. The strategy behind Dubai, and hence the free zones, is to build the first post-oil economy in the oil region, and to make sure it is successful and sustainable – to make sure it performs even better than the oil economies. Oil now contributes only 6 or 7 percent to GDP. Dubai lives in an oil region, but it does not depend on oil directly.

x

09/09

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 [Abdulkhaleq Abdulla](#), [Manal Al Dowayan](#), [Parag Khanna](#), [Turi Munthe](#)  
[Freezone: Dubai](#)

[Abdulkhaleq Abdulla](#) is a Professor of Political Science and Chairman of the Cultural Committee at the Dubai Cultural and Scientific Association. He holds a PhD from Georgetown University and is the author of several books and articles: his latest is 2010 LSE paper on the Gulf Moment. He writes a monthly op-ed for the Gulf News and is a regular commentator on contemporary Gulf and Arab issues.

[Manal Al Dowayan](#) uses photography, text and installation to examine Saudi identity, and in particular the role of women in contemporary society. Working mainly in black and white photography, she also experiments with other media and techniques. She has exhibited globally and is currently showing in two exhibitions in Dubai.

[Parag Khanna](#) is a global strategist, world traveler, and best-selling author. He is a Director of the Hybrid Reality Institute, Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation, Adjunct Professor in the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, Visiting Fellow at LSE IDEAS, Senior Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, and Senior Fellow at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs. He is co-author of *Hybrid Reality: Thriving in the Emerging Human-Technology Civilization* (2012) and author of *How to Run the World: Charting a Course to the Next Renaissance* (2011) and *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order* (2008). In 2008, Parag was named one of Esquire's "75 Most Influential People of the 21st Century," and featured in WIRE magazine's "Smart List."

[Turi Munthe](#) is CEO and founder of Demotix, the crowd-sourced newswire. Demotix has been described as 'Journalism for the 21st Century' by London's Daily Telegraph, and is a Webby Honoree 2011. Munthe has been a publisher, editor, think-tank analyst, lecturer, journalist and talking head. He lives in London.

It has absolutely nothing to do with supremacy, Zionism, or Americanism. Don't just mix things together here, okay? To feel like a minority in your own country – I don't know if you have ever experienced that. I don't know if any nation, any nationality has ever experienced it, because we are the only country that has less than 50 percent and less than 10 percent in our own country. The percentages decrease every year. There is a possibility that we, as a UAE citizens, will be 1 percent in our own country by 2020. And probably zero percent come 2025. If that does not frighten you, you just don't understand the feeling.

When I hear from our friends and our experts that some are starting to call for political rights and citizenship, that just adds to the problem that we go through. We should not have been put through this experience. We should not have been put into a status where we are only 10 percent in our own country. If you go to Europe, if you go to Britain, if you go to the most tolerant country in the world, where the expats, or the foreigners, are only 8 percent, hell is being raised. The government is being brought down. The prime minister is being assassinated.

This is in the most civilized, the most tolerant country on earth. So for you to come in here and tell me that I am talking about supremacy – you are not in the same position. Maybe that explains a little bit better where I'm coming from. We are here to talk about free zones. This is definitely not the topic for the discussion in this session, because it's becoming very sensitive. If there is any other question that has to do with the topic of this session, I would appreciate it more.

**Turi Munthe:** My sense is that that question was very much part of the general discussion about free zones, because I think that was very directly about what is in and what is out. But are there any other questions?

**Audience:** Thank you for a very enticing talk. I like the concept of ferrymen and women, instead of urban nomads or bridge builders. I feel that one really important aspect of living in this free zone is the aspect of language. What kind of language do you bring, as a common language? I'm from the Netherlands, and what I see – and I think Abdulkhaleq is right – the Netherlands used to be a very tolerant country. We have a very specific issue at the moment with people who are coming in. Maybe the Netherlands is not a free zone, but it used to be a free zone of tolerance. But now, people not speaking the language of the land are creating a problem for the majority of the people. There are ferrymen going from one shore to the other in a positive way, but not being able to speak the language of the land, or not willing to speak the language of the land, because they

don't want to lose where they come from. That might be creating problems in the free zone.

**Manal Al Dowayan:** Language, being able to communicate, is a very, very important tool for belonging. This is something that I always go back to in my work – belonging to a space, a landscape, a community, or a political setting. Where I grew up, because there was a community of multinationals, we were forced to choose a common language, which became English. Thankfully, I had the opportunity to study both in Arabic schools and English schools. But I have cousins who went to English schools throughout their lives. Some of my father's friends had the same experience. For them, surviving within the Arabic realm is very, very difficult. I think everybody has a responsibility to learn the language of the place they are in. It bothers me when I meet somebody that's lived in Saudi Arabia for thirty-five years and does not speak a single word of Arabic, who has never gone into the house of a Saudi family. Although they do not see it as a loss, I think it's a loss for them. How could you live in a country for almost a lifetime and not have the experience of engaging with the local community, not understanding their concerns? Picking up the language is a way of saying, I care. I want to belong, or at least belong in a sentimental way.

**Turi Munthe:** Parag, perhaps you'd like to jump in there. The ferryman, as an idea, as opposed to the global nomad or the bridge builder.

**Parag Khanna:** I think learning the local language is a responsibility and an obligation, maybe part of what I'm calling stakeholderhood, which is vague. Manal, you've made it very concrete. I completely endorse what you just said.

**Audience:** My question is for Manal. You mentioned your sisters, who married and went outside the nest, or outside the compound. From your point of view, how did they feel afterwards? Were they offended that they couldn't get access again?

**Manal Al Dowayan:** So you want a finale to the story, basically. They lived happily ever after, I guess. But when you belong to a group of friends, and you are forced to leave this group, and they decide to remove all your privileges as a friend, it's a betrayal. And there is sadness. And there are very negative feelings. Thankfully, they have loving husbands. They left that space and moved into another wonderful space. That's why I say they live happily ever after.

**Audience:** Clearly, the free zones in Dubai have helped expand the economy very quickly. But is it sustainable, politically and economically? On the political side, the free zones have aggravated the demographic imbalance that we talked about.

## Hu Fang Dear Navigator, Part II

Continued from "Dear Navigator, Part I"

### Liqū: Start of Autumn

*The sight of her turning around is as beautiful as someone suffering from melancholy.*

Dear Navigator,  
She once helped me make the bed. During an exhausting, tense journey, what could be more generous than a glass of water, a bowl of rice, and a bed in the midst of hunger and thirst?

By the quiet light of the table lamp, the sight of her making the bed was unforgettable: taking clean sheets from the cabinet, she contemplatively adjusted their position on the bed, occasionally stepping back to look, as though viewing a painting. Seeing her absorbed in this way made me ashamed of my wickedness.

The table lamp illuminated her silhouette, her black hair swaying with her movements around the bed, as though in some quotidian dance. Enveloped in the stillness of the room and the fragrance of the freshly dried sheets, there was an urge to die right then and there.

Gazing out the window of this lonely room, one could always see the church steeple. In the evenings, when the lights went out indoors, the far-off church, lit from below by floodlights, would float out of the darkness, tantalizingly within reach.

A lamp, a song, a bed sheet – each can give this completely characterless, isolated space an air of inhabitation. In the Chinese view of the universe, although humans are not its center, neither have they been ruthlessly expelled to its margins. What makes humans human is precisely that, as the part of nature that is full of sympathy, they mutually complete the other things that exist in this world. Even if Hua\_Sheng\_Lai's mortal body no longer exists, she still has merged with my life; even if my colleagues appear to be sleepwalking apparitions, they still share with me their cravings for good food and their thoughts of home.

Our feelings are necessarily connected to everything that happens in the universe, only the reactions carried by those ripples spread at differing frequencies. For example, when we heard the news about Steve Jobs's death, it was like learning of an incident from another planet. Separated by a fixed distance, there are certain things that are hard to feel sad about, and others to which I'm even more sensitive.

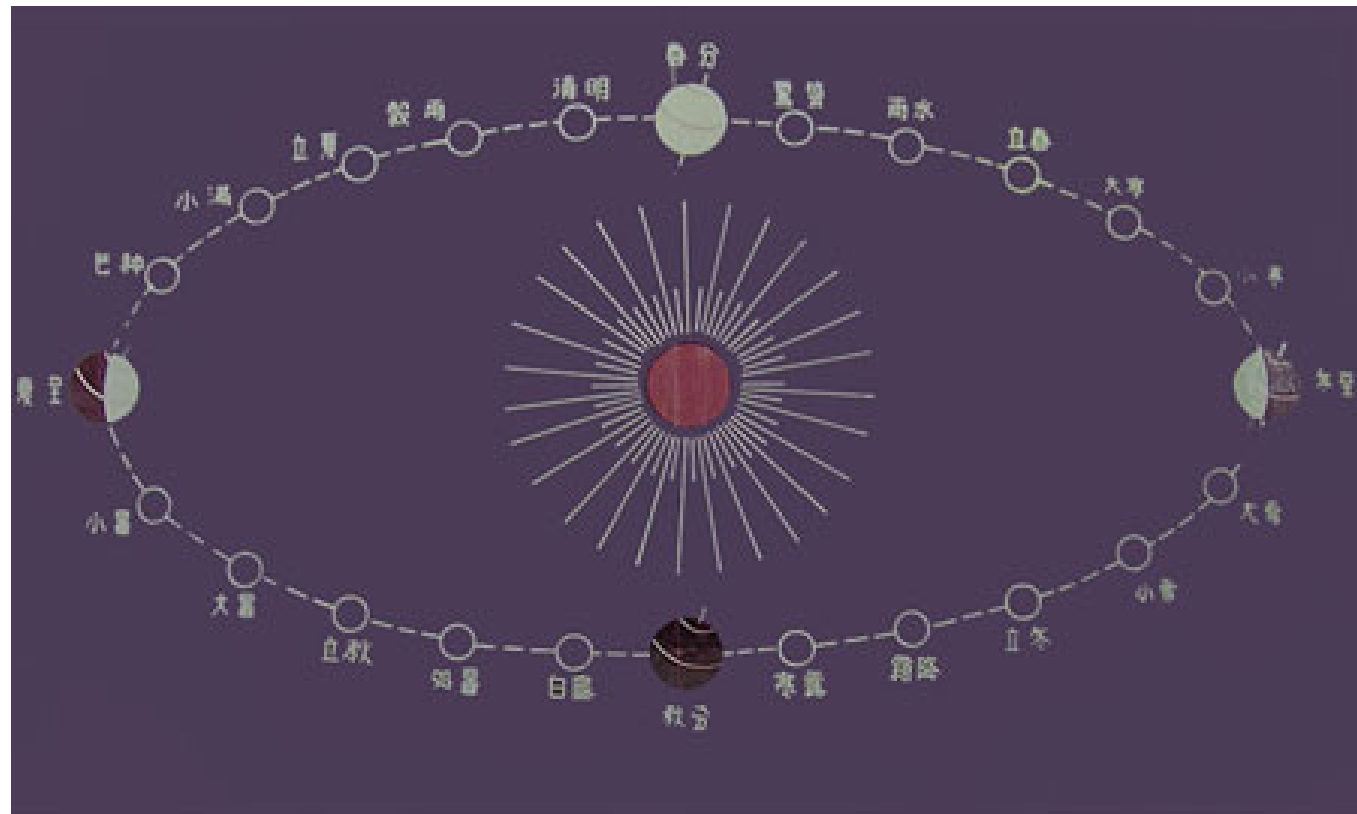
As for myself, the entertainment programs on my desktop are superfluous, as I prefer to reap in quiet the remorse brought by the slowing of time. More than once I have recalled how, behind Hua\_Sheng\_Lai's outwardly happy-go-lucky personality, there was a kind of self-

08/09

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 — November 2013  
Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, Manal Al Dowayan, Parag Khanna, Turi Munthe  
Freezone: Dubai

01/08

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013  
Hu Fang  
Dear Navigator, Part II



simply just attracting entrepreneurs who make money and go. It's really a place that is full of creative minds from all over the place. And then Dubai encourages them to go back.

**Turi Munthe:** Parag, is the Dubai model helping to proliferate a polity in which you swap limited rights for the bliss of limited responsibilities?

**Parag Khanna:** It doesn't have to be that tradeoff. Professor Abdulla talked about foreigners coming and demanding rights. I actually never used the word "rights" when I talked about stakeholderism. I was talking about obligations. If you are going to be somewhere and commit to being somewhere for a long time, what are your obligations to give back to that society? I wasn't talking about coming and demanding rights at all. I was saying that foreigners shouldn't act as if they're so aloof to the place. If they're going to be there for a long time, they should be asking themselves what they owe to the country, because they have to owe something to some place. They have lost their allegiance, maybe, to where they come from. But can this limited compact be sustained? Yes, if that's what the compact is. But free zones don't necessarily have to be non-democratic, or anti-democratic, or monarchical. They come in

all different shapes and sizes. As I said, they could be corporate supply chain-type places, like Aramco City. They could be places that are democratizing, gradually, like Singapore.

**Turi Munthe:** Are there any questions from the audience?

**Audience Member:** My question is for Professor Abdulla. I belong to the part of the room that was quite chilled by some of your comments. I'm an immigrant to the United States, not by will, because I was a child. I was naturalized much later. I grew up with a lot of discrimination, specifically white supremacy. I was given the idea that immigrants contaminate the majority. In the Israel-Palestine conflict, Palestinians are disenfranchised even though they are the majority. The Palestinian womb is seen as a demographic threat. My question for you is whether or not you are endorsing some kind of ethnic supremacy. I'd like to know what you're endorsing exactly, and what thesis you're putting forward.

**Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla:** I'm trying to reflect the agony of the minority in their own country, which you and many others here probably don't go through. For the UAE citizen to live it every single day is a psychological torment that probably has not been expressed very well.



A prospective NYU Abu Dhabi student's snapshot in UAE exhibits a "traditional arabic market at the Cultural Center."

where I'm free and the rules are very different, versus the realm that I have to play in, which is more restricted. So it's very clear to me. Sometimes it's too clear to see things as opposites. Other citizens that live within my community are foreigners. These people also live in a bubble that's not connected to the world they belong in. I was Creative Director at Saudi Aramco for many years. An elderly Aramcon from Texas, US, worked there too. His name was Stan. He told me that he had retired twice. He somehow managed to come back as a contractor to work in Saudi Arabia. Why would he come back? It's because he was so in love with the country. What did he do in the country he loved so much? Not much. He just hung out, went camping – it became a lifestyle. He passed by my office to tell me this, and showed me a water bottle that was filled with sand. He said, I'm taking this sand with me to America, because when I die, I want them to sprinkle this sand on my grave. It blows my mind, this connection to a place that does not even really belong to you. And you don't belong to it.

**Turi Munthe:** That belonging question is exactly what I was trying to get to. Abdulkhaleq, what do Emiratis think of the rights and responsibilities of belonging? Let's start with rights of long-term residents of the Emirates. Their rights not just to health and safety, but their political rights. Do you think this issue of belonging should forever be tied to blood?

**Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla:** I think you just said it. We are the Emiratis in the United Arab Emirates. We are the 10 percent. We are the disappearing minority in our own country. If there is one breach of human rights, it is the right of being a majority in your own country. When you tell me that long-term residents should be given rights here and there, this comes as a complete shock.

**Turi Munthe:** I didn't tell you. I asked you what your sense was of the rights that could be conferred, or maybe have been conferred.

**Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla:** I understood your question. Let me answer it in my own way. What I'm saying is that we, as Emiratis, have not fully enjoyed political rights yet. We do not have the right to elections. We have appointed authorities. So, for non-Emiratis to talk about political rights and citizenship just does not make sense because the contractors – they come here as guests. They come here as temporary workers. They come here to enjoy the safety of the place. They come here to enjoy the bounty. And that's as much as they should be asking for. Do not rock the boat.

**Turi Munthe:** How much do artists lose, and how much does the state lose, by reducing interests down to this very small Venn

diagram? Do you not gain by having the rich and the poor on the same streets? Do you not gain by having driving entrepreneurship on the one hand, and the beginnings of the welfare state on the other? I say this as an entrepreneur who set up my business in London because they had fantastic tax rates for entrepreneurs.

**Parag Khanna:** I think the question that's being posed to you both is, does it have to be non-integrated? Can you imagine a world in which Saudi Aramco and Saudi ...

**Turi Munthe:** Do you lose by not being part of a much more varied community?

**Manal Al Dowayan:** Definitely. There is some kind of negativity produced by being segregated into pockets. But for me, the experience of, first of all, growing up in a pocket that was privileged – not wealthy, but privileged in education and healthcare – was a very positive thing. Spreading this over to the rest of the country was something that the company was doing anyway. And it did develop the whole country. So that's not the issue. I think Dubai has now become an incubator of young talent within the region. Talented young people are migrating here. They feel that this is the space where they can expand. This is true for me as an artist, too. Other artists from around the Arab world and Iran live here because there's a space where we can actually think. Our existence here is respected and treated with interest and encouragement. Because this does not exist anywhere else in the region, I am totally for creating spaces that are restricted in order to not disturb this perfect equation. Let the youth come here and join think tanks. Do research. Make art. And be entrepreneurs.

**Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla:** I think Dubai ticks because it has a huge pool of creative minds that come from all over the region--from Asia and elsewhere. It is that creative class which keeps the buzz in Dubai, and which keeps the city alive over time. The beauty of Dubai is that it doesn't keep them for life. Once they get the Dubai training and experience, it ships them back to where they come from, whether to Syria, to Egypt, or elsewhere. They take the spirit of Dubai and the know-how of Dubai. In that sense, Dubai has not been simply a magnet that attracts young, creative, talented minds, but actually has been a net flow of creative minds. So, Dubai is encouraging this – not brain drain, but brain cupellation within the region. Some of the best Arab minds in Canada, the US, and Europe come to Dubai. The expats experience its different free zones, its different institutions, and once they feel comfortable and mature enough, they go back to Lebanon, to Syria, and so forth. They impart all their knowledge. In that sense, Dubai has served the region in multiple ways other than

destructive urge, while I am the opposite, in that I would never be willing to destroy my one and only hope; I would turn her death drive into my lust for life.

Is there anything better suited for meditation and penitence than this journey to Mars?

– Vladimir Xie, August 7

### **Chūshū: Limit of Heat**

*In everything I do, I always work to avoid results, avoid beginnings and endings.*

Dear Navigator,

Some days later, I discover that I am working with *time bandits*, that I myself am one of them, making off with other people's time, while my own time is stolen without my realizing.

Shares, futures, banks: the *time bandits* sell watches to those without time, and after they've bought their watches, these people believe they actually possess time. Nor is there anyone who can stop the *time bandits*; even this isolation module flying to Mars cannot prevent them from consuming our lives in advance, because it is they who are the backers of the Mars project.

Just as how an idealist and sadist are only one step removed, the *time bandits* have used humanity's desire for immortality to steal the time necessary for eternal life.

Perhaps under the influence of my father, I feel the only thing distinguishing me from the *time bandits* is that I have no care for my physical body, bravely going to further extremes than they in testing the limits of humanity, becoming a secret liaison for contradictory forces. I only want to experience extreme acceleration in flight, accelerating to the point of lightspeed, where our biological clocks slow down, and we can head toward the opposite side of materiality.

This is a form of atonement, yet also a kind of pretension, since I won't experience any fundamental change, and there's no way I could become a humble penitent. Anyone living in this world has his or her own rationale. If divinity could be shared out at every moment of every hour, then it could be a corporation, school, or church, take any form at all, which ultimately is only a support – “Moonlight plays before my bed, / Could it be frost upon the ground?”<sup>1</sup> – but as long as it can be shared, then it is divine.

Dear Navigator, please excuse me, my remaining pride keeps me rattling on at you, and sometimes I end up not making any sense ... I am so thankful for your generosity.

– Vladimir Xie, August 24

### **Báilù: White Dew**

*Being with the elderly, reining in arrogance*

*and rashness, you can live cleanly.*

Dear Navigator,

Through the windows of the craft, I can almost see that massive diamond floating in the air – is this the ring that promises humanity and stars to one another? Crystallized time, diamonds are the polar opposite of humanity's attempts to steal time, condensing time, concentrating destiny. We are all children of stardust, perhaps originating from some explosion that happened in the remote past, as it is precisely the remnants of stardust that produced life. Our real mother already dead, we are all residues, our hearts burning as fiercely as the massive thermonuclear core of the sun, although necessarily under the cover of strangely cold exteriors, until the fires inside burn to exhaustion, and slowly go cold.

After its hydrogen is consumed, a star dies, growing colder, with the entire space around it returning to blackness. The age of stars will end, while dark matter continues expanding. When the galaxy dies, we will arrive at the winter of the universe.

Consciousness of time is what allows us to survey the past. If we lived long enough, we could see far enough – much further into the past than now – not like the fleeting span of our current temporal consciousness.

If we lived long enough, perhaps until 110,000 years from now, we could reach the next closest star to us, Proxima Centauri, but the cruel part is: subjective morals do not determine what gets to survive – firstly, this is a pitched battle, those that survive are those with relatively durable stores of energy, but this also entails gradual stabilization and death – if its own density is too great, then a star must simultaneously generate its own dynamic force while forming external relationships, repeatedly settling and then moving again in chaos.

If the planet's core is dead water, then there's no way for it to gain energy, because energy can only be gained and converted in reciprocal motion. This is like the way people obtain the means for inner peace in the recurring contest between centrifugal force and gravity, although the energy that flares out from it is different, taking different life courses.

The effects and energy of objects, matter-antimatter: all destructive forces proliferate from or are already impregnated within objects; energy, the moment it obtains material form, produces consciousness, and vice versa; what we finally fixate upon is the sustainability of energy, its sustainable duration and intensity. This also means that energy accumulates and seeks out energy, and is not merely exhaustible, otherwise we'd have no way to explain why our form of life began right from birth to head in the

direction it's heading.

Dear Navigator, my whole body revolves around all these energies that inspire and disturb me. You are forever the central axis of my heart, keeping me from losing my bearing in this boundless space, and releasing the visions inside me.

– Vladimir Xie, September 9

### Qīufēn: Autumnal Equinox

*I was a complete fool in front of the monitor, first crying, then laughing, then crying again.*

Dear Navigator,

Ultimately, what is time during insomnia? What is it that is consumed during those hours, or returned to oneself?

In this dark weightlessness, my face has rapidly transformed, become liquid, illusory, just like the mind, inside of which float fragments of form – but when they ultimately converge, what kind of space will they create?

Borderless, infinite, I must focus my concentration, and this makes me all the more conscious of that irrational excitement swallowing up every last nerve ending, echoes surging in my brain, while in the approaching dawn, an endless haze envelops my line of sight. I've already forgotten the texture of light in reality (in the earth's atmosphere). What I confront is always only the lighting in my cabin, and the perpetually calibrated temperature.

Once, I was able to capture the beauty of the light switching from afternoon to evening, the clouds suspended against the fading sky as it turned a deep blue, the street lights flickering on one after the other, having the effect of desk lamps--both condensing space, and yet infinitely expanding it into the gradually shifting colors of the skyline.

Sitting on the bus, a small girl who was sunk into the backrest of her seat watched her reflection in the window. And after a day's work, even more people were drifting to sleep in the bumper-to-bumper congestion, the city emerging from evening like a submarine surfacing from the ocean depths.

You come to a city in a rush, and just as hastily depart.

When you arrive, the people are bathing in the setting sun, a girl on a bicycle majestically straightens her back: it is the most serene time of day. Sitting on the bus, you take in the smiling faces, troubled faces; passing the theater, people are excitedly discussing the new performance program; passing the canteen, the glowing overhead lights have been switched on in succession, everybody seeking their fix of the raw oysters in season. You come just in time to see the ecstatic expressions of people savoring

their delicacies.

Yet where you want to go, a haze covers the land, repression overlaying, aggravating, oppressing people's nerves – what is ultimately sacrificed is still the hoard of commoners with no place to run. The sky darkening, before setting off you try your best to appreciate the fresh air and free laughter here, even engage in a useless debate about the future of humanity, the only problem being that it develops after getting drunk, like the routine passion that follows intoxication, which is the major distinction between our love and that of our parents.

Staring at the stars outside my window, I have unconsciously passed through my time of insomnia. Dear Navigator, you emerge so vividly from my “unconscious,” like the mid-autumn moon.

Good night!

– Vladimir Xie, September 22

### Hánlù: Cold Dew

*No, no, no, if only I could speak the language of plants, they are our true best friends.*

Dear Navigator,

Starting from what point is it possible for us to measure time? The passing of this moment immediately affects the past and future (at this moment, having already entered this moment, everything around me has changed, is changing): is it not the case that starting from this moment, perpetually starting from this moment, every single moment in time is a new beginning? Precisely because it will never renounce the past or fantasize the future, precisely because I exist in the immediacy of this moment, I am able to produce the penitence and hope for my own salvation.

In irreversible time – and here irreversible does not mean that time is linear, as the consequences I have suffered imply that I have also been suffered by others, while what I have suffered is also fed back from the others, forming the mysterious retroaction of time – in this process, why should there be hurt and regret between self and other? Why tears and separation?

It is precisely because time is *not* outside the external reality of human emotions that the labyrinth of time is molded by our emotions even as it molds them, and in the end we can only find our way through this labyrinth based on what is sensible.

Waking up in the middle of the night, seeing the room filled with starlight, it took a long time for me to realize it was the blinking of indicator lamps on the computer and other electrical appliances.

I thought of those nights in Beijing when,

a moderated form of the free zone. But one of his questions was, can a free zone-based city ever become a great city? Or does a city that aspires to greatness have to let in what we in Doha ended up describing as “the real”? I'll give you an example. Xinjiang's gigantic special economic zone, which is twenty-five years old, has gotten realer and realer over the last few years as civic activism has started taking shape there. Abdulkhaleq, can you build a great city out of these very ruly pockets?

**Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla:** Free zones are one of this city's many icons. Dubai and free zones are synonymous. If you take away free zones, there will probably be no Dubai. And if you take Dubai away, you will not see such glamorous, elegant, state-of-the-art business. Each one has contributed positively to the other. There are more free zones in Dubai than there are free zones in the entire Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain. There are three times as many free zones in Dubai than in all of the GCC states. Thirty percent of all free zones in all of the Arab countries are located in the UAE. There are something like 150 different free zones throughout the Arab world, and forty-nine of them are located here in Dubai. The oldest, the busiest, the fastest-growing free zones in the world are here. Dubai has probably the most diversified free zone anywhere in the world. Free zones are such an essential aspect of business and of Dubai overall that they're just indispensable to Dubai.

**Turi Munthe:** Free zones are defined as extrastatal spaces which have extremely precise, often quite limited rules, designed to foster very specific things. I know that Dubai has a media city, which is built around a kind of free speech that otherwise is not achieved elsewhere. It has an international humanitarian city, which, I think, hasn't really worked. It was designed as its own special enclave. Do all these free zones end up looking like Frankenstein's monster, not really truly organic, not really real? However much you aggregate them, will they still function as in-between spaces, devoid of this thing which is real?

**Parag Khanna:** It's always easiest to explain by example, and we have two fantastic examples. One is Hong Kong, the other is Singapore. Hong Kong has in many ways influenced the way the Chinese think about capitalism. It was run by the British for centuries and absorbed into China in 1997. It's no longer a free zone per se. It's no longer an exclusive British entrepôt. It's now part of Chinese sovereign territory. The range of dimensions in which Hong Kong has autonomy from China is gradually diminishing as it becomes more and more a part of China. They

have unique passports, a unique currency in Hong Kong, but gradually, all these things are going to be absorbed by China.

Singapore was founded two hundred years ago, in 1819. When the territory was marked, Sir Raffles said, we are not interested in territorial aggrandizement. We're only interested in trade. It was just a trade entrepôt for Britain. Today, it's a full-fledged country. It has an identity. It's actually one of the wealthiest countries in the world. It's probably the most successful postcolonial country in the world. But it's run like a parastatal corporation – that's very much what it is. I just moved there a few months ago. The people realize what it is they're living in. It's a corporate, civic compact. It's interesting to observe the social dynamics.

You talked about immigration. The demographics of the UAE – correct me if I'm wrong, Dr. Abdulla – are as lopsided as any place in the entire world, in terms of the indigenous population versus the foreign population. About one out of every ten people in the UAE is an Emirati. In Singapore, they're very concerned that by the year 2030, the population will be less than 50 percent indigenous. So citizenship is no longer as relevant a concept. How do you build a sense of allegiance amongst people who have decided to permanently be somewhere that's thought of as a transient free zone? What we need is not citizenship but stakeholderhood, because people are going to permanently live in Dubai who aren't Emiratis. And they're going to live in the UAE. They're going to live in Abu Dhabi and elsewhere. What is this new code or contract within the context of a free zone that makes people feel like they belong, like they have obligations, even though citizenship will never ever be conferred on them?

**Turi Munthe:** I think there is something very particular about that lack of long-term commitment to a historical story, a story of the future, which has historically involved the notion of citizenship, of engagement in the politics of the country in which you live. What strikes me about the Gulf is, one, the extraordinary demographic imbalance, and two, within that demographic imbalance, those people who stay here, like Manal in her Aramco compound. Manal, do you feel you've missed that capacity to engage with the very fiber, the meat, the body politic? I ask because this has an impact on the stakeholders in all these free zones. Are they really, fully real people? Are they really, fully engaged?

**Manal Al Dawayan:** I'll speak about people in general, and then about me personally. Personally, I sort of jump into things aggressively, trying to get involved in everything. I see the potential of what I can do within a certain realm

04/08

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013  
Dear Navigator, Part II  
Hu Fang

05/09

Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, Manal Al Dawayan, Parag Khanna, Turi Munthe  
Freezone: Dubai





Manal Al Dowayan, *I Am a UN Officer*, 2006. Photograph, gelatin silver print.

from my bedroom window, you could see the revolving advertisement on the opposite rooftop, and, following the angle of rotation, make out each of its English letters, over and over, with the brand name formed by those letters slowly seeping into your head, accompanying you into deep sleep.

Everything around me seemed to be stock still, except for those turning letters radiating heat into the air. Amid the first glimmers of dawn, even the building's two or three lit-up rooms appeared exceptionally profound, blank advertising lightboxes inlaid against a light-blue background. It's hard to imagine people passing their entire lives in such lightboxes, but seen from here, they are truly the dwelling place of humanity. As soon as you turn on the light switch, your room, too, will become a lightbox beaming signals at other people. There is no predetermined dwelling place for humanity, only the results of construction, and that endlessly turning advertisement.

From where the sun rises there arose the theme of resistance; from where the moon rises there arose the theme of healing; so what arose with Mars?

This red planet reveals only its dry, cold face, its red reminding me of the red planet we once lost and the convergence of red energy we once had. In that case, will our lost fervor make a comeback?

Dear Navigator, are humanity's deliverance and afterlife already hidden somewhere in space?

– Vladimir Xie, October 8

#### Shuāngjiàng: Frost Descent

*Holding a lemon in my hand, I have grasped my only sense of security.*

Dear Navigator,

Right when day after day of testing has exhausted our spirits, we've finally received news that we'll soon arrive on Mars. This means that three among us will have the chance to leave the module and walk around on Mars. On such a long and tedious journey, you can imagine how exciting this news is. With everybody anxiously awaiting the announcement from mission control as to who can leave the capsule, our Italian colleague N. has almost reached the point of breakdown. "If I can't go, I'm really going to lose it," he says over and over.

The most tortuous thing for me is the experiment we constantly repeat throughout the journey: every two days, the monitor displays an endless stream of images related to life on earth, like landscapes, scenes from city life, portraits of people and animals and so on, and in response I have to use Chinese and English to describe as

quickly as possible what I'm seeing, while also recording it. It makes me indescribably sad and miserable; so many times I want to give up mid-experiment.

But overall, my mental state is not so unstable. The abnormal, artificial climate here makes everything sluggish, as though we were on the edge of winter while our body temperatures remained in a midsummer night. Sunlight gives the leaves about to fall their last dazzling glow, and then a ceremonial guard appears in my head, every last detail of their heavily ornamented dress uniforms so vivid that I even suspect I am among their ranks.

My place in the entanglements of my self-imaginings becomes obscured, disconnected from distant lands, with no worries for parents and lovers, which means there are no dates, no suburban fields. I will suddenly recall a friend who always traveled alone – we would say goodbye as soon as we met; I will recall those friends living in seclusion outside of the city: Are they trying to escape the world's catastrophes in advance? If I held you as tight as I could, would you leave or not? "Fighting for your peaceful life," you say, but even if you say it, and repeat it, I still can't get that kind of peace.

Then I finally had a clear understanding of the *time bandits'* secret. Before, everyday the delivery boy with the words "Live to Deliver" emblazoned across the chest of his uniform would pass the piping hot express delivery pizza to me, shackled to my work behind the computer. And now, I still spend everyday in front of the computer, only I'm eating even faster, even more flavorless vacuum-packed space shuttle food. Everyday, my life becomes more and more unbelievable.

Dear Navigator, I once expected – and even now still expect – that I could be the kind of person who enjoys the sunshine and the rain, someone who discovers truth from simply looking at the dust particles suspended in the sunshine and the fish in the stream, for in the clarity and warmth of light and stream, it is impossible not to be lucid, impossible not to feel love for the world.

– Vladimir Xie, October 23

#### Lidōng: Start of Winter

*I never dared scrutinize my parents' faces, as though one look would speed up their decline.*

Dear Navigator,

The descent was extremely dangerous, the ship violently rocking as we sat intently in the landing module, everything unfolding so slowly until the moment the landing cushion touched down, and we all broke out into blissful smiles.

Embracing and congratulating each other,

we had arrived on Mars. Through the module windows everything outside was a strange red color, as if bathed in the glow of neon light at night (recalling the neon sign I saw from my bedroom window). N. was frantically tapping at the keyboard – along with me, he would be staying inside. The three selected crewmembers began to emerge one by one on the planet’s surface. In their bulky spacesuits, every jerk and movement resembled those of a bear cub made to dance before an audience. Frankly, I was a bit relieved not to be subjected to such a comical undertaking.

The Russian, W., carried the flag representing the Earth Federation, and attempted to plant it in the surface of Mars. But perhaps because the surface was too hard, no matter how he tried he could not do it, and he was left staggering around with the flag in his hands.

From where I was looking, I suddenly noticed a beam of light seeping through the dark Mars background: a half-open door, and a group of figures peering over each other to see everything taking place before them. The distance between W. and the figures and the door was so short, had he wanted to he could have walked through and returned to earth.

Almost losing control, I cried to him, “W., look behind, to your left!” As W. slowly turned his body, the door quickly slammed shut, and he found nothing.

“Have you lost it?” W. shot back at me.

There was no way to prove whether what I had seen was a hallucination or not.

I simply had to refocus my attention, double-check and operate the relevant equipment. W. and the rest continued moving about the surface of Mars. Their movements appearing smoother, they had begun to hurriedly gather rock specimens. All of us had the same hope: when we turn over those rocks, what a sensational discovery it would be if there were some fossils with traces of life etched into them!

Dear Navigator, if we could find remnants of life on Mars, would it do anything to reduce the despair of humanity seeking eternal life in space?

– Vladimir Xie, November 7

### Xiǎoxuě: Minor Snow

*Even if you’re okay with being an insect, it still doesn’t matter, because this world and melancholy have already died.*

Dear Navigator,

After the excitement of landing on Mars, and after thoroughly comprehending the limited extent of its surface (about ten meters long by six meters across, covered with reddish sand

simulating the terrain of the Gusev Crater), we all realized our formerly important division was no more: this truly is just a simulated journey to Mars, which means the return trip will be twice as tedious and long.

At the thought that we are like fish in a fishbowl, and must spend the remaining time doing experiments day after day, a sense of suffocation spread throughout the module.

Perhaps choosing six men to form the crew was a sensible decision, since otherwise some kind of incident would have probably happened by now.

According to NASA regulations, under unavoidable circumstances male and female crewmembers are permitted to enter into sexual relations, the only condition being that private relations should not affect work responsibilities.

Without a doubt, this is the fallout of the Lisa Novak incident, although it’s also a classically capitalist way of thinking: permit sex, but not love, as sex is supposed to be therapeutic, but love destructive.

If people have enough self-control to come all the way to Mars without hurting each other, then I would propose: the future property of Mars should first be freely given to those who can embrace humanity, and not those seeking to run away from it.

Using Hua\_Sheng\_Lai’s voice, she would probably phrase it: The way to make people on earth understand love is to give them a free trip to Mars.

And the crux is: the return trip is not easy, we need to wait for the orbits of Mars and earth to converge upon a specific angle, perhaps even wait for eighteen months.

Maybe when we return to earth, heavy snows will have already covered the north, and then your one and only hope is that when you push open the door at home, the stove will be nice and hot.

– Vladimir Xie, November 22

### Dàxuě: Major Snow

*If it’s possible before I die, I’d definitely wash my socks, to have that feeling like in TV ads of being so fresh people can’t help sniffing.*

Dear Navigator,

On the monitor, the color of Ophelia’s red hair is so dazzling that, in addition to its extreme sexual titillation, it reminds me of a red flag fluttering in the wind, and maybe both are one and the same thing.

Dear Navigator, in this highly-controlled environment without any natural climate, temperature, or humidity, my writing letters to you according to the rhythm of the seasons and the twenty-four solar terms is in itself a little

they will always practice this kind of arbitrage. They will move and shift and relocate, and adjust supply chains to find either the lowest price, or the most relaxed standards. Sometimes, however, they look for the best standards. There’s a lot of research that shows that corporations aren’t just looking to locate operations in places with the cheapest labor or the lowest taxes. They’re actually looking for skilled workers, which are often very hard to find. So what you find in these free zones – let me put one positive spin on it – is education. What you find in places like Saudi Aramco City are educational institutions that may have a higher standard.

Let’s not take an example of what is, per capita, a wealthy country. Let’s look at sub-Saharan Africa. Let’s look at the Andean region of South America. Let’s look at Central Asia. The supply chain – the corporate-public-private presence inside a special economic zone – is where people get health care and education. A Coca-Cola bottling plant in South Africa is a good example. It’s where workers and their families get HIV treatment. In mining towns in the Andean Mountains in Peru and Ecuador, companies provide schooling for illiterate people. Supply chains take these free zones into places where governance has never really stretched.

I’m giving you both sides of the story. The answer, therefore, depends on where a given free zone is and what it’s doing. But we don’t live in a world in which global governance has that capacity, that power, to set the terms, to set the standards and enforce them. It’s done within the context of these supply chains, these free zones.

But if you work on rehabilitation and, for example, provide some decent fishing boats to a local population – and this has already been done on a small scale in parts of Somalia – they will engage in fishing again, in a more competitive way than when they have to compete against South Korean trawlers that steal all their fish. In other words, Somalians don’t have some innate desire to become pirates, some genetic mutation that the rest of us don’t have. The economic opportunity has, in quite a few cases, been robbed from them. Restoring that dignity of economic opportunity – restoring a legal, exclusive economic zone – is admittedly a partial solution in which we are investing far less money than we are in forty-two navies patrolling the seas.

**Turi Munthe:** The tension between the state and private enterprise is as old as time. The free zone, whether it’s Venice or earlier, has existed for a very long time. But I think what’s particularly interesting here is its place-ness, its geographic location. There are certain key places which are more propitious for economic zones,

and others which will have different kinds of impact. Manal, I thought your story was fascinating. You described yourself, or you described others describing you, as either a Saudi girl in a compound, or a compound girl in Saudi. Place is absolutely fundamental to this.

**Manal Al Dowayan:** Throughout the years, until this day, I have lived in the compound permanently. My family, my siblings all work in oil. I worked in oil. Weaving in and out of the compound is my lifestyle. I don’t know anything else. I know how to live that double life where within the compound I don’t wear a veil. I drive. There are movie theaters. I play baseball and participate in American holidays. The inside of the compound was built as a replica of Houston, Texas, or California, so that the oilmen from America would feel at home. This is my home. I don’t know any other.

When you leave the compound, it’s completely different. I wear a veil, and have to have a driver to drive me around. My friends wear veils. Types of entertainment are very different outside the compound. As for the issue of physically moving out of the compound – I haven’t done this yet, but my sisters have. They both married non-Aramcons. That’s what we call people who do not work at Aramco. I don’t know why they did it, but they did [*laughs*]. They left the compound. Once you marry a non-Aramcon, and you’re not an employee, you have zero access to the facilities within the compound. The doctors who treated you from the day you were born, the dentists, the school, even the supermarket – you do not have access to any of this.

There’s this huge withdrawal syndrome they go through, accommodating to daily life outside. It’s quite weird. It’s not about a place. It’s actually that Aramcons have a culture within the community. Our speed limit inside the compound is forty. Once you step outside the compound, you go crazy. There aren’t any driving rules. The way kids play, the way you eat, the way you go to a picnic and clean up after yourself, it’s all different inside the compound. If you step out into the surrounding culture, then you have this whole new negotiation with yourself. You think, maybe I need to cool down. I need to relax in relation to rules. Maybe I’m the strange one, and they’re normal because they’re the majority and I’m the minority. That’s the game that you play.

**Turi Munthe:** I’m struck by the parallels between what you describe and the relation to citizenship in many of the countries in this region, which comes with enormous, extraordinary, incomparable benefits for those who come here for work and define themselves by a very clear set of rules, which come with penalties. Tarik Yousef talked broadly in favor of

06/08

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Hu Fang  
Dear Navigator, Part II

03/09

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Abdulkhateq Abdulla, Manal Al Dowayan, Parag Khanna, Turi Munthe  
Freezone: Dubai



Jebel Ali Free Zone, Dubai Port. Copyright: Mercator Media 2013.



This unidentified construction site represents one of many new additions to Dubai's built environment.

silly, with a hint of obsessive-compulsiveness, but for me this is the only way to preserve my fundamental sense of earth time, so that when I step back on land, I won't be overwhelmed by that fierce sense of strangeness.

In the intervals between waiting for orders and confronting life-threatening dangers, I fall back into a momentary state of hibernation. In the unending void of space, I produce the delusion that I have been banished into a black hole, and then life and death are no longer important. There is only endurance.

Enduring others, enduring one's self. Enduring the increasingly messy environment and rancid air accumulating in the module. Enduring the dejection and massive emptiness that comes after masturbating. Enduring the orders from the command center constantly prompting me to deal with different issues, turning me into an instrument, an instrument for doggedly completing a variety of tasks. I think a major part of my forbearance is inherited from my revolutionary parents, and from my socialist education.

I see myself passing through a blackened street when a truck loaded with prisoners speeds by; a rough, forceful hand pushes at the base of my neck, and I stumble into a crowd that seems to come out of nowhere.

The vague crowd appears blue, the faces of the people indistinct; I can only make out their endless writhing, like rice gruel coming to a boil. I am informed that this group of prisoners will be shot. Stuck to each of their backs are labels on which are written their names – spears waiting to be flung.

I am completely despondent inside: I was only pushed into the crowd by accident when I happened to pass this dark road, and yet I suddenly think about all my previous sins, which may have been minor, but having fermented with time, can not necessarily be lightly pardoned. Reflecting carefully, I realize it was more or less already decided that I would be pushed into this group by a large, forceful hand.

My head is heavy, anticipating the moment it will be pierced by the bullet, my brains splattering like an erupting volcano. Then I hear a battle cry, voices welling from all around, surging to surround the execution squad, and a voice announces amid all the confusion: "The riot has started."

A warm trickle suddenly gushing from my nose, I sense a happiness I've never felt before. This warm trickle dyes my white pillowcase red. The color is so brilliant even I can't believe it's real, nor can ground control believe it's real – they're staring dumbly at the monitor.

Ophelia, the red-haired lass on the monitor, continues chatting with me, worried that my

condition will become the spark that triggers collective panic, and I continuously reassure her, tell her: "I will not forsake humanity."

More than once, when I rejoice at waking, I am in a placeless place, cut off from the world. In this unending journey, everything that was once familiar has become abstract, but I seem to have more clearly realized that I am approaching the place where I want to go.

Dear Navigator, if everything that has ever happened to humanity cannot be echoed in this empty universe, then in the end, to where has the vital energy emitted by the human body been dispersed?

– Vladimir Xie, December 6

### Dōngzhì: Winter Solstice

*I feel sorry for the time, because it cannot kill itself.*

Dear Navigator,

We still have not received the order to return.

Staring at the computer monitor, I think my desire to inhale a breath of fresh air has already reached its limit. All of us have started to crazily search the module for even a cockroach or traces of fleas.

On this homeward voyage, we probably still won't be able to get back our human life rhythms. Due to the distance between us, the mysteries of human sentiment have been abstracted into a dark void, and the concrete ground that I glimpsed through the rain before entering the module has been transformed into an infinitely expanding gray background.

Having only our crewmates is not enough, we need to see are our lovers; but what we desire is not only being able to spend time with our lovers, it is also being able to freely get along with all life-forms beyond humanity: plants, animals, microbes, everything ... frail, endearing, tenacious life.

Dear Navigator, it seems we no longer want to grow up, no longer want to truly step out of earth's cradle.

If I set foot on land again, I will definitely kiss the earth, kiss the grass and leaves, kiss my future lovers; as long as I can remain in this world, no matter what direction I take, it will be a good, a wonderful choice.

Dear Navigator, I am certain we will meet again, meet quite soon, and when we do, we should use the purest vodka to celebrate our new lives.

– Vladimir Xie, December 21

×

*Translated from the Chinese by Andrew Maerkle*

07/08

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 Hu Fang  
Dear Navigator, Part II

**Hu Fang** is a fiction writer and curator based in Guangzhou and Beijing. He is the co-founder and artistic director of *Vitamin Creative Space* in Guangzhou and *The Pavilion* in Beijing. He has been involved in various international projects including the *documenta 12 magazines* as coordinating editor and Yokohama Triennale 2008 as co-curator. His published novels include *Garden of Mirrored Flowers* and *New Arcade, Shopping Utopia*.

08/08

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 [Hu Fang](#)  
Dear Navigator, Part II

1  
A famous verse from the poem  
“Jing Ye Si” (*Thoughts on a Still  
Night*) by the Tang dynasty poet  
Li Bai (701–62). The complete  
poem is as follows:

Moonlight plays before my  
bed,  
Could it be frost upon the  
ground?  
Head raised, I gaze into the  
moonlight,  
Lowered now, remember home.  
(trans.)

## Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, Manal Al Dowayan, Parag Khanna, Turi Munthe **Freezone: Dubai**

e-flux journal #49 — november 2013 [Abdulkhaleq Abdulla](#), [Manal Al Dowayan](#), [Parag Khanna](#), [Turi Munthe](#)  
Freezone: Dubai

01/09

*The following conversation is excerpted from FREEZONE, a discussion organized by Shumon Basar and H.G. Masters for the Global Art Forum in Dubai, March 2013. Featuring commissioned projects and research, as well as six days of live talks, the Global Art Forum brought together artists, curators, strategists, thinkers and writers.*

*The international participants in this discussion – Turi Munthe, founder of Demotix, an English-French-Swedish online crowd-sourced news platform, Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, an Emirati professor of political science, Manal al-Dowayan, a Saudi artist, and Parag Khanna, an Indian American writer – took on the complex politics of free zones.*

**Turi Munthe:** Back in the 1970s, the UN promoted free zones as these jump leads for economic growth, especially in the developing world. They were like floral nurseries; the idea was to grow the bulb in a greenhouse, and then plant it in the home soil, as a burgeoning tree. As these free zones – which were once considered temporary, immediate solutions to temporary problems – become more permanent, these big organizations are getting nervous about them. The OECD called free zones “sub-optimal” economic catalysts. Halliburton, recipient of billions of US taxpayers dollars, recently left Houston and settled in Dubai, where it can avoid paying US taxes. In that way, free zones seem particularly expensive to all but some of the parastatal organizations, which they were designed to help grow. They’re also proliferating very quickly. Can you tell us, over the course of the next ten, twenty, fifty years, as we see free zones proliferating, what their tensions are going to be, and perhaps what the future looks like?

**Parag Khanna:** Let’s start with the two examples you gave. Yes, the UN and various development agencies did promote free zones as a way to help initiate regulatory reform in postcolonial countries and economies that were structurally weak, and that remain structurally weak to this day. It was seen as temporary. These things have gone in waves, as you noted. Parastatal entities that are quasi-governmental but use private investment and are co-managed – this sort of thing has been around for hundreds of years. The extraterritorial zones that were part of what sparked the Opium War were parastatals, in some ways.

You gave the examples of the UN and Halliburton. Those are two completely different kinds of things. What Halliburton does is regulatory tax arbitrage. Companies do that all the time. Corporations have mobility. Most people in the world don’t. Countries and governments, by definition, don’t have mobility. Corporations, by contrast, are agile actors, so