

JULIA KUREK

Lucha Libre



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**CYKL CZTERECH WYSTAW POWSTAŁYCH W OPARCIU O POBYTY REZYDENCYJNE W MEKSYKU /
THE CYCLE OF FOUR EXHIBITIONS BASED ON ARTIST RESIDENCIES IN MEXICO CITY**

**MIEJSCA / PLACES: MAZOWIECKIE CENTRUM SZTUKI WSPÓŁCZESNEJ „ELEKTROWNIA”, CSW ŁAŻNIA W GDAŃSKU,
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01/01

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017
Colophon

Editors

02 pp. **Editorial**

Alexander Kluge and Hans Ulrich Obrist

11 pp. **What Art Can Do**

01/01

Yuk Hui

12 pp. **On the Unhappy
Consciousness of
Neoreactionaries**

Xin Wang

10 pp. **Asian Futurism and the
Non-Other**

Vivian Zihler

166 pp. **The Fourfold Articulation**

Chen Chieh-jen

12 pp. **Dissenting Voices of the
Unwashed, Disobedient,
Noncitizens, and Exiles in
their Own Homes**

Arthur Jafa and Tina Campt

10 pp. **Love is the Message, The
Plan is Death**

Elizabeth A. Povinelli

11 pp. **Geontologies: The Concept
and Its Territories**

David Morris

16 pp. **Anti-Shows**

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017
Contents

Editors Editorial

01/02

Art cannot solve the problems of 2017, Alexander Kluge says to Hans Ulrich Obrist in this issue, but it can start solving the problems of 2036. Though it may begin in the affective work of mourning, art moves towards a rational archeology and a realistic anticipation. We could call this “futurist realism,” a vision of the coming decades as a series of problems to be solved, rather than as a source for transcendent salvations or damnations of whatever fashion. Unlike the ecstatic or dispirited futurisms we are accustomed to, futurist realism looks forward with no false regrets. Bad-faith futurism, by contrast, is exemplified by those who, at the moment of Occidental eclipse, cynically claim the bankruptcy of that which the Occident never stood for in the first place. Yuk Hui argues that these men – and they are all men – are trapped in a moment of “unhappy consciousness,” wallowing in feelings of loss rather than conceptualizing the global changes taking place around them. Feelings, Hui reminds us, are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for knowledge. Without this understanding, neoreactionary melancholia quickly gives way to Silicon Valley–inspired “sinofuturist” fantasies that project a fantastically smooth, anti-political existence onto an entirely polymorphous set of cultures and histories.

In “Asian Futurism and the Non-Other,” Xin Wang draws on the work of the novelist Liu Cixin to show that the same recuperative approach underlies art-world attempts to represent other cultures as other. In the same way that, for the neoreactionaries, Asian cultures happen to perfectly fill in the holes they see in the Western fabric, so too do teams of art luminaries scour the globe in search of what is exotic by that same standard. In both cases, an apparent focus on the non-Occidental in fact preserves the Occident at the center of the story. The alternative, Wang avers, would be to recognize things for what they are. Under such conditions, productions like the Hollywood version of *Ghost in the Shell* would “just be a regional homage to the Japanese classic.” Meanwhile, Vivian Zihler, in “The Fourfold Articulation,” continues to deepen her own engagement with the significance of the frontier for the metropolitan imaginary, reanimating the Marxist – or is it Maoist? – conception of “articulation” to describe the work of thinking and representing the in-between.

Providing a concrete history of just how the inside enlists the outside to project its own stability, Chen Chieh-jen discusses the overlapping imperialist histories of Taiwan’s Losheng Sanatorium and how these relate to his

David Morris is a writer and researcher based in London. He is an editor at *Afterall*. He is coeditor, with Sylvère Lotringer, of *Schizo-Culture: The Event, The Book* (2014, Semiotext(e)/MIT Press), co-organizer of the exhibition project “Cracks in the Street” (with Katherine Waugh and Paul Pieroni, SPACE, 2014), and has been working with the Semiotext(e) archive since 2011. He teaches at University of the Arts, London. Recent and forthcoming publications include *Wendelien Van Oldenborgh: Amateur* (with Emily Pethick and Wendelien Van Oldenborgh, Sternberg Press/The Showroom/If I Can’t Dance, 2016), *Stefan Themerson: Neither & Both or Something Third* (forthcoming 2017/18, with Pedro Cid Proença), and *Anti-Shows: APTART 1982–84* (with Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn, Afterall Books, 2017).

16/16

1
Manuel Alcayde, email conversation, 2017. Except where noted, direct quotations are taken from conversations and email exchanges with the artists during January and February 2017.

2
Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 168.

3
Sven Gundlakh, “The Show Must Go On” (1983), in *Anti-Shows: APTART 1982–84*, eds. Margarita Tupitsyn, Victor Tupitsyn, and David Morris (London: Afterall Books, 2017).

4
As quoted by Myroslava M. Mudrak, “Lost in the widening cracks and now resurfaced: Dissidence in Ukrainian painting,” in *Nonconformist Art: The Soviet experience 1956–1986*, eds. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 137.

5
According to the account of Kornely Zelinsky, held in the Russian State Archive for Literature and Art (RGALI), folder 1604, cited in Robert H. McNeal, *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 154.

6
The Museum of American Art, itself housed since 2004 in an east Berlin apartment block, has done much work to reconstruct these specific environments and analyze these dynamics. I am grateful to the technical assistant of the Museum for conversations that informed the present text.

7
Sven Gundlakh, “Pictures from an Exhibition,” *A-Ya* magazine 5 (1983).

8
The artists add: “There is another reading of this object-text – explicit to any Soviet onlooker; Seva Nekrasov, a poet and essayist of the MANI circle, called our *Chair* the best formula of Soviet reality he ever knew. That is the very essence of the Soviet form of Socialism or collectivism if you like: nothing belongs to you because it always belongs to everyone – that is, to nobody. ‘I’ vs. ‘WE,’ where ‘WE’ does not exist because of a lack of ‘I’ while ‘I’ cannot be realized because of the lack of ‘WE.’ In other words, ‘only the dead know Brooklyn.’”

9
N. Alekseev, letter to Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn, February 18, 1983. Archive of M. and V. Tupitsyn.

10
Gundlakh, “The Show Must Go On.”

11
An apartment show held in

Albert’s apartment in 1979 gathered together all the main participants of APTART.

12
David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, “Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc,” in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, eds. D. Crowley and S. E. Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 13.

13
They invited contributions from Novi Kolektivizem, Goran Đorđević, Mladen Stiljnović and Milivoj Bijelić, Laibach, Retrovision, and Kozmokineticni kabinet Noordung.

14
See “Parallel Chronologies: An Archive of East European Exhibitions,” available at <http://tranzit.org/exhibitions/narchive/>; and *Notatki z Podziemia / Notes From the Underground*, ed. David Crowley and Daniel Muzyczuk (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2016).

15
For an example of the former, see Shut Down LD50 Gallery, in London <https://shutdownld50.tumblr.com/>; for the latter, see Boyle Heights Aliana Anti Artwashing Y Desplazamiento (Boyle Heights Alliance Against Artwashing and Displacement), in Los Angeles <http://alianzacontraartwashing.org/en/bhaaad/>; or see the various anti-gentrification alliances and strategies developed by Collective Research Initiatives Trust (CRIT) in Mumbai <https://crit.in/>.

16
The flow of information here was asymmetrical: New York artists, critics, and curators would have been aware of APTART by the mid-’80s (largely through the advocacy of Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn), but New York’s underground art scene – as well as Havana’s – was more or less off the radar of Moscow artists.

17
Miguel A. Lopez, “Discarded Knowledge: Peripheral Bodies and Clandestine Signals in the 1980s War in Peru,” trans. Megan Hanley, in *Removed from the Crowd: Unexpected Encounters I*, eds. Ivana Bago, Antonia Majača, and Vesna Vuković (Zagreb: BLOK, 2011), 116.

18
See <http://garagemca.org/en/even-t/meeting-with-nikita-alekse-iv>.

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Editors
Editorial

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 David Morris
Anti-Shows

contemporary reincarnation of Walter Benjamin, who first appeared in Ljubljana in 1986, and Victor Skersis have also both recently also theorized variant forms of “meta-art.”) And for Abalakova and Zhigalov it relates to the fact that

the space of the flat came to be dynamic, interactive, and dialogical or perhaps even polylogical. Due to spontaneous approach to installation of the material (which was predominantly essentially immaterial) this “minigallery” happened to be the experimental playground where new forms of expression – a mutual enrichment of “knots” and “grains” was suggested to the audience. And all worked all right on all levels – installationally, performatively – mad tea-drinking of texts, objects, drawings, photos etc. That’s what we (TOTART – Total Art Action) meant by “anti-show” with the accent on new form (its hidden radical immateriality).

It is not so much that the idea of “anti-show” collapses the old oppositions of public-private, art-life, autonomy-nonautonomy (as might be said about sympathetic practices elsewhere in the world) – it is more that these anti-shows emerge in a situation where such binaries mean little: as conceptual frames they are not useful, and maybe even misleading. “Anti-show,” then, describes a phenomenon in terms of what it resembles, but isn’t; a thing awaiting a more precise conceptual language. Similarly in the case of collectivism and anti-collectivism: perhaps there are better ways to think about the deep interdependency, conversation, and cooperation that art entails; perhaps APTART would be better understood via a methodology of friendship, “teamwork,” or a “non-aggression and mutual assistance pact” (as Abalakova and Zhigalov put it). Skersis does not recall the term “anti-show” specifically, but for him

the situation was a given with no need for a regretful term. And now I clearly see that our curse was a blessing. What was done in APTART could not have been done in an official or a commercial space ... The purpose of a show in a Western gallery is primarily to show the completed works of an artist to the public. Truly it is a very archaic situation, where artworks broadcast conserved messages from a patriarchal figure behind the scenes to the congregation. On the other hand, in the closely knit community, as APTART was, the purpose of a show was for the collective to assemble and discuss the common subject, which made APTART work more

like a lab than a museum.

As a movement or a gallery, if it can be named as either, it was a construction; its “public” was self-reflexive, a fantasy or phantom limb – even its producers were sometimes fictional. It arrived at the end of something, not at the start – a culmination of socialist apartment practices, not an inauguration. It is as a construction, a fiction, or model, perhaps, that the anti-shows gain their focus – an artist-to-artist “proto-institution”; as with much of Moscow conceptualism, as Albert has put it, the function was to produce models. The model APTART produced was mobile, unstable, and under constant threat, created via complex forms of intergenerational sociality and cohabitation (with both persons and objects) in a situation where the commercial art world was an irrelevant, distant fiction. For Manuel Alcaide, “it was a trip to the future” – a future that, today, still feels a long way off.

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A version of this text will appear in the forthcoming book Anti-Shows: APTART 1982–84, edited by Margarita Tupitsyn, Victor Tupitsyn, and David Morris, published in the Exhibition Histories series by Afterall Books in association with the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College.

own work as an artist and filmmaker. The movement to save the sanatorium becomes a struggle to articulate – that word again – an adequate testimony to the character of everyday life in the twenty-first century. This emphasis on the importance of listening to images is underlined by Arthur Jafa and Tina Campt, who discuss movement, motion, dance, Christian sectarianism, and the mechanics of empathy in “Love is the Message, the Plan is Death.” What do we owe images of suffering? And how does the scale of our encounter with representation change our experience and understanding of life and death? Elizabeth Povinelli revisits this theme to offer a glimpse of the deep history behind the institutionalization of the distinction between life and nonlife.

Finally, David Morris gives us the history of the autonomous Russia-based Cold War collective APTART as an example of one way that art practice has tried to solve a certain kind of problem in the past. By running together the Russian and English words for art, APTART reminds us that we are never without resources for crossing even the most well-defended of our inherited frontiers.

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15/16

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 David Morris
Anti-Shows

02/02

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Editors
Editorial

Alexander Kluge and Hans Ulrich Obrist What Art Can Do

01/11

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Alexander Kluge and Hans Ulrich Obrist
What Art Can Do

The following conversation took place on January 1, 2017.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: It is the beginning of 2017. What will happen?

Alexander Kluge: It has been one hundred years since the Russian Revolution. Five hundred years since Martin Luther. Be careful of Silicon Valley. They're the flower children of 1968, so to speak. Which they heavily ignore. That is, the power of it.

HUO: Ignore in what sense?

AK: Rejuvenation. In evolution there are living beings that don't become fully grown but procreate in their youth and thus survive. And so they're in the position to say, we can control technology in the world, and we can control the platforms, but we can't simultaneously control the content. If you do that, it gets difficult. You can only control two of these three things.

We have to alter our communication between the arts. Every single battleship, as we know, is sunk in war. So we have to form the convoys. And they can't be separated from music, from film, from visual art. The collaborations that you encouraged with Kerstin Brätsch and Adele Röder show how valuable this is. This auratic anchoring that's possible in visual art: film can't do this. It gets difficult if it departs from what it can do. Conversely, auratic art can't really move. The aircraft carrier is missing.

Sometimes only visual art can be seen. The images of Thomas Demand, for example, have a tremendous pull on me. Precisely because nobody can be seen at work. They portray an almost dust-free other nature. And so you imagine the "impure" of reality. An entirely new, self-sufficient form of aura, which isn't based on autonomy but, on the contrary, on absorption into the other nature. From whose parallel reality we see reality.

And that's one of the great functions of the aura. We don't want to immortalize Christian martyrs or paint articles of faith. Cranach paints Luther and the religions. If films respond to this now, then they do some good. But if they just pretend to make art, then it gets difficult and sometimes tedious, that is, esoteric. But films can take up themes outlined by Kerstin Brätsch, by Kiefer, by Demand. Film can create surroundings. Proceeding from an oasis, it can comment like a work of art.

HUO: The thing about the oasis brings us back to the gardens.

AK: Building oases. In a world where there's too much silicon in the form of chips, it's very good to have oases. Because too much silicon means the desert.

HUO: You've called for a garden of cooperation in an information jungle.

1980s Moscow, for Zakharov it is still "maybe a bit in opposition to the art system," by allowing artists to take a more active position. Working artist-to-artist, doing everything oneself, working in nonindividuated ways, and keeping a distance from selling are the kinds of freedom to be learned from the microculture of 1980s Moscow. Zakharov writes:

When I speak to students in Russia [about this period], they always say "there's one thing we don't understand – your works look free, not like they were created in a cage." The art system doesn't want to accept the freedom, I would like to say, of artists. This is maybe strange to say from my side, to you, but too many freedoms in artists' positions are not really viable today.

A text advertising a public discussion with Alekseev hosted by the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art – a museum in Gorky Park founded on the private wealth and art collections of Roman Abramovic and Dasha Zhukova – writes that APTART "is now considered to be the first Russian private art gallery."¹⁸ Here APTART appears as a precursor to an entrepreneurial culture of startup galleries in growing

economies, where cultural formations are only ever able to emerge in anticipation of a commercial infrastructure to come. But for Alekseev, speaking to me this year, APTART's importance was precisely an escape from dominant conditions: "a small space where we could work and function and communicate ... a parallel world."

Speaking today, the artists have different understandings of the anti-show concept. As Alekseev notes, "Perhaps it was 'anti' concerning official exhibitions but I would rather prefer 'parallel.' This notion of being off of official universe, existing in our parallel reality was more important than simply being against." Albert is more questioning:

Anti what kind of shows? We were absolutely indifferent to official exhibitions ... [and] there were no exhibitions of contemporary art to which we could be "anti." Maybe there was an opposition to apartment shows by the older generation, but it was opposition in the very small circle.

In relation to his own practice, Albert suggests instead the term "meta-shows." (The



Work by Manuel Alcayde at "APTART en plein air," May 1983. Courtesy of Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn Archive.

violences. For example, community-led shutdowns of art spaces, whether because of their use as fascist meeting points or – more pertinently for a discussion of apartment practices – for their gentrifying function.¹⁵ On the other hand, much of unofficial art was not directly antagonistic, and more a way of working with and within its system’s restrictions. “It’s possible to work without public, state, museums, market, and if you’re lucky you can recognize it as the material of your art,” explains Albert. “But it’s very difficult.”

For his part, when Manuel Alcayde returned to Cuba in 1984 he found echoes of the Moscow *tertulias* in the collective work of a younger generation of artists. Grupo Puré, Grupo Provisional, Arte Calle, and other groups variously ignored, evaded, or confronted the nascent state policy. They were, in Alcayde’s words, “a generation that showed a vision that was less vernacular and more universal, which also became more conscious of its social role and critical potential.” Arriving in New York in 1984, Skersis recognized similar energies in the squats of the East Village, activist spaces like ABC No Rio, and DIY exhibitions such as “Times Square Show.”¹⁶ Albert makes a comparison between the Soviet context and Latin America,

13/16

which also suggests parallels with groups such as Grupo Chaclacayo (GC). Formed around 1982–83 by Raúl Avellaneda, Helmut Psotta, and Sergio Zevallosalso, GC staged collective-artistic transgressions in the domestic space of a rented house on the outskirts of Lima. The “shocking sarcasm, sexual disobedience, belligerent statements, and junk aesthetics” that Miguel Lopez ascribes to the emerging anarcho-punk, experimental, and DIY cultural scene in the city, as well its ambivalence and antagonism towards established socialist parties and its embrace of a younger, cultural left in the context of state violence and persecution, could be equally applied to APTART.¹⁷ Certainly there are discontinuities between Lima and Moscow, as there were between Moscow and New York (a more frequent comparison), or Moscow and other locations in the Eastern Bloc, or even Moscow and Moscow, in its official and unofficial guises. But as Alekseev notes: “things happen simultaneously.”

Vadim Zakharov has continued to organize apartment exhibitions as part of an art practice that self-institutionalizes on various levels (as critic, archive, curator, historian, gallery, etc.). Even if the conditions of organizing in an apartment in 2010s Berlin are incomparable to



Nikolai Panitkov and Mikail Roshal at the first APTART exhibition, autumn 1982.

02/11



Alexander Kluge, *Schiffsuntergänge und Meeresdramen*, 2016.

AK: Right. And sometimes jungle, sometimes canal-digging. There are many forms of imaginary gardens.

HUO: There are many possible imaginary gardens.

AK: The paradise garden is an old motif. It means something enclosed against the world, that also contains the world. That's what art can do.

HUO: The question that arises in connection with these experiments is that of the Gesamtkunstwerk.

AK: The authorial principle that's still there in the Gesamtkunstwerk is very imperial. The orchestra is hidden. The Gesamtkunstwerk is created by a single artist, a single spirit. And with the power of united individualities, this world has set up so many minefields in the meantime, so much dead work, that is, machinery. There is so much work done and piled up that you can say it's like lava flowing over the individual. If you want to make the Gesamtkunstwerk today, you'll become impotent. If you want courage, the opposite of impotence, you have to make alliances. And how do you make alliances while retaining the principle that something responsible, new, and authentic can only come from within? Something

that makes no compromises, so to speak? That's one of Leibniz's themes. The monad, that's the artist. It's also the viewer, who has something to do with the artist.

HUO: Each human being is a monad.

AK: Every person is a monad. A person's individual capacities, the eyes, the ears, the soles of their feet, are organized monadically. They are hermetically isolated when they produce from the world. And yet a pre-stabilized harmony comes about. This means that all monads together can form a counterworld, the merely technical world.

HUO: All the monads can create a counterforce. A twenty-first-century artwork would possibly be a monadology.

AK: A monadology, with which it permeates the pores of reality, and then counters reality's systemic terror by forming connections of its own. So connection is one category, monad is the other. Creation remains, as in Romanticism, as in the Renaissance, with the individual. Nothing happens without the individual. But within the individual there are forces cleverer than the individual. It's like a crystal. We have to develop the dragonfly eye. And it's true that at first everything goes through one's inner self. You're cleverest if you sit on the toilet in the morning

03/11



Natalia Goncharova, *Mystical Images of War [Voyna: misticheskie obrazy voiny]*, 1914. Lithograph, 10 x 13 in. University of Notre Dame, Hesburgh Library, the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.

Alekseev, they also did not constitute a movement, "except in a very very general sense.")

What were the anti-shows against? The dominant system of official art is the most obvious answer, but it is not the only answer. To the extent they were "anti-" this system, they were also "for" a kind of anarchic, "low-culture," junk aesthetics, in visible opposition to the elitist "high culture" found beyond the USSR. Vadim Zakharov, another key APTART participant, recalls that "when we started to create exhibitions in apartments or studios we never [intended] to make exhibitions – the main idea was to present works and [a] concept," adding that the category "show" was not being used as it was in the Western tradition. But to turn Zakharov's analysis on its head, "presenting works and a concept" sounds like an exhibition; whereas APTART may be understood as precisely anti-show – where "show" (commerce, superficiality, spectacle) corresponds with the dominant forms of exhibition in what was then the West.

There are other problems around Western categories. Neither the idea that domestic spaces are private spaces, nor the public/private dichotomy, can be assumed. "The identification of the home or dwelling with the realm of privacy is a relatively recent Western construction. Historically and geographically specific, it cannot be taken for granted in the context of socialism."¹² The idea of an audience, too, was for the artists akin to a phantom limb (to follow one of Albert's metaphors). An aim of the emergent field of exhibition studies is to shift historical focus away from some moment of artistic "creation" and towards art's becoming public, towards the many and multifarious collective formations (institutions, audiences, publications, discourses) that produce what we recognize as art. But received ideas of exhibitions, audiences, and publics may not be particularly relevant here. The closed circumstances produced an intense degree of connectivity – akin to the two television sets facing one another in one corner of Alekseev's flat (Mikhail Roshal's *Art for Art's Sake*) – inaccessible for those outside its circuit.

After perestroika, there would be a conscious attempt to connect APTART with its "outsides." APTART International (APTART INT), a separate project by Konstantin Zvezdochetov and others, referred to the history of apartment exhibitions more broadly. In an attempt to rekindle the "underground era" during the rapid commercialization of the early-'90s Russian art scene, Zvezdochetov, Elena Kiurliandtseva, and Victor Misiano invited artists including Octavian Trauttmansdorff, Franz West, Haralampi Oroschakov, and Heimo Zobernig to produce

exhibitions in a rented apartment at 12 Leninsky Prospect, Moscow. The best known of these was IRWIN's NSK Embassy: echoing the idea of "apartment art" as "nationality," the apartment became a base for the "NSK State," adorned with the coat of arms and state flag, inhabited by NSK personnel and used for public talks with visiting critics and artists.¹³ As APTART INT showed, and as research projects such as *Parallel Chronologies*, or the recent exhibition at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, "Notes From the Underground: Art and Alternative Music in Eastern Europe 1968–1994," emphasize,¹⁴ the myriad microcultures of this era took place well beyond the centers of global power, and well outside their dominant narratives, very often along more modest, comunally focused, transgressive, or anti-systemic lines.

Today, might there be something to learn from such groupings: artists working outside market relations, within a more or less closed system, moreover a system in crisis? Although APTART happened at the beginning of the end of the USSR, at that time there was no end in sight; "very poor, grey, without hope, no future," as Albert characterizes it. Rather than the "openness" and *Uskoreniye* ("acceleration") under Gorbachev, APTART coincided exactly with the two-year tenure of lury Andropov – the former KGB chief famous for his leading role in the violent suppression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Prague Spring, who took over after Brezhnev's death in 1982. APTART was a circumvention of a dominant system, at a moment of stasis, with no end in sight – right before its sudden collapse.

As Alekseev reflects, "you could be part of [the art system] but you had to accept its rules – and that wasn't interesting to us." What would be the contemporary equivalent of "official art," in relation to the art system today? What is known as "contemporary art" seems not to obey any one program, and generally faces no particular restrictions (with important local variations) except perhaps "art that looks like art." Contravening its internal "rules" is usually an asset. Instead of the valuable items found within today's vast complex of galleries, museums, art fairs, auction houses, and offshore storage bunkers, "official art" might be more accurately characterized as the whole complex of things recognizable as "art": the discursive and performative projects, the parasitic, para-institutional, and educational practices, the schools, seminars, events, and exhibitions, and the people who attend, think, and talk about them. The opposition to this world, our contemporary "anti-shows," might then be more easily located in the conflicts on its edges, especially those that speak to ongoing structural

12/16

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 David Morris
Anti-Shows



TOTART, *Take Care of Art – Our Wealth*, 1983, with Anatolii Zhigalov, at "APTART en plein air," May 1983. Courtesy of Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn Archive.

uninfluenced by anyone else, just being with yourself.

Consider the role of introspection in questions of love. Introspection is the only authority from which you can obtain advice. You can't ask the internet what you love. You can either notice this yourself or not. You can only do it through introspection. And so it fundamentally remains with the individual. But if the individual is very strong, very self-aware, then they can lower the ego barrier. Immanuel Kant says it. He turns the subjective and the objective around.

HUO: Kant kind of flips the verb.

AK: He turns it around. When someone understands something and concentrates to create something – like a craftsman, intensively involved with the details – at that moment he's being with himself. He's utilizing all the power he has.

HUO: When craftsmen work on the details, they are by themselves. It's subjective.

AK: It's subjective. And when someone says, "Today I feel the weather," this is very individual. In this sleet I have a feeling that runs through me, and my leg twitches, and I even notice my age. When Peter Handke talks about himself, he says he's the object of his distresses, inside or outside. He doesn't say that it's subjective. He has to collect himself first. That's interesting. That's the tool, so to speak, with which the ego barrier can be lowered, with which you can also be cooperative, because you're self-aware. If you're firmly anchored in your inner self, you have particularly good preconditions for cooperation.

HUO: Let's talk more about cooperation.

AK: Cooperation doesn't diminish the intensity of self-will.

HUO: Cooperation doesn't diminish the intensity of the I.

AK: But cooperation don't happen between Gesamtkunstwerks, but between the elements that make them up.

HUO: One such example of cooperation is the ballet *The Rite of Spring*, which was produced by Diaghilev, with compositions by Stravinsky and costumes by Goncharova and Picasso.

AK: But if you take Goncharova's *Angels and Aeroplanes*, that's a painting of aircraft carriers that sometimes look like angels and sometimes like aircraft carriers. And then, like Ben Lerner, I can counterpoetize. I can take a verse from his counterpoetry and write a story. Another instance of cooperation. And now, with this painting by Goncharova as a guiding aura, a navigation sign, a lighthouse, we can evolve our own expression quite individually.

HUO: I'd be very curious about the cooperation between you and Ben Lerner.

AK: I was sent *The Lichtenberg Figures* by one of my staff. That's a sequence of sonnets by

Lerner in German and English. I took some lines from it. "The sky stops painting and turns to criticism" – that's critical theory – "we envy the sky its contradictions."

Then I wrote a story to this verse, about the eastern sky of Aleppo, the Aeos, which Homer described as coming from the east, and which is very colorful in the Middle East. It's in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. The dawn is more colorful than in Poland, Germany, or Russia, where it's misty. And from this wonderful play of color, which was so magical to Caspar David Friedrich, come silver dots. And they turn out to be airplanes, which are now dropping bombs. And so I develop the idea into stories like that. There's a verse by him that fascinates me: "In medieval angelology, there are nine orders of snow."

HUO: It's snowing now.

AK: I don't think I can say what the angelic nature of snow is. But I was thrown onto the nine orders of snow. When I step before the face of God, I burn. Burning is actually the quality of the angels. They're creatures of flame. And here they're interpreted as snow. And so I come into a variety which before had neither an impression, nor an angel, nor art, but only a general idea [die weder Ausdruck, noch Engel, noch auf die Kunst, auf eine generale Idee hätte].

I made a film about Chernobyl. It's a silent film with a soundtrack on which Svetlana Alexievich is talking to her translator, Tietze. She talks about "the wife of the machinist." In Chernobyl, during the first few hours, an electrician was responsible for the safety of the mains, and he didn't want a second, conventionally caused catastrophe to occur, so he went into the contaminated zone and disconnected all the cables. A hero. And his body was completely destroyed. A head like a melon. He was so contaminated and his body radiating so much that the doctors didn't enter his room anymore. And his wife took care of him. She injected him with two liters of vodka. She slept with him regardless. Svetlana relates this, and then she asks, "What is *Tristan and Isolde*" next to this story, "the wife of the machinist"? And now, if you like, we're back to your Gesamtkunstwerk.

HUO: I see it as a triad. There's Studs Terkel, Svetlana, and you. In all three cases, world literature comes about through the form of conversations. All three of you turn the interview into literature.

AK: This can happen as long as there is orality, like the communication of early tribal societies that didn't have writing. Trust comes from the tone. Trust in the dialect. In your tone I hear whether you're lying or speaking the truth. As long as there's this orality, there isn't only one single reality. There's always a pleonasm. There

are always many realities.

HUO: It's what Carlos Fuentes told me about the novel. The novel is a polyphony of truths.

AK: That's true. And they chafe at each other, and each one would no longer be true. There's no element without context and correlation. And without the element there's no connection. That's a radical modernity. We want to answer Walter Benjamin after all. I have the same problem that he rightly diagnoses, namely, that film has no aura and doesn't produce one, because it blows the aura away. It may be that someone's fascinated and gripped by a single image, but that's the function of film; it's what makes the self-activity of the viewer so strong. Now we have the problem that these films can't be brought into exhibitions in the conventional curatorial way.

HUO: It's a conundrum.

AK: We can boldly say in film-historical terms: inability.

HUO: Harald Szeemann did an exhibition in Vienna at the end of his life, in which his attempted solution was to take three-, four-, five-, six-, seven-minute excerpts, and the public could only see these clips.

AK: That comes near to the MoMA chamber of horrors, where they screen art films. The

05/11

movie theater has to be dark, or people won't pay. In the theater, film has to keep pace in a particularly modern way with depictive realism, with all forms of art. It has to be pre-chewed, the whole plot. Manufactured film is pre-chewed food. There's no ideal of authenticity anywhere. I'm not talking about Murnau; I'm not talking about Godard. I'm talking about the few who work differently. Even my favorite, Fritz Lang, is manufactured. He's unsuccessful in this. There are elements of genius in it, but he had to take the films apart. But Szeemann's right there, when he only takes the authentic scenes from the Doctor Mabuse films, the ones pervaded by Fritz Lang's temperament. If we only had these moments, we'd have a wonderful impression of film history continuing. But this impression is weakened in a strong context. If you've seen it once, you think you've understood it and don't need to repeat it. Everyone thinks he knows what the Doctor Mabuse series is, and forgets the details. You should rather emphasize the details and the overall history.

HUO: You could pick out singularities.

AK: The concept kills the particular. But the particular is the real heart of art. You have to do something or other. I'm not saying you should make blind art but that you have to form convoys.

the exhibition in the Sandunovsky bathhouse organized by Joseph Backstein and Gia Abramishvili.) Whether by chance or historical necessity, APTART was among the last unofficial apartment exhibitions in the "closed" Soviet era.

Much of their "apartment art" did not even take place in apartments. Following the KGB's intervention, APTART's actions moved outdoors. The cramped maximalism of Alekseev's apartment opened into the Russian landscape. Just as the previous set of works were conceived for apartments, this set of works was conceived to appear en plein air – but not to transform a less cultural space into a more cultural one, or to compete with the scale of the outdoors (Russia, one-sixth of the world's landmass, is largely nonurban space): "We deliberately scattered our works over a large space so that they did not stand out and did not destroy the peculiar beauty of the place."¹⁰ For one event Manuel Alcayde constructed a "Russian Palm" in a wide-open field, vivid against the surrounding conifers – "a touch of tropicalism inspired by Russian folk patterns" and "a gift to the nature of that country."

The point was also conviviality, and a kind of deep sociality. The outdoor gathering was a "Woodstock" and in general, "the shows were never shows ... the most important thing was gathering in that tiny kitchen and talking and having a drink ... socializing," as Victor Skersis, one of the central participants in APTART, explains:

These small congregations are the most important entities in art ... ideas come from individuals, and in group formations they have more chance for survival – they bounce from one mind to another, combining, developing information, a bigger context. And that's what happened in APTART.

A 1975 action by Skersis's earlier Gnedzo (Nest) group (with Mikhail Roshal and Gennadii Donskoi) involved the artists building a nest in the center of an official exhibition space – the Hall of Culture, at the Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy – which they inhabited, surrounded by signs stating "Quiet! Experiment in progress!" A photo shows the young artists looking thoughtful, reading and hanging out with a young child atop the pile of leaves and sticks. The nest would become a point for visitors to linger, chat, or eat. As part of an officially sanctioned exhibition of "unofficial" art (following the two important unofficial public displays known as the "Bulldozer" and "Izmailovo" exhibitions the previous year), the action has been framed as ironic comment on

the socialist economy – perhaps sensing this, the nest was ultimately destroyed by the Ministry of Culture. But this overlooks the function of *Hatch Eggs!* as a generous and generative communal space, a short-lived squat within official surroundings.

The Soviet communal apartment (*kommunalka*) was a cipher for other installations produced in Moscow in the 1980s – Kabakov's installations such as *The Man Who Flew into Space From His Room* (1985) or Irena Nakhova's *Rooms* (1983–87) series. In a parallel way, APTART's anti-shows added a conceptual frame to the longstanding practice of apartment exhibitions: recognizing the conditions they inhabited as material for their art. Kabakov has written of visiting the first APTART show, seeing it not as a product of his younger Moscow contemporaries but as the creation of some other imagined author-figure, some unknown multiple personality. (Reading this text, it is also possible to see Kabakov recognizing his own ideas reflected back at him, transformed, within that apartment – Kabakov's character-based installations began the following year.) But unlike the installations of Kabakov or Nakhova, or much earlier examples such as the 1972 apartment-installation by Komar and Melamid, whose work was relatively legible for outsiders in terms of their singularity of vision, APTART is more dense and contradictory in its accumulation of ideas. "Born in private apartments, private heads," this was nonetheless "collective curating – curated collectively and also curated as an expression of a group," as Yuri Albert, another APTART participant, explains.¹¹ And with a specific scenography: bed in the center; novel-refrigerator; kitchen sink; TV.

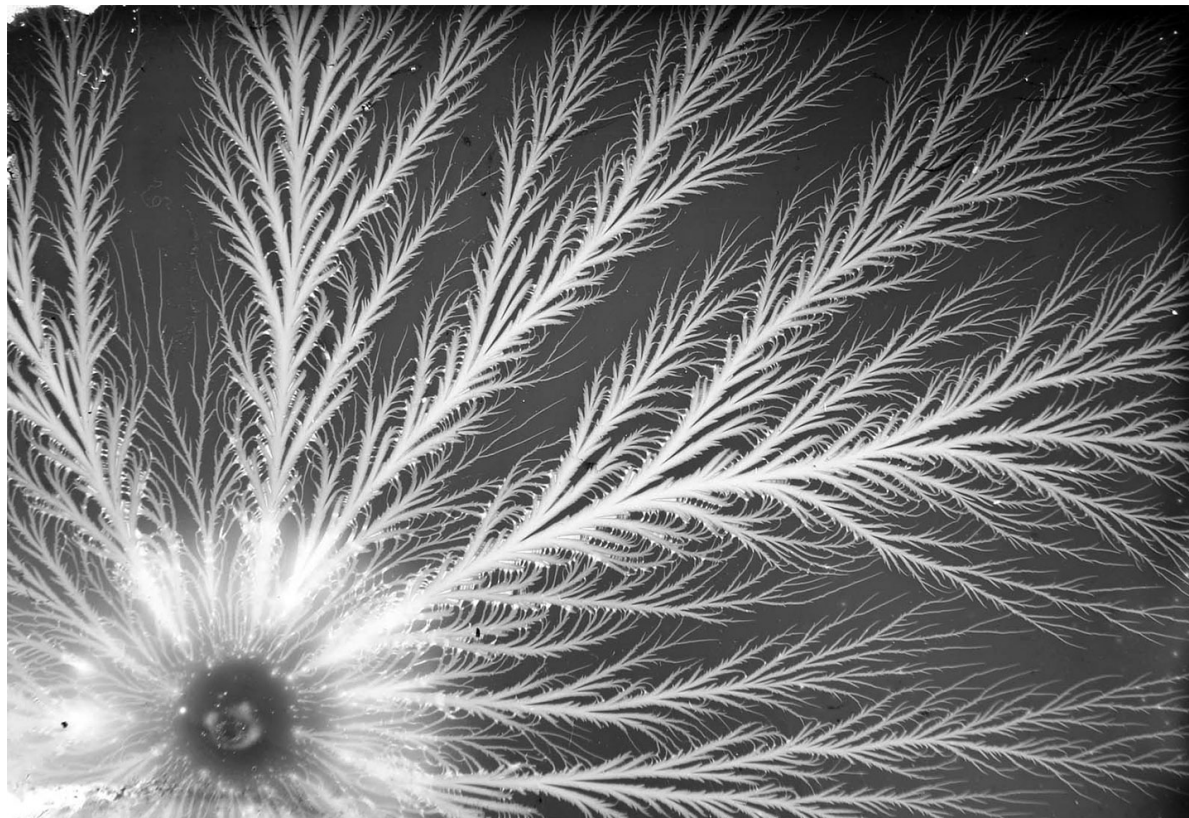
Abalakova-Zhigalov make an explicit link to the collective actions of the Russian avant-garde at the opposite end of the Soviet era:

It was undoubtedly an ART MOVEMENT – perhaps the first in the twentieth century since the Russian AVANTGARDE. By "movement" I (we) understand some special historic situation which makes a group of artists with different personal interests some kind of undivided social body – a single whole.

At the same time, the various group-formations involved – TOTART, S/Z, the Mukhomors, Collective Actions, the Peppers – were not at all "predisposed to any sort of manifestation of collectivity the very idea of which is defiled by official propaganda." The language of collective production, in the Soviet context, was cynical and suspect. There was a kind of anti-collective collectivism. (And by no means unified: for

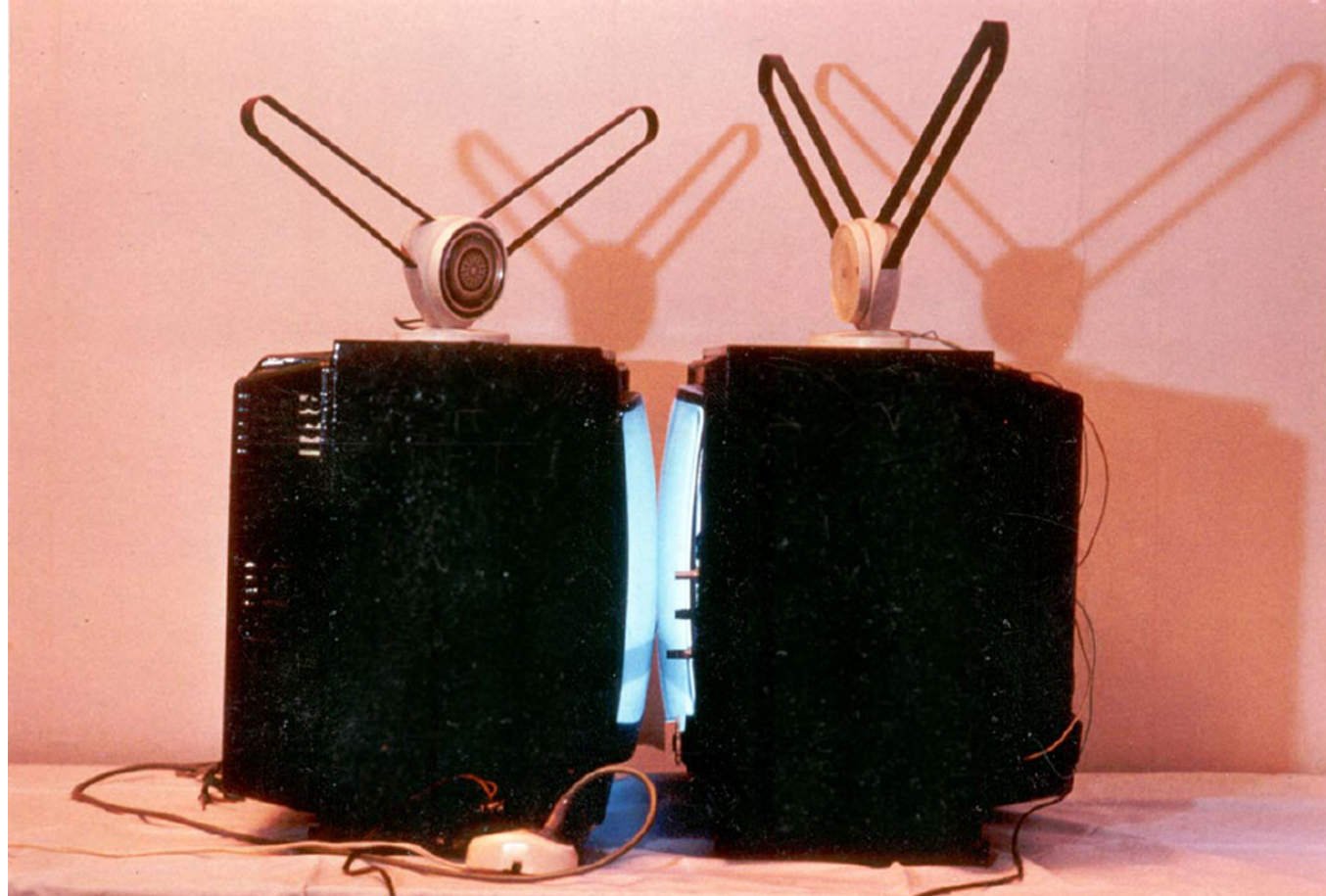
10/16

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 David Morris Anti-Shows



An original photograph of the Kinraide negative documents a "filiciform discharge" also known as the "Lichtenberg Figures."

09/16



Mikhail Roshal, *Art for Art's Sake*, 1982. Photo: Georgy Kiesewalter.

06/11



Alexander Kluge, *The Artist in the Circus Dome: Clueless*, 1968. 1' 43"

The minesweeper has a different task from the submarine and the aircraft carrier and the GPS guiding the fleet.

HUO: With Svetlana and you and Studs Terkel, it's about listening. Can one function of art be to make people listen?

AK: You can't dictatorially say, "You should listen." Art needs to open itself up. Luther says that seeing and the worker's hands are worldly, while hearing is a matter for God, which is one-sided. And mildly dictatorial.

But this is true of all forms of communication. It's true of the tribal society that could only speak and couldn't write. It's true of writing, which begins with the Mesopotamians and goes from accounting to literature and can record something. It's true of the sphere of Gutenberg, who can print everything and deliver us from handwriting. And it's true of the digital revolution, which really is a revolution of all these elements except orality, which hardly occurs in the digital world.

In each of these phases there is a human habit and a refusal. Criticism, for example, is a defense mechanism that comes about because of the inflation of writing in human society. Criticism only comes about after Gutenberg. And finally it leads, in the three volumes of Immanuel Kant, to what we can't or shouldn't or wouldn't like to know. These are defense mechanisms against the too-much.

People react against it. They defend their earlier forms of communication. The solitary writing of the monk. The level of personal trust in the tribe. They defend it against this modernity of Gutenberg. I can't read everything, so I look for a reason to reject everything. It's the Trump effect. Yeah?

HUO: It describes one part of the Trump effect.

AK: One part. The other is the principle of the charisma of the drunken elephant. Namely, that I'm not allowed. I'm sitting in the Rust Belt, in the Bible Belt somewhere in the US, and I'm being disciplined. Reality is torture, but I don't cross the boundaries. Now, if somebody ostentatiously and successfully tramples down the boundaries all at once, then half of my soul, the part that isn't suppressed and disciplined, says: I want to be like that. Max Weber saw it. That lack of self-control, along with even lying and propaganda, belongs to the charisma of the dictator. The lack of self-control of the controllers. The fat Göring, who stole so many paintings in Europe.

If you show a lack of self-control, you're forgiven. And in the Bible Belt there's an additional Calvinistic element. Because God has preordained everything and is cruel, I can only ascertain the mercy of God in successes, like a

scout. And if against all probability one person has such a vigorous effect, then it can only be God's will. That's the fine print of the writing on the wall. Those are the instructions for reality.

HUO: So you've always loved elephants?

AK: Yeah, always loved elephants. My grandparents were simple peasants. As a child, I saw two elephants in the circus. What I do isn't art. It's recording something through the optics of art as a lens.

HUO: That means that art in this sense isn't autonomous. It becomes a tool instead.

AK: A very respectfully used tool. It's as if the image emerges from the material. Alienation is unnecessary here. It's only used on things that contain their own cliché.

HUO: So it's interdependence.

AK: Interdependence, yes, and you must not do it extremely exactly. It should be free so that you can choose.

HUO: You can see it again and again. It's like a painting. You can see it again.

AK: It's not linear montage.

HUO: Circular montage.

AK: Someone wants to invent gold and discovers porcelain. A good alchemist. We don't have the luxury of also wanting to do everything right. In the face of Silicon Valley and the reality principle of this massive objective reality that almost kills everything, our mistakes are just as important as the things we do right.

HUO: But they have to be present.

AK: The main thing is for them to be personal. I mean, the Trump election is a kind of mistake. If I look at why such mistakes occur, I can suggest a different mistake to this root, and so we could grope forward together. Art is a navigational aid here. But to go back to the circular montage. It can link the aura of an artwork. Film can do this.

HUO: You combine two things, if you like, that otherwise aren't combined.

AK: Exactly. The more you stay with film and don't pay attention to art, the better you can combine the elements of the artwork. I noticed that Okwui Enwezor's exhibition "Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic" at the Haus der Kunst, which I think is great, doesn't contain music. If I count from 1945 to 1965, the greatest piece of music was written for an opera, *Die Soldaten* (The Soldiers), by Bernd Alois Zimmermann. It's the greatest work of the twentieth century. It isn't present. Even if you only played three minutes of it over the loudspeaker, the work would be present. Around the same time, Arno Schmidt was writing his novel *Zettels Traum* (Zettel's Dream), a continuation of Joyce, and there's nothing of it in the exhibition. He and Bernd Zimmermann were both at the TV channel WDR. They must have

07/11

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Alexander Kluge and Hans Ulrich Obrist
What Art Can Do

08/16



View of the first APTART exhibition, autumn 1982, with work by the Mukhomor group. Courtesy of Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn Archive.

conceptualist circles. As Alekseev explains: “the meetings at Kabakov’s studio were very quiet, intellectual, not everybody was allowed to come – it was very highbrow. APTART was more like a nightclub.”

There were around ten anti-shows, as well as actions and performances, during APTART’s short existence. For the first show, Alekseev’s small living space was bisected by banners and hangings, works filling every available surface (he slept in an inflatable dinghy as there was no space in the bed) and covering the walls and ceiling. There were piles upon piles of texts and literary objects – something to read almost everywhere, from Alekseev’s book *I Do Not Like Contemporary Art* to book objects by Nikolai Panitkov, but no clear narrative to be discerned, no message or singular position. TOTART’s *My Recent Work: I Work as a Supervisor...*, shown as a book work, retrospectively declared the author’s day job as art, and their work *A Chair is Not for You, A Chair is for Everyone* (1982) – a chair bearing this text – suggests a desublimation and collectivization of conceptualism’s object-based claims (the chair is just a chair, for anyone to use – though its label, its appearance of art, still suggests a kind of prohibition).⁸ The Mukhomors took over Alekseev’s Север (North) brand refrigerator in its entirety to produce a novel. Its epigraph and title page are painted on the door, while the inside was reserved for plot points and the protagonists’ inner monologues, written and placed in boxes, while objects, colors, and images structure other aspects of the plot. The novel itself centers on an “extraordinarily cozy little apartment” inside a monument to a major battle in the Russo-Turkish War.

Like its surroundings, the *Novel-Refrigerator* was in flux – people added to and subtracted from it, Alekseev continued to use it for food, and finally the KGB confiscated most of the textual components in a raid on the apartment. What’s left of the work is now preserved behind glass in the State Tretyakov Museum, attributed to Konstantin Zvezdochetov alone, who sees it in this desecrated state as a kind of sacral artifact, a mix of partial inscriptions and images – a relic of a more or less indecipherable time. Rather than an “art-life” divide, the fate of *Novel-Refrigerator* suggests the anti-shows as a kind of museological activism, a lived preservation of artworks, artifacts, objects, and ideas in their “living” states – sites of use, discussion, ritual, congregation.

There are a few paradoxes to unpack; as Gundlakh noted about the first show, “attention became focused on the work itself, which was simpler, more emotional, and, with the

abolishment of commentary, more paradoxical.” The projects of APTART were collective, socially orientated, in domestic space (space that in Russia had been subject to forced collectivization post-1932, a policy which by the 1980s was being reversed), but the Moscow artists were skeptical of any kind of collectivist thinking. Their actions were “public” but more or less closed and in the absence of a public sphere. In their case, the “grudging necessity” (as Margarita Tupitsyn has put it) of unofficial artists sharing art privately among their colleagues, outside the official infrastructure, was remade as a badge of ironic pride.

The anti-shows were also deliberately apolitical, or even anti-political. According to Alekseev and others, staying outside the field of politics was not mere pragmatism, but an artistic decision: the aim was only to exist within the allowed limits of the system (in the sense that it was not specifically forbidden to declare one’s apartment a gallery and extend an open invitation to visit). Despite such efforts, APTART was politicized by the authorities. In a letter to friends in New York, Alekseev wrote:

I am informing you with deep regret that APTART ceased to exist on 15 February 1983. Early in the morning of that day, the employees of a “well-known” organisation came with a search warrant and smashed the exhibition of [Victor] Skersis and [Vadim] Zakharov, confiscated some of the works along with other materials which were in no way anti-Soviet. On the same day Mikhail Roshal’s apartment was searched and his works and those of Mukhomors were expropriated. From the “employees” remarks it was clear that they tend to interpret all works if not as anti-Soviet then pornographic or both ... Most likely, this signals the beginning of a new campaign for complete extirpation of new art. If this is true, it is terrible. What shall happen next is unclear, but to expect anything good is unrealistic. It looks like we have become an eyesore to them since they seriously warned us back in September ... I am not trying to “bury” myself and my friends yet but the atmosphere here is pretty awful.⁹

APTART actually continued for another year or so after this, coming to an end the year before Gorbachev took power in 1985. From that moment, the cultural landscape began its slow transformation. Nonconformist art activities and possibilities to hold exhibitions increased to the extent that artists began to experiment more widely with the exhibition format. (For example,

worked together. They ought to have worked together. Museums should actually enable cooperation.

HUO: Just like the encounter between Joyce and Eisenstein.

AK: It took place in 1929, in the same month as Black Friday. And we shouldn’t let go of 1929. And if the project they discussed was never completed, then you have to realize it.

HUO: It remained an unrealized project, the film version of *Ulysses*.

AK: That kind of thing needs a place in the world. It can’t be commercial cinema, which is covered with the lava of producers’ intentions. Film history doesn’t progress that way. Michael Haneke would belong there, or Edgar Reitz, but they’re only really visible at festivals.

HUO: So it’s about the realization, then, of this unrealized project, not as part of commercial cinema, but by doing this nine-hour film on *Capital*. In this context you describe yourself as an archaeologist.

AK: Yes. In archaeology there’s the good image where we have to ride away. In the archives of the past we’ll find the future.

HUO: And that’s even more important in the current dystopian moment.

AK: Absolutely. It’s very comforting. We can

do it. Parallel with a reality that’s becoming more and more crazy. You can dig tunnels, alternative mines. There’s nothing else you can do.

HUO: How can you do Eisenstein’s unrealized film of Marx’s *Capital* now? A few years ago you said that our time could be read with a false map, but it remains a false map, because it isn’t the map of our time. How can we read the present era via this matrix?

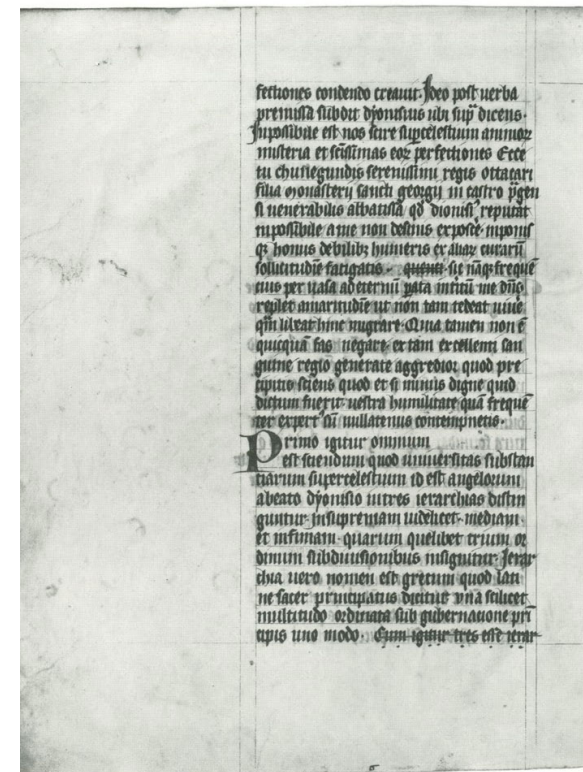
AK: If you read Marx, Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, and critical theory, then you can choose the principle of antagonism, which is the human reaction when people are injured and adversely affected by reality. And thus you deselect civilization under the condition that it is a component of reality. Only civilization isn’t only anchored in the reality principle but also in dreams and the libido. So civilization is more richly anchored than we think. It’s as Blumenberg said: we’ve embarked on a sinking ship.

HUO: It’s not that here is you and here is the raft. You’re on the raft. And Sloterdijk then also says that a lot of ships no longer have captains in the Anthropocene age.

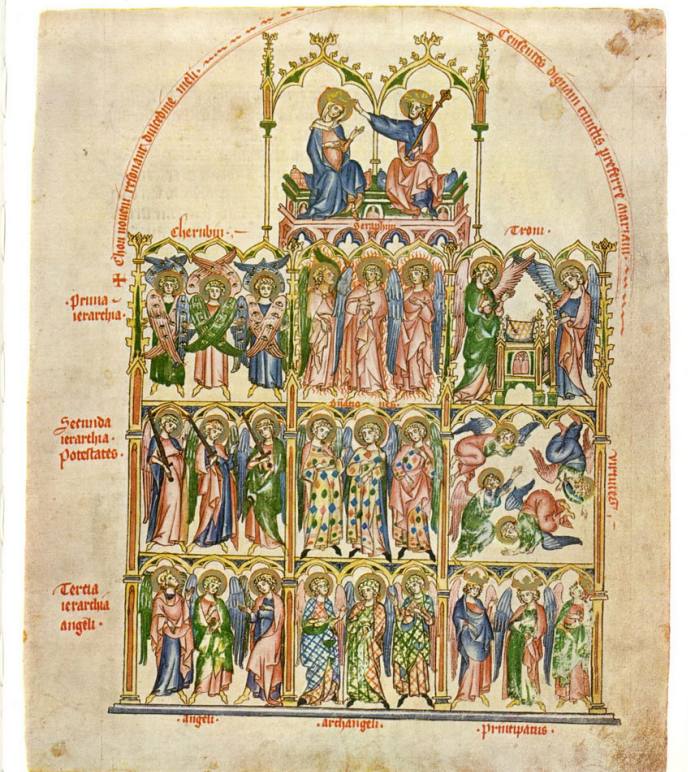
AK: That’s right. On the art side there are enough people who know and say that, and are also trained in navigation. But curators of

07/16

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 David Morris
Anti-Shows



19 b



20 a

Illumination detailing the hierarchies of angels as found in the book *The Passional of Abbess Kunigunde* (1312–21).

exhibitions sometimes seem foolish or delayed to me. There are brilliant people too, whom I admire very much, but I'm surprised that this transformation of viewing sites into production sites, this remedial maintenance ...

HUO: These are places of observation transformed into places of production. And that's of course what Cedric Price says with his unrealized *Fun Palace*, which we're now recreating with Tino Sehgal. It was never realized. That's similar to Eisenstein with the film on *Capital*. There's this big unrealized project by Cedric Price. Not only can we learn from the past but also from unrealized projects.

AK: You're coming to the point where there's a fascination, an aura, in the arts. And then you can depict Caspar David Friedrich's *The Wreck of Hope* and then vary it until hope looks out. You would build a raft from this wrecked ship. And by some means you have to reach the North Sea and a harbor. Not "ta-da, we've reached the sea," but rather "we're on shore again." That's one task of the convoy, which can counter Silicon Valley to a certain extent, and is thus able to cooperate with Silicon Valley. We're on equal footing if we use content on equal footing.

HUO: You said in an interview last year that human beings are not interested in reality. They have wishes.

AK: They're creatures of illustration. It's what Nietzsche says the whole time. We are trained for illustration purposes, otherwise we couldn't bear it. And by mistake we can still think, and as a by-product we can be political for a moment. Then we poison Socrates once again. When we're really political, it's never for long. And with these barren means, this dearth of mutations, the human creature is suitable neither for predation nor peace. Originally the human being is a scavenger who can only walk. The gazelles are much faster. We're neither quicker nor can we bite better than other animals.

But it's repeating today. People are in a pre-objective world shot through with minefields, in which we can actually predict that things can only go awry. We shouldn't imagine building a Noah's Arc and then bringing on the animals – no way. We have to build an entire fleet of boats with trunks of writing in the holds. All of literature, all the tomes have to go in. The pictures that move us. On the scale of Demand and Kiefer, I need both. I need the reductive image, which omits and thus has an antirealist effect. Antirealism has to do with inner forces that don't just consist of wishes but continually want to supplement something. You see something, and there's something missing, and you have the desire to complete it.

HUO: The way Adorno pushes Bloch up

against the wall and demands that he finally tell him what utopia is and Bloch says: "Something is missing."

AK: I can enter this "something missing" with my imagination. This basic principle of the playful element in the human being.

HUO: There was a good interview with Judith Butler in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* the day before yesterday, where she quotes Adorno to the effect that she can't lead a good life in a bad world.

AK: But we have to. There's no right life in the wrong one. But because we have nothing other than the wrong one, it's a matter of navigation in the wrong one. In the middle of the shipwreck, we're called upon to repair the ship.

HUO: That leads us to the principle of resistance. Lyotard did an exhibition at the Musée Immateriaux. It was the first exhibition in which he raised the issue of the internet. And then much later, when he was much older, he wanted to do a second exhibition, which was never realized. It was called "Resistances." The interesting thing is that he wanted to do a group exhibition. He said that the problem with exhibitions is that they take place and then come apart. Lyotard said that he would like there to be a ubiquitous aspect to this group exhibition, as in a film, which you can show anywhere.

AK: And projects should come about from the exhibition. Connections between people. And then they collaborate. Every exhibition is a cooperative context that goes on working.

HUO: And that's the project we are trying to resurrect. It will be the first exhibition in the history of art curated by a dead philosopher. Lyotard couldn't do it anymore, so we're doing it with Philippe Parreno and Daniel Birnbaum at the LUMA Foundation.

AK: Great idea. If you can imagine the 1905 revolution in Russia – it wasn't very much, but it whipped up feelings. It wasn't guilty of anything, because it didn't have the opportunity. We wouldn't be celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the Russian Revolution now if it weren't for the one in 1905, without which the one in 1917 wouldn't have happened. We should reassess the 1905 revolution. A group of people, and then those that came after them, worked continuously and tirelessly starting in 1905 to eventually bring about the revolution of 1917. That gives us hope. That's resistance in reality. There is no resistance in the moment of despair.

HUO: Resistance is not the moment of despair, but hope.

AK: In 1928 I could have created conditions with eight hundred thousand teachers that would have prevented me from sitting powerlessly in a basement in 1945. I can start now to solve the problems of 2026, which my

have gathered to do collaborative work. And those who have gathered are in no way a unified group. These individuals are too different for that. This is, rather, a direction or a movement. The only unifying factor among all is a certain common tendency, a tendency that distinguishes these artists from the vanguard Russian artists of the 1970s who remain within the bounds of traditional art. The artists gathered here destroy the borders between commonly held notions of art and lived reality, and between the artist and the spectator. They approach the "art product" itself in a completely different way. Working on the hypothetical borderline between art and life, they investigate the problem of this "borderline," analyzing the very essence of the artistic phenomenon. They are interested in the mechanism of art, its structure, its function in life and in society, its ability to communicate, to teach, to engage, its ability to create distance, its social aspects, etc. The question is directed to the artist himself. It dethrones the myth of the artist as demiurge, an inscrutable lone genius. All models and conceptions are reevaluated. But this is not analysis in

the usual sense. It is above all action, creative realization.

APTART followed a period of isolation or atomization within the local art community. As Sven Gundlakh wrote at the time, "the main thing is, in my opinion, that not long ago there was nothing – and then suddenly there was – and is – something."⁷ Younger artists had come of age via the "Moscow Conceptual" tradition: they joined the seminars with Ilya Kabakov, Erik Bulatov, Ivan Chuikov, Boris Groys, and many others, were taught by Komar and Melamid. With Andrei Monastyrsky, Lev Rubinstein, and Georgy Kiesewalter, Alekseev was a founding member of the Collective Actions group, who from 1976 organized ephemeral, mystical "empty actions" in rural or marginal areas around Moscow for invited groups of participant-observers. APTART repeated the longstanding practices of informal gatherings by unofficial artists, reflecting on and developing the continuous discussions that connected three generations of Moscow artists between the 1960s and '80s. But it also fought against this lineage – moving away from meticulous analysis and documentation, another characteristic of Collective Actions' work, and attempting to open out the relatively closed



Mikhail Roshal, Victor Skersis, and Gennadii Donskoi performing *Hatch Eggs!* Photo: Igor Palmin. Courtesy of Igor Palmin.



Invitation to "APTART en plein air," May 1983. Courtesy of the Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn Archive.

children will live to see. And if we set up this working group now, it's better than only doing it in 2036, in mourning for what went wrong in 2026.

HUO: With all the catastrophes of 2016, there's the question of what can art do.

AK: It can't do anything in 2016. Aleppo can't be liberated through art. But in 1918–21, when Syria was founded, it could have. With preparation, they could have set the course differently at every fork in the road. And art can't do what I'm telling you, but it can celebrate and orient, so that you have a sense of possibility. This is why we need curiosity cabinets again – science and art.

Art doesn't collect. It has gravitation. Science and art together are something strong again. Now they need to play. Play is not a matter for children. Freud says play is quite serious.

HUO: And Robert Louis Stevenson says that art is like play, but with the seriousness of children playing.

AK: Exactly. What else does Anselm Kiefer do but play, albeit with the seriousness of children? All these things require a change of thinking in these little oases that we call museums.

HUO: So we have to rethink our oases.

AK: Modernity doesn't consist in an imaginary future or in today's obsessive will to reform. Time is past and a new one is coming. That's Alexandria and the Museion. The last authentic departures from the Museion are the scholar artists from Byzantium in 1453. They are banished and go to Tuscany and cofound the Renaissance. It wasn't the banker sons and the bankers themselves. It was infection by the scholars. And musicians are involved as well, and all the others.

HUO: You talk about rethinking the museum, turning it into a production site, a laboratory.

AK: A laboratory – and it shouldn't just make the products themselves but do development work.

HUO: A laboratory that does a kind of R&D.

AK: At the beginning of this development there should be a combination of people who know each other. At best they should fall in love with one another. Now we've come to the Platonic symposium.

HUO: It's a wonderful combination: the combination of people who fall in love with each other. It's the museum, it's the laboratory; like what J.G. Ballard said: it's junction-making. A creation of connections.

AK: You're a specialist there. The way you sent Sarah Morris to me. That was such a nice day.

HUO: I sent her to visit you in Munich

because she rang me, and then she told me for about ten minutes what she wanted to do. And when she talked, I interrupted her. I said it's absolutely obvious. You and Alexander can do it. It was just so obvious that you two have common ground.

AK: And this itself is a work of art – to put brains or senses together. How do you call this? Fingertips; fingertips of two persons belong together.

HUO: That's what happened at Black Mountain College.

AK: Yes, exactly, and we need an imaginary Black Mountain College. Yeah?

HUO: And how could it work, an imaginary Black Mountain College?

AK: Like you do.

HUO: So we do an imaginary Black Mountain College by intensifying the junction-making; that's a nice motto for the new year.

AK: That's a perfect motto for the year. Reality is only accessed via museums, not via the stock exchange.

HUO: One last question: I'm continuing to work against the disappearance of handwriting. We're putting out a sentence, a doodle, every day on Instagram. Jane Goodall, who works with animals – she's now working in Tanzania – says that by working together we make this a better world for all. Not just for people but for all living beings. Or Etel Adnan: the world needs togetherness, not separation. Love, not suspicion. A shared future, not isolation. I wanted to ask if you could write something down for the beginning of the year.

AK: [writes] Not to make yourself stupid from the power of others and not from your own powerlessness.

x

Alexander Kluge is a German author, philosopher, academic, and film director.

Hans Ulrich Obrist is a Swiss curator and art critic. In 1993, he founded the Museum Robert Walser and began to run the Migrateurs program at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris where he served as a curator for contemporary art. In 1996 he co-curated Manifesta 1, the first edition of the roving European biennial of contemporary art. He presently serves as the Co-Director, Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects at the Serpentine Gallery in London.

11/11

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Alexander Kluge and Hans Ulrich Obrist
What Art Can Do

sequence of shows in an apartment and outdoors, a movement and a collective project, APTART's actions were described by its participants as "working expositions," "anti-shows," "exhibition-nonexhibitions," or – following the Socialist Realist dictum that art must be nationalist in form and socialist in content – as "apartment art" by "nationality."³ (The latter is an oblique but suggestive description – collapsing the nation-state into the space of an apartment, confounding the identitarian claims of nationality, and leaving the idea of "socialist in content" hanging.) The name is a contraction of "apartment art," as well as a play on the Russian *APT*, meaning ART: a kind of stutter, "ART ART," a repetition of "ART" across Russian and English. APTART may also be seen alongside the other major artists' initiative in Moscow at that time, the Moscow Archive of New Art (1981–86), a collaborative archive which also marked a self-reflexive moment in the city's experimental lineage. Nikita Alekseev, in whose apartment APTART began, sees no great significance in what they did, and certainly this example of self-organization among artists is one small part of a vast web of "unofficial" activity in Moscow and beyond. But such micro-experiments in collective time and space hold important lessons for the present.

APTART was not the first organization of apartment exhibitions in the Soviet Bloc but it was among the last. With state institutions given over entirely to "official" artists, the presentation of art in homes and off-spaces was relatively widespread, especially from the 1960s and '70s onwards. In 1976, a group of artists in Odessa produced a questionnaire, asking: "1) what is your view of apartment exhibitions?; 2) what artists shown are of most interest to you?; and 3) what characterizes your own work?" For these artists, there was no alternative to showing in apartments: "official art exhibitions made no room for artworks that resulted from a strong inner drive to explore the language of art for its own sake."⁴

The history of official and nonofficial art is complex and uneven. The level of prohibition or relative flexibility varied considerably depending on region and prevailing political conditions. Unofficial art was united by what it was not ("official art"), but beyond that, few generalizations can be sustained. Some artists identified as "dissident" or explicitly "anti-Soviet," but many more were pointedly apolitical or held more nuanced positions between the two. As for all Soviet citizens, there was a provision of free education, heating, and paid holidays, and most "unofficial" artists were employed by the state (as teachers, or more exceptionally in creative professions such as illustration and

book design). Despite widespread antipathy towards the state, its provision of basic needs – and significant amounts of free time – were not unhelpful to artists. Often the nonofficial spaces that supported nonconformist culture were also state institutions, just not those of the art system.

The commitment to Socialist Realism may be traced to a 1932 speech given by Stalin to a group of writers in the Moscow home of Maxim Gorky: "The artist must give first priority to the truthful presentation of life, and if he truly portrays our life, then he cannot but note, cannot but show, that it leads to socialism. This will be Socialist art. This will be Socialist Realism."⁵ Two years later, in August 1934, Socialist Realism would be institutionalized at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. If Stalin's speech launched one of art's trajectories through the twentieth century, his future Cold War rivals were consolidating something similar through institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art and the Central Intelligence Agency. This narrative also began in domestic or private spaces, with the office of Alfred Barr in Manhattan and Gertrude Stein's salon in Paris taking the place of Gorky's Moscow home.⁶

The subsequent conflicts between these narratives forged in domestic spaces would be played out in the celebrated Cold War binary between realism and expressionism, prefigured already by Georg Lukács's famous attacks, throughout the 1930s, on modernist, expressionist, and abstract aesthetics. US expressionism, for its part, aggressively sought ground in other geopolitical blocs, including the former East; notable here is the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow (with Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko, among others). By the early 1980s, New York was the center of a rapidly expanding commercial art system in its boom years, at that time dominated by neo-expressionist painting.

But the vast web of apartment actions and other "unofficial" activities – of which APTART's anti-shows form one small part – unravels these epic conflicts even as they suggest minor ways in which their elements might be given a new shape. The practices around APTART were as far from the "official" Moscow art system as they were from the "official" emanations of Reagan-era neoliberalism: "the new spirit in painting," Julian Schnabel, and the rest of the ascendant, most-valued art-products. Natalia Abalakova and Anatolii Zhigalov wrote a kind of "press release" for the first anti-show, in autumn 1982:

This event is not an exhibition, and certainly not a private showing. It is an artist's apartment where his artist friends

04/16

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 David Morris
Anti-Shows



View of the first APTART exhibition, autumn 1982, with Nikita Alekseev. Photo: Georgy Kiesewalter

Yuk Hui
On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries

01/12

1. Decline of the Occident ... Again?
 In his contribution to the 2004 conference “Politics and Apocalypse,” dedicated to the French theorist and anthropologist René Girard, Peter Thiel wrote that 9/11 marked the failure of the Enlightenment heritage. The West needed a new political theory to save itself from a new world configuration open to a “global terrorism” that “operated outside of all the norms of the liberal West.”¹ Granting in advance that the West had embodied the doctrines and values of democracy and equality, Thiel moved immediately to argue that these had made the West vulnerable.

Such assertions of the Enlightenment’s obsolescence characterize the principal attitude of neoreaction, of which Mencius Moldbug – the pen name of Silicon Valley computer scientist and startup entrepreneur Curtis Yarvin – and the British philosopher Nick Land are the primary representatives. If Thiel is the king, then they are his knights, defending certain communities surrounding Reddit and 4Chan. Nor are the three unrelated. Over the past decade Moldbug’s blog, *Unqualified Reservations*, has inspired Land’s writing, and his startup company Tlon is supported by Thiel, a well-known venture capitalist, founder of PayPal and Palantir, and member of Donald Trump’s transition team. Tlon’s primary product, Urbit, proposes a new protocol different from the centralized client-server structure that currently dominates contemporary networks, allowing decentralization based on personal cloud computing – a so-called post-singularity operating system. The task of neoreaction seems to be sufficiently summarized in the question raised by Thiel towards the end of his paper:

The modern West has lost faith in itself. In the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment period, this loss of faith liberated enormous commercial and creative forces. At the same time, this loss has rendered the West vulnerable. Is there a way to fortify the modern West without destroying it altogether, a way of not throwing the baby out with the bathwater?²

I think Thiel’s question exemplifies a condition Hegel once diagnosed as “the unhappy consciousness”; understanding this concept is helpful for understanding neoreaction.³ Since history is, for Hegel, a long chain of necessary movements of the Spirit on the way to absolute self-consciousness, there are many stops or stations along the way – for example from Judaism to Christianity, and so on. The unhappy consciousness is the tragic moment when consciousness recognizes a contradiction at the

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Yuk Hui
 On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries



View of the first APTART exhibition, autumn 1982, with works by TOTART, Mikhail Roshal, and SZ.

LIBERALS WANT A BIG GOVERNMENT
CONSERVATIVES WANT A SMALL GOVERNMENT



REACTIONARIES WANT
A FUNCTIONING GOVERNMENT
WHETHER OR NOT EVERY FOOL HAS A VOTE

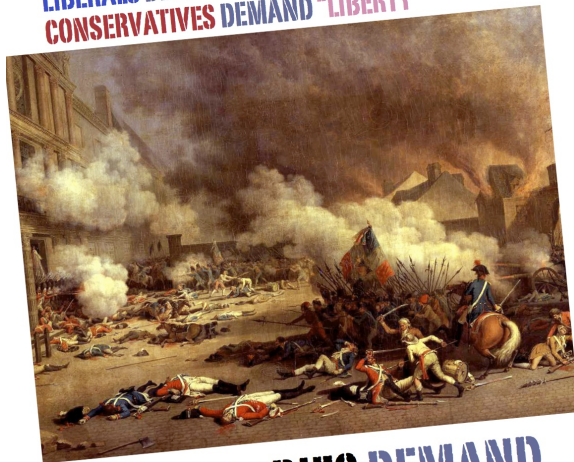
WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY

"How despicable, with best fidelity, the eternal regulation of the Universe? All the world answers me,
"Count heads; ask Universal Suffrage, by the watch-tower, and that will fail."
Well, — I perceive we have got into strange spiritual latitudes indeed. Within the last half century or so,
either the Universe or else the heads of men must have altered very much." — Carlyle (1850)



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LIBERALS DEMAND "EQUALITY"
CONSERVATIVES DEMAND "LIBERTY"



REACTIONARIES DEMAND
THAT THE REIGN OF TERROR STOP
BECAUSE THE GUILLOTINE HAS DONE ENOUGH

WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY

"That a good man be 'free,' be permitted to unfold himself in works of goodness and nobleness,
is surely a blessing to him, immense and indispensable; — to him and to those about him. But that
a bad man be 'free,' — permitted to unfold himself in his particular way, is the fatallest curse
you could inflict on him; curse and nothing else, to him and all his neighbors." — Carlyle (1867)



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02/16



View of the first APTART exhibition, autumn 1982. Courtesy of the Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn Archive.

David Morris Anti-Shows

01/16

A long time ago, thousands of young people from all over the world – mainly from socialist countries, but also from sympathetic countries and from capitalist countries sent by leftist parties – were studying in the USSR. The main aim of our learning experience was to become specialists in disseminating around the world the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. This meant to champion communism, in our case, through Socialist Realism.¹

Manuel Alcayde, a young student from Havana, moved to Moscow in 1978 to study painting and stage design. Even though pro-Soviet tendencies were gaining ground within state institutions in Cuba, Cuban Socialist Realism never managed to advance much beyond the level of cultural policy. Some Soviet tutors were working in Cuban art education in the late 1970s, but students joked about the “muddiness” of the official styles they taught (even convincing the tutors to adopt the term, without explaining the meaning, so they would then tell their students to paint “more muddy”).²

Moscow’s art system, however, was still dominated by “official art” and managed through a complex of governmental and professional organizations, associated exhibition spaces, artists’ associations, and awards. During his time in Moscow, Alcayde met a group of young artists who called themselves the Mukhomors (“Toadstools,” specifically the iconic *amanita muscaria* variety, red with white spots, poisonous and hallucinogenic) and entered the circles of “unofficial” art:

I visited exhibitions, actions, concerts, readings, and participated in *tertulias*. These events could happen anywhere and everywhere – including the living room of an apartment, a park, a cottage in the countryside, the metro or other outdoor spaces – with the fake excuse of a special occasion, such as a birthday or a welcome party. They were put together within limited budgets and were almost always constrained by legal and political limitations, including extreme political risks.

For artists who worked in ways that were not recognized by the official art system, such *tertulias* were the primary medium for the circulation of art.

Between 1982 and 1984, APTART was an artist-to-artist institutionalization of such gatherings in Moscow. A grouping of artists and artist groups, an apartment-exhibition space, a

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 David Morris
Anti-Shows

heart of its previously blithe, even comedic nature. What self-consciousness had thought was complete and whole is revealed as fractured and unfinished. It recognizes the self’s other as a contradiction while at the same time not knowing how to sublimate it. Hegel writes:

This Unhappy Consciousness constitutes the counterpart and the completion of the comic consciousness that is perfectly happy within itself ... The Unhappy Consciousness ... is, conversely, the tragic fate of the certainty of self that aims to be absolute. It is the consciousness of the loss of all essential being in this certainty of itself, and of the loss even of this knowledge about itself ... It is the grief which expresses itself in the hard saying that “God is dead.”⁴

Hegel’s recourse to the affective language of grief is not accidental, for the unhappy consciousness, as the name implies, is dominated, even overwhelmed, by feelings it cannot escape. In Judaism, claims Hegel, a duality of extremes develops in which essence is beyond existence and God outside man, leaving man stranded in the inessential. In Christianity, a unity between the immutable and the specific is called forth through the figure of Christ as God incarnate; however, such unity remains a feeling without thought.⁵ The unhappy consciousness feels without understanding the participation of the universal in the particular, leaving this contradictory duality insurmountable, since it is still only a feeling, not a concept. As Jean Hyppolite explains:

The object of unhappy consciousness ... is the unity of the immutable and the specific. But unhappy consciousness does not relate to its essence through thought, it is the feeling of this unity and not yet its concept. For this reason, its essence remains alien to it ... The feeling of the divine which this consciousness has is a shattered feeling, precisely because it is only a feeling.⁶

For the neoreactionaries, the Enlightenment in general – and democracy in particular – appears as an alienated other of the self. It is both remedy and poison, or more precisely a *pharmakon* in the Greek sense. However, the consciousness of contradiction remains a feeling, and the attempts to escape this feeling open a pathological path towards a deeper melancholia or an illusory abyss of the *schwärmerei* of speculative thinking. Thiel refers to Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the Occident* to describe this contradictory self, and to frame

03/12

9/11 as a decisive warning of it. In *Years of Decision*, Spengler himself connected this restless sentiment to the “Prussian Spirit” which he saw as “the salvation of the white race”:

The Celtic-German “race” has the strongest will-power that the world has ever seen. But this “I will,” “I will!” ... awakens consciousness of the total isolation of the Self in infinite space. Will and loneliness are at bottom the same ... If anything in the world is individualism, it is this defiance of the individual towards the whole world, his knowledge of his own indestructible will, the pleasure he takes in irreversible decisions, and the love of fate ... To submit out of free will is Prussian.⁷

Certainly it is easy to see the neoreactionaries’ embrace of the purported decline of the Occident as a repetition of these familiar historical moments: in particular, the attack against the radical Enlightenment towards the end of the eighteenth century and the emergence of reactionary modernism in Germany between the First and Second World Wars, which married Romanticism with technology and finally merged with National Socialism. It is important to keep this repetition in mind to understand the tactics and the rhetoric which the neoreactionaries use – with or without awareness of these histories – if only to understand what, for them, constitutes the decline of the West today and why the Enlightenment appears to them to be the source of such unhappiness.⁸ If the neoreactionaries reject the Enlightenment, it is a rejection of a strange and specific kind.

2. Quarrels of the Enlightenment

After 9/11, Thiel predicted an increase in security at US airports and greater scrutiny of immigrants. These policies reached a new level of intensity in the travel ban imposed by the administration of Donald Trump – the product of “American democracy” which has stunned even Francis Fukuyama, who recently remarked, like a true Hegelian, that “twenty years ago, I didn’t have a sense or a theory about how democracies can go backward.”⁹ However, the question goes far beyond American democracy: “state of exception,” a term used to describe emergency measures such as travel bans, becomes utterly banal when Trump exercises what is no longer an exception at all, but rather the routine power of the sovereign, in ways reminiscent of the absolutist monarchs of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. The return to monarchy embraced by the neoreactionaries orients itself as an assault against the Enlightenment values of democracy

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Yuk Hui
On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries



LIBERALS PRAISE OBAMA
CONSERVATIVES PRAISE REAGAN

REACTIONARIES SAVE IT
FOR FREDERICK THE GREAT
PHILOSOPHER • CONQUEROR • STATESMAN

WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY
... he abolishes the use of Torture in Criminal Trials ... Will have Philosophers about him, and a real Academy of Sciences ... All Religions must be tolerated ... for in this Country every man must get to Heaven in his own way ... The Press and Newspapers the best instructors ... All these are phenomena of Frederick's best work. — Carlyle (1852)



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LIBERALS FIGHT "RACISM"
CONSERVATIVES FIGHT ACCUSATIONS OF "RACISM"

REACTIONARIES SUGGEST
WE SHOULD ALL JUST GROW UP
AND LEARN TO MANAGE RACIAL CONFLICTS

WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY
"Mighty racial tides flow from the most elemental of vital urges: self-assertion and self-preservation. To condemn the former as 'criminal' and the latter as 'selfish' is either silly or hypocritical and tends to evasion with unnecessary rancor: what objective fairness might keep a candid struggle, inevitable yet alleviated by mutual comprehension and respect." — Ludwig Stauder, *The Rising Tide of Color*



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writings of Darwin, Bergson, and Deleuze, Grosz evacuates the difference between Life and Nonlife, the organic and inorganic, by ascribing a "constrained dynamism" pulsing through both. She also differentiates the inorganic and organic by elevating one form of organic reproduction, sexual dimorphism, above all others on the basis of its complexity; it is uniquely "dynamic, open-ended, ontologically." Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 116.

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11/11

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Elizabeth A. Povinelli
Geontologies: The Concept and Its Territories

Elizabeth A. Povinelli is Franz Boas Professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies at Columbia University. Her books include *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (2016); *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (2011), and *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (2002). She is also a founding member of the Karrabing Film Collective.

10/11

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15
For example, Elizabeth Grosz
has recently sought to situate
the concept of difference in the
work of Charles Darwin and,
more broadly, in the
contemporary posthuman turn.
Across a rich reading of the

and equality, which they understand as,
respectively, degenerative and limiting. In a
series of blog posts entitled "The Dark
Enlightenment" – which have since become
something of a neoreactionary classic – the
British philosopher Nick Land praised the lords
Moldbug and Thiel for honestly declaring these
gods to be dead. In their place we find the god of
freedom, whose own patrimony is not without
shades of light.

Land cites Thiel's 2009 essay "The
Education of a Libertarian," which famously
pronounced: "I no longer believe that freedom
and democracy are compatible."¹⁰ But what does
it mean for democracy and freedom to be
incompatible? Thiel claimed that libertarians
have been mistaken in thinking that freedom can
be achieved through politics (democracy), when
the only way to realize the libertarian project is
through capitalism outstripping politics via an
extensive exploration of cyberspace, outer
space, and the oceans. Democracy is what
prevents the realization of freedom, writes Land,
suggesting that democracy is merely an
Enlightenment myth:

In European classical antiquity, democracy
was recognized as a familiar phase of
cyclical political development,
fundamentally decadent in nature, and
preliminary to a slide into tyranny. Today
this classical understanding is thoroughly
lost, and replaced by a global democratic
ideology, entirely lacking in critical self-
reflection, that is asserted not as a credible
social-scientific thesis, or even as a
spontaneous popular aspiration, but rather
as a religious creed, of a specific,
historically identifiable kind.¹¹

Land and Moldbug also raise the question of
alternatives, which, in the spirit of Thiel, requires
"recovering from democracy, much as Eastern
Europe sees itself as recovering from
Communism." In "An Open Letter to Open-Minded
Progressives," Moldbug related his own
trajectory from a progressive to a Jacobite.¹² He
rejected the political correctness and politeness
of progressives by proposing to instrumentalize
Hitler and the reactionary thought of fascism.
This is a form of ideology critique descended
from radical left thinking about what happens
when ideas and practices are institutionalized. It
is only in the "cathedral" that ethics and dogma
overlap. But while for the non-academic left, this
dogma is ineffective and benign, for the
neoreactionaries it is an existential threat;
political correctness becomes a toxic threat to
Western Civilization.

This quarrel over the Enlightenment

resonates with a debate that raged during the
European Enlightenment. On one side were
radical thinkers such as Diderot, d'Holbach,
Paine, Jefferson, and Priestley – philosophers
and Unitarians who attacked the Church and the
monarchy and saw the progress of reason as the
realization of universalism. On the other side
were more moderate Enlightenment thinkers
such as Ferguson, Hume, and Burke, who
championed the monarchical-aristocratic order
of society.¹³ The Enlightenment, it would seem,
has no original commitment to democracy. On
the contrary, the issue was contested from the
start.

Moldbug's frequent references to the
cameralism of Fredrick the Great further
dramatize this quarrel, exemplifying the
confused feelings of the unhappy consciousness.
One the one hand, Moldbug calls himself a
Jacobite, defends the divine right of kings, and
proposes a new cameralism that sees the state
as a business – a vision that has apparently
appealed to the Trump Administration. On the
other hand, he avoids the fact that the
Enlightenment was practically Old Fritz's
personal brand – not only did Fredrick reject the
divine right of kings in favor of social contract
theory, he also wrote famous essays on
"enlightened monarchy" and said that "my
principal occupation is to combat ignorance and
prejudice ... to enlighten minds, cultivate
morality, and to make people as happy as it suits
human nature, and as the means at my disposal
permit." He even sheltered Voltaire when the
latter got himself into trouble with the church.
And sure enough, it is clear that the
neoreactionaries see themselves as so many
contemporary Voltaires battling the
contemporary church of political correctness –
what Moldbug calls "the Cathedral." Hence the
unhappy consciousness stranded between an
awareness of the contradictions of the
Enlightenment and their transcendence: for the
neoreactionaries, the Enlightenment giveth and
the Enlightenment taketh away. The expressed
symptom of this disease is a relentless irony, as
Land observes:

Without a taste for irony, Mencius Moldbug
is all but unendurable, and certainly
unintelligible. Vast structures of historical
irony shape his writings, at times even
engulfing them. How otherwise could a
proponent of traditional configurations of
social order – a self-proclaimed Jacobite –
compose a body of work that is stubbornly
dedicated to subversion?

But this contradiction is precisely what makes
the neoreactionary consciousness so unhappy,

05/12

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Yuk Hui
On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries

insofar as Land and Moldbug allow their feelings of grief and loss to take precedence over the difficult protocols of reason they nevertheless cite with a compulsion worthy of Freud. Moldbug wants the authoritarianism of the Jacobites alongside the political economy of the Whigs, and if this makes no sense, then too bad because someone is probably getting bullied by the Cathedral on the internet someplace. Land, at least, good veteran of the academy that he is, knows enough to avoid getting bogged down by tiresome questions of historical accuracy, and as *The Dark Enlightenment* goes on, one can almost feel him slinking away from Moldbug. After parroting some boilerplate libertarian catechism, Land moves quickly towards his real aim: exposing the contradictory consciousness of contemporary progressive bloggers, a target-rich environment to be sure, albeit one far below his weight class as a thinker. Here it is significant that Land has reversed the order: reusing the radical philosophers' criticism of the monarchist Enlightenment thinkers against themselves, cunningly accusing the radical Enlightenment – played again, following Moldbug, by the purported universalism of radical Protestantism – of hypocrisy and contradiction, following its own gesture and script:

Under this examination, what counts as Universal reason, determining the direction and meaning of modernity, is revealed as the minutely determined branch or sub-species of a cultic tradition, descended from “rangers,” “levelers,” and closely related variants of dissident, ultra-protestant fanaticism, and owing vanishingly little to the conclusions of logicians.

This attack on social-democratic politics as the consequence of Enlightenment institutionalization is in fact a return to the conservative thinkers of the Enlightenment itself: a negation of the negation. Land embodies the return of the repressed even as he warns against it:

The basic theme has been mind control, or thought-suppression, as demonstrated by the Media-Academic complex that dominates contemporary Western societies, and which Mencius Moldbug names the Cathedral. When things are squashed they rarely disappear. Instead, they are displaced, fleeing into sheltering shadows, and sometimes turning into monsters. Today, as the suppressive orthodoxy of the Cathedral comes unstrung, in various ways, and numerous

senses, a time of monsters is approaching.

Such complexities are part of the reason why it is too simple to just denounce the neoreactionaries as racists – though probably most of them are. Their rejection of the Enlightenment comes out of a “self-consciousness” that has not yet grasped a unified concept of its contradiction. Rather than confront the difficult fact that their God never existed, the neo-reactionaries set about trying to kill Him by sabotaging the Cathedral and pursuing absolute deterritorialization. The will towards such radical change leaves them with the illusion of a beautiful story on the other side of the world, and with elaborate speculations about a superintelligence that will save human beings from politics. For example, Land's celebration of Asian cities such as Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore is simply a detached observation of these places that projects onto them a common will to sacrifice politics for productivity. Political fatigue often causes the West to be drawn to East Asia's promises of depoliticized techno-commercial utopia; sinofuturism becomes the model for radical change. By “sinofuturism” we mean the idea that China has been able to import Western science and technology without resistance, while in the West, the fantasy goes, any significant technological invention or scientific discovery will always be limited and decelerated by the political correctness of the Cathedral. It is not surprising that Milton Friedman, who regarded Hong Kong as a neoliberal economic experiment envisioned by himself and the Scotsman John Cowperthwaite (the financial secretary of Hong Kong in the 1960s), had the same observation, writing in his essay “Hong Kong Experiment” that the economy of Hong Kong outstripped that of the US thanks to its ability to function without any “vagaries of politics.”¹⁴

This desire for productivity is consistent with the neoliberal premise that a techno-commercial depoliticization is necessary to save the West. But *from what?* I tend to believe that the rise of the neoreactionaries reveals the failure of a universalization *qua* globalization since the Enlightenment, but due to a far more nuanced reason. For the neoreactionaries, the equality, democracy, and liberty proposed by the Enlightenment and their universalization led to an unproductive politics characterized by political correctness. One therefore needs to “take the red pill” to renounce these causes in order to seek another configuration, whether political in disguise or apolitical in essence. Neoreactionary thinking as unhappy consciousness is an outcry in the face of a dialectical transformation of globalization.

Western shadow imposition of the qualities of one of its categories (Life, Leben) onto the key dynamics of its concept of existence (Being, Dasein). Removed from the enclosure of life Leben as Dasein roams freely as a form of univocal vitality. How, in doing this, are we disallowing whatever Nonlife is standing in for to affect whatever Life is an alibi for? What are the traps that this strategic response sets for critical theory? How does this ascription of the qualities we cherish in one form of existence to all forms of existences reestablish, covertly or overtly, the hierarchy of life?¹⁵

Finally, the Virus and its central imaginary of the Terrorist provide a glimpse of a persistent, errant potential radicalization of the Desert, the Animist, and their key imaginaries of Carbon and Indigeneity. The Virus is the figure for that which seeks to disrupt the current arrangements of Life and Nonlife by claiming that it is a difference that makes no difference not because all is alive, vital, and potent, nor because all is inert, replicative, unmoving, inert, dormant, and enduring. Because the division of Life and Nonlife does not define or contain the Virus, it can use and ignore this division for the sole purpose of diverting the energies of arrangements of existence in order to extend itself. The Virus copies, duplicates, and lies dormant even as it continually adjusts to, experiments with, and tests its circumstances. It confuses and levels the difference between Life and Nonlife while carefully taking advantage of the minutest aspects of their differentiation. We catch a glimpse of the Virus whenever someone suggests that the size of the human population must be addressed in the wake of climate change; that a glacial granite mountain welcomes the effects of air conditioning on life; that humans are kudzu; or that human extinction is desirable and should be accelerated. The Virus is also Ebola and the waste dump, the drug-resistant bacterial infection stewed within massive salmon and poultry farms, and nuclear power; the person who looks just like “we” do as she plants a bomb. Perhaps most spectacularly the Virus is the popular cultural figure of the zombie – Life turned to Nonlife and transformed into a new kind of species war – the aggressive rotting undead against the last redoubt of Life. Thus the difference between the Desert and the Virus has to do with the agency and intentionality of nonhuman Life and Nonlife. Whereas the Desert is an inert state welcoming a technological fix, the Virus is an active antagonistic agent built out of the collective assemblage that is late liberal geontopower. In the wake of the late liberal crises post-9/11, the crash of financial markets, and Anthropogenic climate change, the Virus has been primarily

associated with fundamentalist Islam and the radical Green movement. And much of critical thought has focused on the relationship between biopolitics and biosecurity in the wake of these crises. But this focus on biosecurity has obscured the systemic reorientation of biosecurity around geo-security and meteorosecurity: the social and ecological effects of climate change.¹⁶ Thus the Virus is also recognition's internal political other: environmentalists inhabiting the borderlands between activists and terrorists across state borders and interstate surveillance. But while the Virus may seem to be the radical exit from geontopower at first glance, to be the Virus is to be subject to intense abjection and attacks, and to live in the vicinity of the Virus is to dwell in an existential crisis.

As I am hoping will become clear, Capitalism has a unique relation to the Desert, the Animist, and the Virus insofar as Capitalism sees all things as having the potential to create profit; that is, nothing is inherently inert, everything is vital from the point of view of capitalization, and anything can become something more with the right innovative angle. Indeed, capitalists can be said to be the purest of the Animists. This said, industrial capital depends on and, along with states, vigorously polices the separations between forms of existence so that certain kinds of existents can be subjected to different kinds of extractions. Thus even as activists and academics level the relation between animal life and among objects (including human subjects), states pass legislation both protecting the rights of businesses and corporations to use animals and lands and criminalizing tactics of ecological and environmental activism. In other words, like the Virus that takes advantage but is not ultimately wedded to the difference between Life and Nonlife, Capital views all modes of existence as if they were vital and demands that not all modes of existence are the same from the point of view of extraction of value.

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06/12

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Yuk Hui
On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries

09/11

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Elizabeth A. Povinelli
Geontologies: The Concept and Its Territories

relevant, sensible, or practical.

Take the Desert and its central imaginary Carbon. The Desert comprises discourses, tactics, and figures that restabilize the distinction between Life and Nonlife. It stands for all things perceived and conceived as denuded of life – and, by implication, all things that could, with the correct deployment of technological expertise or proper stewardship, be (re)made hospitable to life. The Desert, in other words, holds on to the distinction between Life and Nonlife and dramatizes the possibility that Life is always at threat from the creeping, desiccating sands of Nonlife. The Desert is the space where life was, is not now, but could be if knowledges, techniques, and resources were properly managed. The Carbon Imaginary lies at the heart of this figure and is thus the key to the maintenance of geontopower. The Carbon Imaginary lodges the superiority of Life into Being by transposing biological concepts such as metabolism and its key events, such as birth, growth-reproduction, death, and ontological concepts, such as event, *conatus/affectus*, and finitude. Clearly, biology and ontology do not operate in the same discursive field, nor do they simply intersect. Nevertheless, the Carbon Imaginary reinforces a scarred meeting place where each can exchange conceptual intensities, thrills, wonders, anxieties, perhaps terrors, of the other of Life, namely the Inert, Inanimate, Barren. In this scarred space, the ontological is revealed to be biontology. Being has always been dominated by Life and the desires of Life.

Thus, the Desert does not refer in any literal way to the ecosystem that, for lack of water, is hostile to life. The Desert is the affect that motivates the search for other instances of life in the universe and technologies for seeding planets with life; it colors the contemporary imaginary of North African oil fields; and it drives the fear that all places will soon be nothing more than the setting within a Mad Max movie. The Desert is also glimpsed in both the geological category of the fossil insofar as we consider fossils to have once been charged with life, to have lost that life, but as a form of fuel can provide the conditions for a specific form of life – contemporary, hypermodern, informationalized capital – and a new form of mass death and utter extinction; and in the calls for a capital or technological fix to anthropogenic climate change. Not surprisingly then the Desert is fodder for new theoretical, scientific, literary, artistic, and media works from the Mad Max films and science fiction of Philip K. Dick's *Martian Time-Slip* to the poetics of Juliana Spahr's *Well Then There Now*.

At the heart of the figure of the Animist lies the imaginary of the Indigene. Whereas the

Desert heightens the drama of constant peril of Life in relation to Nonlife, the Animist insists that the difference between Life and Nonlife is not a problem because all forms of existence have within them a vital animating, affecting force. Certain social and historical populations are charged with always having had this core Animist insight – these populations are mainly located in settler colonies but also include pre-Christian and pre-Islamic populations globally, the contemporary recycling subject,¹² new Paganism, actant-based science and technology studies, and certain ways of portraying and perceiving a variety of new cognitive subjects. For instance, the psycho-cognitive diagnosis of certain forms of autism and Aspergers are liable to fall within the Animist. Temple Grandin is an exemplary figure here, not merely for her orientation to nonhuman life (cows), but also for her defense of those alternative cognitions that allow for an orientation to Nonlife forms of existence. The Animist has also animated a range of artistic explorations of nonhuman and inorganic modes of agency, subjectivity, and assemblage, such as Laine Paul's novel *The Bees* and in the Italian film *Le Quattro Volte*. The Animist is, in other words, all those who see an equivalence between all forms of life or who can see life where others would see the lack of life.

The theoretical expression of the Animist is most fully developed in contemporary critical philosophies of vitalism. Some new vitalists have mined Spinoza's principles of *conatus* (that which exists, whether living or nonliving, strives to persevere in being) and *affectus* (the ability to affect and be affected) to shatter the division of Life and Nonlife; although others, such as John Carriero, have insisted that Spinoza uncritically accepted that living things are "more advanced" than nonliving things and "that there is more to a cat than to a rock."¹³ The American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce has also inspired new vitalist scholarship – for instance, Brian Massumi has long probed Peirce's semiotics as grounds for extending affect into nonliving existents.¹⁴ To be sure the interest in "vital materialism," to quote from Jane Bennett's work, does not claim to be interested in life per se. Rather it seeks to understand the distribution of quasi-agencies and actants across nonhuman and human materials in ways that disturb the concepts of subject, object, and predicate. And yet it is right here that we glimpse the power of the Carbon Imaginary – the suturing of dominant forms of conceptual space in late liberalism by the reciprocal transpositions of the biological concepts of birth, growth-reproduction, and death and the ontological concepts of event, *conatus/affectus*, and finitude. The new vitalisms take advantage of the longstanding

3. The Neoreactionary Unhappy Consciousness

Regardless of which Christian sect we ascribe it to, universalism remains a Western intellectual *product*. In reality there has been no universalism (at least not yet), only universalization (or synchronization) – a modernization process rendered possible by globalization and colonization. This creates problems for the right as well as the left, making it extremely difficult to reduce politics to the traditional dichotomy. The reflexive modernization described by prominent sociologists in the twentieth century as a shift from the early modernity of the nation-state to a second modernity characterized by reflexivity seems to be questionable from the outset. Reflexivity, resting on a "heightened awareness that mastery is impossible," instead of being a constant negotiation for differences, appears to be only a means of universalization through methods other than war.¹⁵ This doesn't prevent the return of nation-states, nor monarchies for that matter, which anyway never left – witness the Kingdom of Saud, whose support for the 9/11 hijackers is well known.

The universalization process functions according to power differences: the technologically stronger powers export knowledge and values to the weaker ones, and consequently destroy their interiority. The French paleontologist André Leroi-Gourhan illustrates this process beautifully in his 1945 book *Milieu et Techniques*. He defines a "technical milieu" as a membrane separating the interiority and the exteriority of different ethnic groups. The differences in technological development define, to a large extent, the boundary of culture and power differences. Of course, today it is no longer a question of ancient ethnic groups but rather nation-states and ethnonationalism that define the boundary of cultures. In the process of modernization, the dynamic described by Leroi-Gourhan has to be largely updated, because such a milieu virtually doesn't exist, since all non-Western countries have been forced to adapt themselves to constant technological development and innovation. Take China as an example: the defeat of China during the two Opium Wars led to a rampant modernization in which such a technical membrane became virtually unsustainable due to fundamental differences in technological thought and development (the most significant existing membrane is probably the Great Firewall of China, but its construction is only possible thanks to Silicon Valley).


The universalization process has been a largely unilateral one, reducing non-Western

thinking to an amusement. Even for Leibniz, who took Chinese thinking seriously in the eighteenth century, Chinese writing is only an inspiration for him to construct a *characteristica universalis*; in other words, Chinese thought is only a passage to the universal. The modernization following the Opium Wars was intensified during the Cultural Revolution, since tradition – for example, Confucianism – was naively judged as a return to feudalism, which goes against the Marxist view of historical progress. The economic reforms that started in the 1980s, directed by the world's greatest accelerationist, Deng Xiaoping, further accelerated this modernization process. Today, military-industrial technologies in the global south are catching up with the West, reversing the unilateral universalization of Western modernity since the turn of the last century. The Hegelian consciousness has to recognize that the "climax and terminus of the world process" is far beyond Hegel's "own existence in Berlin."¹⁶ The last scene of such a joyful Hegelian consciousness was when American and European expats were practicing yoga in India, climbing the Great Wall in China, and enjoying the exotic delights of nature outside of their country. Today, when Shanghai is no cheaper than New York and when Trump accuses China of stealing jobs and destroying the US economy, the story is over.


The story of globalization continues, but happy consciousness is outstripped by material conditions. And not only in the US. When I visited Barcelona last summer, I was struck by the fact that so many Spanish restaurants and shops are run by Chinese people. An anthropologist friend studying the suburbs of Barcelona told me that the situation is even more astonishing there, where most local bars are now owned and operated by Chinese families. He remarked that something significant will take place in the coming decades due to demographic changes, let alone the issue of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. We must remind ourselves that the limit of globalization is not established by the lie of the Enlightenment, as the neoreactionaries claim, but rather that it is only a historical zeitgeist in which colonization, industrialization, and the birth of economics overlap. The new configuration of globalization now reveals its other – which was already present at the beginning, yet remained unthought.

Fundamentally, the neoreactionary movement and the "alt-right" are expressions of an anxiety over the fact that the West is incapable of overcoming the current phase of globalization and maintaining the privilege it has enjoyed for the past few hundred years. Nick Land already admitted as much twenty years

**LIBERALS SUPPORT GLOBAL DEMOCRACY
CONSERVATIVES SUPPORT GLOBAL CAPITALISM**



Singapore: authoritarian




Haiti: democratic

**REACTIONARIES CAN ADMIT
DIFFERENT PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT
AND THRIVE IN DIFFERENT SYSTEMS**

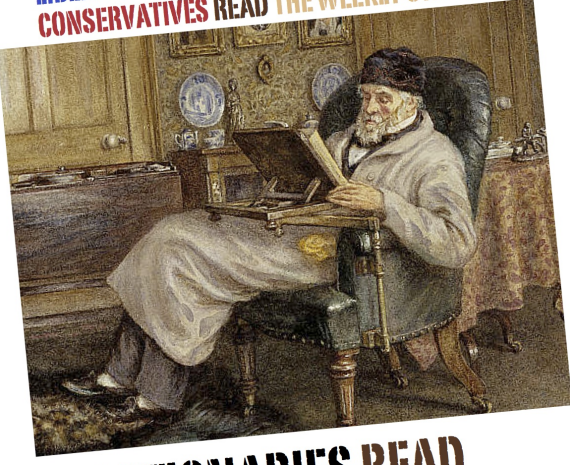
WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY

"A constitution which is made for all nations is made for none; it is a pure abstraction, a school exercise... What is a constitution? Is it not the solution to the following problem: to find the laws that are fitting for a particular nation, given its population, its customs, its religion, its geographical situation, its political relations, its wealth, and its good and bad qualities?" — De Maistre (1797)



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**LIBERALS READ THE NEW REPUBLIC
CONSERVATIVES READ THE WEEKLY STANDARD**



**REACTIONARIES READ
THE LATTER-DAY PAMPHLETS (1850)
BECAUSE IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO GET IT RIGHT**

WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY

"Your ship cannot double Cape Horn by its excellent plans of voting. The ship may vote this and that, above decks and below, in the most harmonious exultatory constitutional manner: the ship, to get round Cape Horn, will find a set of conditions already voted for, and fixed with adamantine rigor, by the ancient Elemental Powers, who are entirely careless how you vote." — Carlyle (1850)



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07/11



Karrabing Film Collective, *When the Dogs Talked*, 2014. Film still.

increasingly put pressure on the ontological distinctions among biological, geological, and meteorological existents, and a posthuman critique is giving way to a post-life critique, being to assemblage, and biopower to geontopower. What status should objects have in various Western ontologies? Are there objects, existents, or only fuzzy assemblages? Are these fuzzy assemblages lively too? Anthropologists have weighed in on these more typically philosophical questions by transforming an older interest in social and cultural epistemologies and cosmologies into a concern about multiple ontologies.¹⁰ But perhaps these academic disciplines are only catching up to a conversation begun in literature such as Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, and certainly in the literary output of Margaret Atwood, starting with *The Handmaid's Tale*, and continuing through her MaddAddam Trilogy. Now an entire field of ecoliterary studies examines fictional, media, and filmic explorations of the coming postextinction world.

And this leads to my second point. As we become increasingly captured by the competing claims of precarious natures and entangled existences, a wild proliferation of new conceptual models, figures, and tactics is displacing the conceptual figures and tactics of the biopolitical and necropolitical. For the purpose of analytical explication, I cluster this proliferation around three figures: the Desert, the Animist, and the Virus. To understand the status of these figures, two points must be kept firmly in mind. First, as the geontological comes to play a larger part in the governance of our thought, other forms of existence (other existents) cannot merely be included in the ways we have understood the qualities of being and life but will need, on the one hand, to displace the division of Life and Nonlife as such and, on the other hand, to separate themselves from late liberal forms of governance. In other words, these figures, statics, and discourses are diagnostic and symptomatic of the present way in which late liberalism governs difference and markets in a differential social geography. Therefore, the three figures of geontopower are, from one perspective, no different than Foucault's four figures of biopower. The hysterical woman (a hystericization of women's bodies), the masturbating child (a pedagogization of children's sex), the perverse adult (a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure), and the Malthusian couple (a socialization of procreative behavior): Foucault cared about these figures of sexuality and gender not because he thought that they were the repressed truth of human existence but because he thought they were symptomatic and diagnostic of a

modern formation of power. These four figures were both expressions of biopower and windows into its operation. Although, when presenting his lectures, compiled in *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault discussed the insurrection of subjugated knowledges, understanding these figures as subjugated in the liberal sense of oppressed subjects would be wrong-headed. The problem was not how these figures and forms of life could be liberated from subjugation but how to understand them as indicating a possible world beyond or otherwise to their own form of existence – how to understand them as a way station for the emergence of something else. How might the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult become something other than what they were? And how could whatever emerged out of them survive the conditions of their birth? How could they be invested with qualities and characteristics deemed sensible and compelling before being extinguished as a monstrosity?¹¹

A similar approach can be taken in relationship to the Desert, the Animist, and the Virus. Each of these figures provides a mechanism through which we can conceive of the once presupposed but now trembling architectures of geontological governance. Again, these figures and discourses are not the exit from or the answer to biopolitics. They are not subjugated subjects waiting to be liberated. Geontology is not a crisis of life (*bios*) and death (*thanatos*) at a species level (extinction), or merely a crisis between Life (*bios*) and Nonlife (*geos, meteoros*). Geontopower is a mode of late liberal governance. And it is this mode of governance that is trembling. Moreover, and this is the second point, because the Desert, the Animist, and the Virus are tools, symptoms, figures, and diagnostics of this mode of late liberal governance, perhaps most clearly apparent in settler late liberalism than elsewhere, they might need to be displaced by other figures in other places if these other figures seem more apparent or relevant to governance in these spaces. But it seems to me that at least in settler late liberalism, geontology and its three figures huddle just inside the door between given governance and its otherwhises, trying to block entrance and exit and to restrict the shape and expanse of its interior rooms. Or we can think of these figures as a collection of governing ghosts who exist in between two worlds in late settler liberalism – the world in which the dependent oppositions of life (*bios*) and death (*thanatos*) and of Life (*bios*) and Nonlife (*geos, meteoros*) are sensible and dramatic and the world in which these enclosures are no longer, or have never been,

ago, in a text entitled "Meltdown":

The sino-pacific boom and automatized global economic integration crashes the neocolonial world system ... resulting in Euro-American neo-mercantilist panic reactions, welfare state deterioration, cancerizing enclaves of domestic underdevelopment, political collapse, and the release of cultural toxins that speed-up the process of disintegration in a vicious circle.¹⁷

The neoreactionary critique exposes the limit of the Enlightenment and its project, but surprisingly, it may only show that the Enlightenment has never really been implemented, or rather that its history is one of compromise and distortion.¹⁸ Clarifying the emergence of neofascist politics on a global scale demands admitting at least this much: in the same way that Hitler's love for the master race in no way imperiled his alliance with the Empire of Japan – indeed, it was the British commander of Singapore who left the landward side of the island undefended because he did not think the Japanese could see out of their slanty eyes well enough to attack from land – so too does contemporary ultranationalism constitute a truly international phenomenon. The neofascist movement extends far beyond Europe and America, with different ways of orienting the "global" and the "local." Take, for example, the Russian political theorist and self-proclaimed Heideggerian Aleksandr Dugin and his "fourth political theory." Like Land, Dugin is not someone easily discredited or denounced. Yes he has to be understood as a true reactionary. His fourth political theory claims to go beyond the failure of the three previous political theories: liberalism, communism, and fascism.¹⁹ If the subjects of the previous three political theories were, respectively, the individual, the class, and the nation-state or race, then the subject of the fourth political theory is the Heideggerian *Dasein*.²⁰ *Dasein* resists the deracination of the postmodern, the midnight "when Nothingness (nihilism) begins to seep from all the cracks."²¹ The fourth political theory is indeed a reactionary theory, which finds its roots in the conservative revolution and fascist movements (Arthur Moeller van den Bruck in Germany, Julius Evola in Italy), traditionalism (René Guénon), and the new right (Alain de Benoist). For Dugin, the global is the modern world and the local is Russian tradition.

In Asian cities such as Hong Kong a similar movement has appeared in recent years, initiated by folklore scholar Wan Chin, who completed a PhD in ethnology in Göttingen in the

1990s. His theory of "Hong Kong as a city-state" is based on an awkward neoracism against Mainland Chinese, replacing the "global" with China and the "local" with a mixture of colonial history and Chinese culture dating back to the Song Dynasty. I am personally not a traditionalist, though I appreciate tradition and still believe that the failure of all communist revolutions is due to a failure to respect tradition or draw from its forces, instead posing matter against spirit. The opposition between matter and spirit leads to a nihilism which pushes modernization to its extreme. The question today is not whether to give up tradition or to defend tradition, but rather how to de-substantialize tradition and appropriate the modern world from the standpoint of a de-substantialized tradition in terms of episteme and epistemology, as I have tried to propose in my recent book.²² I emphasize *both* episteme and epistemology, since an epistemological shift still remains within a trajectory of European thought, and serves the diversification and perfection of the homogenizing technical system; the question of episteme goes further, since it also concerns the question of forms of life. This means that it will be necessary to transform tradition itself in order to reappropriate technological modernization and reconstitute a new episteme. These are the nuances that we must make, and make carefully, instead of subsuming discourse to clear oppositional and exclusive categories of right and left.

Critics have frequently pointed out that globalization is another name for global capitalism. Distinctions between capitalist globalization and alternative globalization notwithstanding, the silence of the antiglobalization movement since the end of the millennium has led some authors to suggest that coming to terms with a certain sterility should cause revolutionaries to break away from the constraints of leftist politics that keep "the Gulliver of revolution attached to the ground."²³ A radical politics is called for by both revolutionaries and neoreactionaries, though radical in two completely different directions.

4. Thinking After Meltdown

How then is the West going to save itself, to sublimate the contradiction of the unhappy consciousness? Reaction, like fascism, doesn't tell the truth, but only allows people to express themselves. Trump's victory is more or less a victory of reactionary and right-wing thinking, which do not provide a worthier analysis of the situation but rather appeal to the emotions, as Ernst Bloch once said about the situation in Germany.²⁴ Commentators have tried to suggest, based on the relation between Thiel and Girard,

06/11

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Elizabeth A. Povinelli
Geontologies: The Concept and Its Territories

09/12

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Yuk Hui
On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries

that Trump and tech entrepreneurs are comparable to scapegoats²⁵; like the *pharmakos* in ancient Greece or the King described by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, their sacrifice puts an end to social and political crisis. However, the figure of the scapegoat is analogous to the “red pill”: it is only a rhetorical tactic that justifies its reactionary tendency as a covert truth. The sacrifice of the scapegoat is a redefinition of friend and enemy, which is rather clear in Trump’s position on China-US-Russia relations. To maintain an uneven globalization and avoid the expense of war, real scapegoats are going to be sacrificed, since they are the vessels for hiding the truth in favor of populist movements. In other words, how can the West maintain unilateral globalization to preserve its privilege and supremacy? This question is not asked by Land, who simply mobilizes the neoreactionaries as a means of advancing his own bionic agenda. However, no matter how unwilling one is, we cannot deny the fact that today’s world can no longer maintain the old order; the military modernization of the past century makes this impossible.

Bloch was right, but emotion is not enough. The reactionary modernists also provided something substantial. They wanted to overcome the opposition between *natur* and *technik*, and therefore to reconcile *technik* and *kultur* (*kultur* was considered to be opposed to *zivilisation*) within the interiority (*innerlichkeit*) of European culture. This is also why, after publishing *The Decline of the West* (1922), Spengler followed with *Man and Technics: Contribution to a Philosophy of Life* (*Der Mensch und die Technik. Beitrag zu einer Philosophie des Lebens*, 1931) to reassert his pro-technology credentials.²⁶ Today we can observe how technology returns to provide a futurist vision of the technological singularity as a solution to any politics, with the added nuance that the *innerlichkeit* is no longer of central concern. Thiel is a venture capitalist who has funded major tech companies such as Facebook, Google, and PayPal. Technology, as he wrote in *Zero to One*, means complementarity, and “strong AI is like a cosmic lottery ticket: if we win, we get utopia; if we lose, Skynet substitutes us out of existence.” Moldbug is the developer of the operating system Urbit, which runs on libertarian principles. Nick Land is interested in technological singularity and the “intelligence explosion” since the 1990s. He has also praised Bitcoin, as have other neoreactionaries such as Eliezer Yudkowsky, who is a well-known AI researcher. In Thiel’s view, it is only through an invasive technological intervention that the West can recover from democracy. Land’s accelerationism is the most sophisticated of the various accelerationisms, and far more

philosophical than the leftist version, which relies on a rather shallow understanding of technology. His transhumanist position, however, is another kind of “universalism,” one in which all cultural relativity is subsumed under an intelligent cybernetic machine, producing a “meltdown” – an absolute deterritorialization and an intelligence explosion that captures the creative force of intellectual intuition in the Kantian sense. Land seeks a remythologization of the world through Lovecraftian weird realism. “The endless [that] ends in itself,” a poetic sentence from Land’s fictional work *Phyl-Undhu*, gestures toward an idealist recursive genesis.

The competition to realize the technological singularity has become a major battlefield, and the threat of war has never been so imminent. Thiel once wrote that “competition is for losers,” since it is monopoly that “produces at the quantity and price combination that maximizes its profits.”²⁷ The irony is that the nonpolitics Thiel supports careens towards such an undesirable fate. We must avoid this war at all costs. This doesn’t mean that we should completely reject the possibility of a superintelligence. But we should resist surrendering to a destiny predefined by technological development. We urgently need to imagine a new world order and seize the opportunity provided by the meltdown to develop a strategy that opposes the relentless depoliticization and proletarianization driven by the transhumanist fantasy of superintelligence.

This meltdown doesn’t have to mean the end of the world. It can also be approached as a pivotal political and philosophical moment, when restructuring on both a global and local scale is possible because the old structures have been dissolved by new technologies. In the words of Bernard Stiegler, we can describe our moment as a “digital *epoché*,” in which old institutional forms are not only conceptually but also materially suspended. For example, Finland is considering using new digital technology to abandon the traditional way of teaching according to subject and to develop a curriculum that involves more collaboration among teachers. This is a moment when new forms of educational institutions can be created, when a “destitution” (in Agamben’s sense) can be carried out to break down a synchronization that so far has only served the interests of globalization. This destitution can lead to the emergence of epistemes that diverge from the hegemonic synchronization internal to the technological singularity. It is an opportunity to develop new thinking and new constitutions that go beyond current debates focused on universal basic income and robot taxis. We must not wait for the technocrats to implement this thinking via

others? Take the recent work of the anthropologist Anna Tsing in which she mobilizes the matsutake mushroom to make the case for a more inclusive politics of well-being; a political imaginary which conceptualizes the good as a world in which humans and nonhumans alike thrive. And yet this thriving is, perhaps as it must be, measured according to specific human points of view, which becomes clear when various other species of fungi come into view – for instance, those tree fungi that thrive in agricapital nurseries such as *Hevea* root fungal parasites: *Rigidoporus lignosus* and *Phellinus noxius*. I might not want plantation capitalism to survive, but *R. lignosus* and *P. noxius* certainly do. *P. noxius* is not noxious from the point of view of nowhere but because it can be understood as the companion species to a specific form of human social existence, agricapitalism. So will I deny *P. noxius* a ballot? What will it have to agree to do and be before I agree to give it one? What else will need to abide by my rule in this new war of the world – those minerals, lakes, air particles, and currents that thrive in one formation but not another? “Sustainability” can quickly become a call to conceive a mode of (multi)existence that is pliant to our desires even as political alliances become very confusing. After all, *P. noxius* may be the best class warrior we now have. It eats up the conditions of its being and it destroys what capital provides as the condition of its normative extension. True, it eats up a whole host of other forms of existence in the process. But class war is not a gentle affair. When we become exhausted trying to solve this problem, we can swap our telescope for a set of binoculars, looking across the specific human modes of existence in and across specific social geographies. In other words, we can give up trying to find a golden rule for universal inclusion that will avoid local injustices and focus on local problems. Say, in the case of this text, I stake an allegiance with my Indigenous friends and colleagues in the Northern Territory of Australia. Here we see that it is not humans who have exerted such malignant force on the meteorological, geological, and biological dimension of the earth but only some modes of human sociality. Thus we start differentiating one sort of human and its modes of existence from another. But right when we think we have a location – these versus those – our focus must immediately extend over and outward. The global nature of climate change, capital, toxicity, and discursivity immediately demands we look elsewhere than where we are standing. We have to follow the flows of the toxic industries whose by-products seep into foods, forests, and aquifers, and visit the viral transit lounges that join species through disease vectors. As we stretch the local across these

seeping transits we need not scale up to the Human or the global, but we cannot remain in the local. We can only remain *here-ish*.

In other words, the Anthropocene and its companion concept of climate change should not be seen merely as meteorological and geological events but as a set of political and conceptual disturbances that emerged in the 1960s – the radical environmental movement, Indigenous opposition to mining, the concept of Gaia and the whole earth – and these disturbances are now accelerating the problem of how late liberalism will govern difference and markets globally. My purpose is not to adjudicate which antagonisms and protagonists we choose but to demonstrate how the object of concern has taken residence in and across competing struggles for existence, implicating how we conceptualize scale, event, circulation, and being. No matter how geologists end up dating the break between the Holocene and Anthropocene, the concept of the Anthropocene has already had a dramatic impact on the organization of critical thought, cultural politics, and geopolitical governance in and across the global north and south. And this conceptual impact is one of the effects and causes of the crumbling of the self-evident distinction of Life and Nonlife, fundamental to biopolitics. As the geographer Kathryn Yusoff notes, biopolitics is increasingly “subtended by geology.”⁸ The possibility that humans, or certain forms of human existence, are such an overwhelming malignant force that Life itself faces planetary extinction has changed the topical foci of the humanities and humanistic social sciences and the quantitative social sciences and natural sciences.⁹ The emergence of the geological concept of the Anthropocene and the meteorological modeling of the carbon cycle, the emergence of new synthetic natural sciences such as biogeochemistry, the proliferation of new object ontologies (new materialists, speculative materialists, speculative realists, and object-oriented ontologies), all point to the perforating boundary between the autonomy of Life and its opposition to and difference from Nonlife. Take, for example, the humanities.

As the future of human life – or a human way of life – is put under pressure from the heating of the planet, ontology has reemerged as a central problem in philosophy, anthropology, literary and cultural studies, and in science and technology studies. Increasingly not only can critical theorists not demonstrate the superiority of the human to other forms of life – thus the rise of posthumanist politics and theory – but they also struggle to maintain a difference that makes a difference between all forms of Life and the category of Nonlife. Critical theory has

04/11



Karrabing Film Collective, *Windjarrameru, The Stealing C*nt\$, 2015.*

lengthy reports from the “Cathedral.”

Let us conclude by going back to the Enlightenment and its world process. Philosophy is fundamental to revolutions, affirmed Condorcet, since it changes at a single stroke the basic principles of politics, society, morality, education, religion, international relations, and legislation.²⁸ Such a notion of philosophy has to be turned towards the question of thinking for a new world history. Maybe we should grant to thinking a task opposite the one given to it by Enlightenment philosophy: to fragment the world according to difference instead of universalizing through the same; to induce the same through difference, instead of deducing difference from the same. A new world-historical thinking has to emerge in the face of the meltdown of the world.

x

All posters above were originally found on HestiaSociety.org, an image-based website loosely affiliated with neoreactionary thought.

11/12

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e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Yuk Hui
On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries

1 Peter Thiel, "The Straussian Moment," in *Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture: Politics and Apocalypse*, ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 189–218.

2 Ibid., 207.

3 The reference to "the unhappy consciousness" is meant to suggest that neoreactionary thinking is a skepticism which cannot get out of itself, similar to what Hegel argued in his discussion of stoicism and skepticism in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel saw skepticism as a duplication of self-consciousness, an essential aspect of the Spirit not yet in unity: "The Unhappy Consciousness is the consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely contradictory being." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 126 (§206–207).

4 Ibid., 455 (§752).

5 See Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1979), 197, 207.

6 Ibid., 207.

7 Oswald Spengler, *The Hour of Decision: German and World-Historical Evolution* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2002 (1934)), 142–45.

8 Readers may want to refer to Philip Sandifer's *Neoreaction: A Basilisk* (forthcoming), which details the emergence of the neoreactionaries and their main thinkers such as Eliezer Yudkowsky, Nick Land, and especially Mencius Moldbug. In the present essay I will have a different focus.

9 Ishaan Tharoor, "The man who declared the 'end of history' fears for democracy's future," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2017 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/02/09/the-man-who-declared-the-end-of-history-fears-for-democracys-future/?postshare=6401487082770512&tid=ss_fb-bottom&utm_term=.c0e3e2ace10e.

10 See <https://www.cato-unbound.org/2009/04/13/peter-thiel/education-libertarian>.

11 Nick Land, "The Dark Enlightenment"

<http://www.thedarkenlightenment.com/the-dark-enlightenment-by-nick-land/>. All subsequent Land quotes are from this text unless otherwise indicated.

12 Jacobitism was a movement in Great Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which fought to restore the divine right of kings.

13 See Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

14 Milton Friedman, "The Hong Kong Experiment" <http://www.hoover.org/research/hong-kong-experiment>.

15 Bruno Latour, "Is Re-modernization Occurring – And If So, How to Prove It?" *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2003): 35–48. Cited by Ulrich Beck, Wolfgang Bonss, and Christoph Lau, "The Theory of Reflexive Modernization: Problematic, Hypotheses and Research Program," *ibid.*, 1.

16 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 104.

17 Nick Land, "Meltdown," [ccru.net](http://www.ccrunet.net/swarm1/1_melt.htm), 1997 http://www.ccrunet.net/swarm1/1_melt.htm.

18 Just a reminder that radical thinkers like Diderot and d'Holbach were very skeptical of Anne Robert Jacques Turgot's laissez-faire economic principles, since they were open to all sorts of "friponnerie," demanding strict vigilance and intervention from the government. See Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind*, 117–18.

19 Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory* (London: Arktos, 2012), 9.

20 Ibid., 34.

21 Ibid., 29.

22 Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotronics* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2016).

23 The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 2014 <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/the-invisible-committee-to-our-friends.html>.

24 See Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary*

Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 101.

25 In his book *Zero to One*, Thiel himself made a comparison between "founders" (entrepreneurs) and scapegoats: "Who makes an effective scapegoat? Like founders, scapegoats are extreme and contradictory figures. On the one hand, a scapegoat is necessarily weak; he is powerless to stop his own victimization. On the other hand, as the one who can defuse conflict by taking the blame, he is the most powerful member of the community."

26 Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, 38.

27 Peter Thiel, "Competition is for Losers," *Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2014 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/peter-thiel-competition-is-for-losers-1410535536>.

28 Israel, *Revolution of the Mind*, 45.

12/12

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Yuk Hui On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries

helped create the modern disciplines of biology and geology, the carbon bomb it set off also slowly and then seemingly suddenly made these disciplinary distinctions differences of a different sort. From the perspective of the planetary carbon cycle, what difference does the difference between Life and Nonlife make? What new disciplinary combinations and alliances are necessary under the pressure of Anthropogenic climate change? Moreover, if industrial capital was the cause of the modern discipline of geology and thus the secret origin of the new geological era and its disciplinary supports, why didn't we name and shame it rather than the Human? Indeed, Jason W. Moore has suggested that what we are calling the Anthropocene might be more accurately called the Capitalocene – what we are really witnessing are the material conditions of the last five hundred years of capitalism.⁴ In Dennis Dimick's poetic rephrasing, the Anthropocene and climate change reflect nothing so much as industrial capitalism's dependence on "ancient sunshine."⁵ Other names proliferate: the Plantationocene, the Anglocene, the Chthulucene ...

How and why various scholars choose one geohistorical nomenclature or peg over another helps illuminate how geontopower is supported in, and supports, natural life and critical life, and the ways in which all specific forms of existence, whether humans or others, are being governed in late liberalism. As the authors of a recent piece in *Nature* note, changes to the earth system are heterogeneous and diachronous, diffused and differential geographies that only appear as instantaneous earth events when viewed from the perspective of millions of years of stratigraphic compression.⁶ But while all stratigraphic markers necessitate a "clear, datable marker documenting a global change that is recognizable in the stratigraphic record, coupled with auxiliary stratotypes documenting long-term changes to the Earth system," the Anthropocene presents a specific problem insofar as it cannot rely "on solid aggregate mineral deposits ('rock') for the boundary"; it is "an event horizon largely lacking fossils" and thus must find a different basis for a global boundary stratotype section and point (a GSSP) "to formalize a time unit that extends to the present and thereby implicitly includes a view of the future."⁷ What is the clearest, materially supportable, and socially disinterested evidence of this new geological age: the carbon layer left from the Industrial Revolution, the CO2 from the changing climate, the atomic signature that followed the atomic bomb?

Contemporary critical theorists may scoff at the idea that any of these markers are disinterested facts in the ground, but we will see

that, from a specific and important angle, critical theory iterates rather than contests key desires of the natural sciences. I take up this point elsewhere. Here it is useful merely to point out how each way of marking the key protagonists in the drama of the Anthropocene results in a different set of ethical, political, and conceptual problems and antagonisms rather than any one of these exiting the contemporary dilemma of geontopower. For instance, from the most literal-minded point of view, the Anthropocene contrasts the human actor to other biological, meteorological, and geological actors. The Human emerges as an abstraction on the one side with the Nonhuman world on the other. When did humans become the dominant force on the world? This way of sorting the world makes sense only from the disciplinary logic of geology, a disciplinary perspective that relies on natural types and species logics. From a geological point of view, the planet began without Life, with Nonlife, out of which, somehow, came sorts of Life. These sorts evolved until one sort threatened to extinguish not only its own sort but all sorts, returning the planet to an original lifelessness. In other words, when the abstraction of the Human is cast as the protagonist of the Anthropocene, a specific set of characters crowd the stage – the Human, the Nonhuman, the Dead, the Never Alive. These characters act out a specific drama: the end of humans excites an anxiety about the end of Life and the end of Life excites an anxiety about the transformation of the blue orb into the red planet, earth becoming Mars, unless Mars ends up having life ... Just as things are getting frothy, however, someone in the audience usually interrupts the play to remind every one that Life and Nonlife and the Human and the Nonhuman are abstractions and distractions from the fact that humans did not create this problem. Rather, a specific mode of human society did, and even there, specific classes and races and regions of humans. After this interruption the antagonism shifts and the protagonists are neither humans and other biological, meteorological, and geological forces, nor Life and Nonlife. The antagonism is between various forms of human life-worlds and their different effects on the given-world.

But none of these ways of narrating the protagonists and antagonists of geontopower provide a clear social or political solution. For example, if we keep our focus on the effect that a mode of human sociality, say liberal capitalism, is having on other forms of life, should we democratize Life such that all forms of existence have a say in the present use of the planet? Or should some forms of existence receive more ballots, or more weight in the voting, than

03/11

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Elizabeth A. Povinelli Geontologies: The Concept and Its Territories



Karrabing Film Collective, *Windjarrameru, The Stealing C*nt\$, 2015*. Film still

Xin Wang
**Asian Futurism
 and the Non-
 Other**

In the Chinese version of *Star Trek*, Liu awakes from prolonged cryogenic sleep and discovers a note: “Welcome, Law! [Cantonese version of Liu]. In the next five years you’ll be in charge of the spaceship alone, and the long dark nights will be lonely. Hopefully the delicacies will console your soul. Go check the fridge! – Captain Li Da Mao.” Law opens the fridge only to find endless arrays of dumplings; the Cantonese food he had packed is long gone. Law: a lonely Cantonese dude in the Universe.

– Daguguguji (a popular Weibo user who generates incisively absurdist, trolling, yet provocatively relevant memes), November 11, 2015

We meet again for the first time at Tahrir Square, we meet again for the first time at Zuccotti Park, we meet again for the first time at Taksim Square.

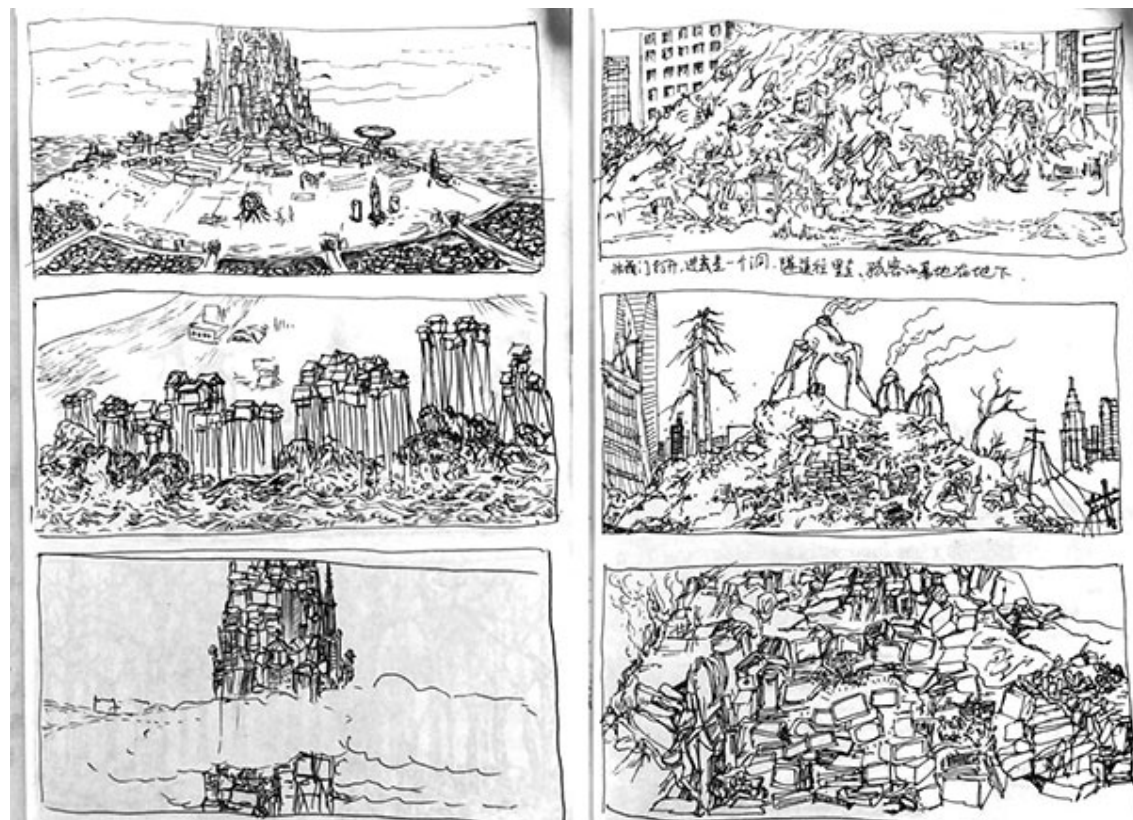
– overheard and perhaps incorrectly transcribed from Raqs Media Collective’s performance *The Last International*, 2013

1. Spoiler Alert

In February 1989, the year the World Wide Web was born, Liu Cixin – author of the widely celebrated space opera *Three Body Trilogy* (2006–10) – published his debut sci-fi novel, *China 2185*. The story fast-forwards to a future Chinese society burdened by an aging population largely kept alive mechanically. A new president – a twenty-nine-year-old woman who was recently divorced and lost custody of her child – has just been inaugurated and is immediately challenged by a curious series of events that quickly snowball into a national crisis: Mao and five other deceased Chinese citizens are accidentally “revived” as digital immortals, and soon begin to haunt and compromise the nation’s cyberspace – one of the territories most crucial to its sovereignty.

In the story, the “revival” is presented as an inevitable outcome of achieving a technological singularity, made possible by combining advanced 3-D scanning in molecular holography with supercomputer programming competent enough to simulate human intelligence. While most daily affairs and responsibilities of citizenship are exercised primarily in cyberspace, humans have nevertheless retained their analog attributes. The revived, on the other hand, possess both full consciousness and autonomous human agency despite their complete virtual existence; their superhuman capacities for processing mass information instantaneously become crucial in enabling them to intervene and manipulate the digitally

02/10



Qiu Anxiong's storyboard for *New Classic of Mountains and Seas III* (2016-2017), the last installment in the eponymous trilogy that projects a prehistoric perspective on the phenomena and plight of modernity. Image courtesy of the artist.



Qiu Anxiong's 3-D rendering for *New Classic of Mountains and Seas III* (2016-2017), the last installment in the eponymous trilogy that projects a prehistoric perspective on the phenomena and plight of modernity. Image courtesy of the artist.

Elizabeth A. Povinelli
**Geontologies:
 The Concept
 and Its
 Territories**

01/11

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Elizabeth A. Povinelli
Geontologies: The Concept and Its Territories

Many attribute the crumbling of the self-evident distinction between Life and Nonlife to the challenge that climate change poses in the geological era of the Anthropocene.¹ Since Eugene Stoermer first coined the term “Anthropocene” and Paul Crutzen popularized it, the Anthropocene has meant to mark a geologically defined moment when the forces of human existence began to overwhelm all other biological, geological, and meteorological forms and forces and displace the Holocene. That is, the Anthropocene marks the moment when human existence became the determinate form of planetary existence – and a malignant form at that – rather than merely the fact that humans affect their environment. It’s hardly an uncontroversial concept. Even those geologists who support it do not agree on what criteria should be used to date its beginning. Many criteria and thus many dates have been proposed. Some place it at the beginning of the Neolithic Revolution when agriculture was invented and the human population exploded. Others peg it to the detonation of the atomic bomb, an event that left radioactive sediments in the stratigraphy and helped consolidate a notion of the earth (Gaia) as something that could be destroyed by human action and dramatize the difference between Life as a planetary phenomenon and Nonlife as a coldness of space. Hannah Arendt’s 1963 reflections on the launching of Sputnik and the lost contact “between the world of the senses and the appearances and the physical worldview” would be important here; as would be James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis published two years later in the wake of the revolutionary Apollo 8 picture of earthrise, broadcast live on Christmas Eve 1968.² Still others situate the beginning of the Anthropocene in the coal-fueled Industrial Revolution. While the British phrase “like selling coal to Newcastle” was first recorded in 1538, reminding us of the long history of coal use in Europe, the Industrial Revolution massively expanded the Lancashire, Somerset, and Northumberland coalfields in the eighteenth century, setting off a huge carbon bomb by releasing unheard of tons of hydrocarbons into the atmosphere and resulting in our present climate revolution and, perhaps, the sixth great extinction.³ But the exploitation of the coalfields also uncovered large stratified fossil beds that helped spur the foundation of modern geologic chronology: the earth as a set of stratified levels of being and time. In other words, the concept of the Anthropocene is as much a product of the coalfields as an analysis of their formation insofar as the fossils within the coalfields helped produce and secure the modern discipline of geology and biology. But even as the coalfields

calibrated public sphere. Disembodied, they have become truly immortal – an ontologically different kind of human.

In a remarkably sophisticated yet eerily prescient manner, Liu Cixin explores how this posthuman moment rapidly engulfs social and political life. By 2185, China has long been a fully democratic society thanks to, among other things, the sophistication of its virtual infrastructure, which allows the entire population to chime in on important domestic and international affairs. Liu meticulously details the technological parameters of this infrastructure, which is similar – especially in the mechanisms for processing and prioritizing input – to what we now understand as the semantic web. He imagines that color-coded visualizations of individual attitudes will provide instantaneous indications of consensus, not unlike the angry face emojis flying over the Facebook live-stream of a Sean Spicer press conference. At the emergency meeting called to address the revival, Chinese citizens engage in a heated debate about the “human” rights of the revived, who were initially contained in isolated digital storage, and vote to grant them full access to Chinese cyberspace, where they soon wreak major havoc. As it turns out, the troublemaker is not Mao, but one of the more obscure men among the revived. During his long lifetime he was deeply resentful of the progressive ways of younger generations. Having woken up with newfound superpowers, he retaliates by generating enough autonomous derivatives – a kind of human called a “pulsate” – to form a conservative republic within Chinese cyberspace, ready to overthrow the “outside” government.

Yet Liu Cixin eschews portraying a teleological evil, or even a technological one, which has been a staple in the mainstream rhetoric of science fiction and techno-orientalism. After the pulsates and their republic are terminated by a costly nationwide power cut, the young president receives a letter from the republic with extensive documentation of its history and aspirations, revealing a particularly poignant aspect of its demise: since the pulsates communicate and process information at a speed incomprehensible to humans, they are able to form a full-fledged state and a unique civilization within two hours – roughly equivalent to six hundred years in human time.

China 2185 resists the long-standing dichotomy between hard and soft sci-fi to speculate freely on science and ideology as mutually mediating agents that shape social discourse. Written at a particularly fraught moment in China’s recent history, Liu’s reflections on humanity, democracy, and

nationalism are as trenchant as they are romantic. Significantly, his speculations are grounded in the technological and material realities of the infrastructure of that fictional yet not unlikely future: the computing power required to process of huge amounts of data; the postmortem encoding of cerebral structures; a national ID system and the way it screens citizens for democratic voting; the experience of information as epistemologically and materially burdensome; the coexistence of radically different temporalities. Many of these elements that resonate with contemporary life are explored poetically, as the foundation for new kind of sublime: an entire population represented as a holographic constellation in the Great Hall of People; forms of connectivity – akin to those found in the sci-fi TV series *Sense8* – which create the deep empathy characterizing the nation’s young.

The story does not concern itself with abstract or symbolic representations of power; rather, it offers a totalizing speculation on technological and (hence necessarily) civilizational futures from a Chinese perspective. In a recent issue of *e-flux journal*, philosopher of technology Yuk Hui advocated for “turning technology into a support for culture” rather than merely studying it.¹ Heidegger invokes the ancient Greek term *techne*, reminding us that technology “belongs to the bringing forth, to poiesis: it is something poietic.”² In its capacity to reveal, technology unveils ontological truth and discloses the circumstances in which humanity finds itself – just as Liu Cixin has demonstrated, in novel after novel, that any singularity event in the realm of technology is necessarily a singularity event for humanity, with profound ramifications.

Thinking about speculative futures like *China 2185* primarily in terms of racially oriented identity politics can be a hindrance, if not an insult, to the genre and its conceptual magnetism. The identitarian bias at the heart of Western political thought is too anthropocentric a scope for such critical inquiries. The question that is repeatedly posed these days seems to be: How can we imagine a future with this or that received identity as a dominant cultural and political force? While these speculations often rightly reinforce or complement organized efforts of resistance, they are also limiting and susceptible to *BuzzFeed*-style ideological consumerism and curatorial topicality. What we lack are culturally specific and intellectually rigorous speculations in which identity politics may or may not play a significant role. The rage over Hollywood’s casting of Scarlett Johansson in the new iteration of *Ghost in the Shell* is certainly justified. But wouldn’t it be a more

effective strategy to render Hollywood and its regressive politics obsolete by diverting critical attention elsewhere and expanding the scope of references with which we accumulate momentum for real paradigmatic change? A Hollywood adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* should just be a regional homage to the Japanese classic, and faux multiculturalism rightly taken at (cheap) face value. To think that Hollywood (or any other highly visible, immensely powerful American, European, or – dare I say – Chinese institution) is anything but provincial, or that it is any real benchmark of cosmopolitanism – assumptions that continue to underlie debates on representation and identity – is delusional and unproductive.

It would be absurd to understand the radical premises of a story like *China 2185* solely through the fact that the protagonists are non-white, that Esperanto replaces English as the international language, or that the president and the majority of the government's cyber-army are women. Feminism as a discourse with too specific a (Western) history of struggle is often incompatible with an effective reckoning with cultural contexts elsewhere. Meanwhile, the "othering" gaze will never admit that it only likes to see what it wants to see. This is why embarrassing, bikini-waxed exhibitions claiming to present and represent creative endeavors from broad swaths of culturally and geopolitically volatile regions still take place in established cultural institutions. Efforts to further tighten control over narrative and framing reflect an institutional anxiety about faltering credibility and a diminishing influence over the dominant discourse.

The most resonant part of *China 2185* concerns the very real challenges humanity will experience on multiple fronts in the coming decades: ethical, legal, biological, even teleological. But that future also has a long history, from Freud's anticipation of humanity's transformation via technology into a "prosthetic God" to *Ghost in the Shell*. In *China 2185*, the "pulsates" are a clear example of a threshold separating the human from the post-human condition: technology doesn't simply augment their traditionally-defined human agency, but fundamentally changes their experience of time – the very material of existential history. In its closing chapter, the young female leader has an exchange regarding the calamities with Mao, who offers some illuminating, Marxist views on the immortality of the pulsates, arguing that their eternal life is equivalent to eternal death:

To live is to change, to live forever is to change forever. Within a hundred years, the phenomenal world may still revolve around

the same set of underlying principals, but given eternity, those principles are bound to change. In fact, it doesn't take eternity; ten thousand years will be more than enough to completely transform what was once considered fundamental. Those foundations will have in effect ceased to exist, and what is alive will be something brand new...Whatever remains unchanged is essentially already dead.³

That time is an unstable, or rather destabilized, agent in both historical reckoning and speculative thinking is already part of a wider consensus. Tropes of quasi-primitive societies and religious symbolism have persistent visibility in the post-apocalyptic genre and other aspects of contemporary cultural imagination (music videos and music-video-like video art); artist Qiu Anxiong considers *the Matrix* as a sci-fi expression of the Buddhist experience in the phenomenal world. But the truth is we have never been secular. By which I don't simply mean the resurgence of religious extremism, or panspiritualism and mindfulness promoted by "California Zen"; I am also referencing the open display of prayers and acts of passionate devotion from a variety of religious practices on the soccer pitch and the e-commerce of instant salvation on Weibo, where hordes of "verified" users self-identified as spiritual leaders of esoteric sects of Buddhism routinely offer "enlightened" prayer beads and other devotional or talismanic objects. Religious thought, which used to guide human behavior and perception of the world, remains an important source that mediates our connection to the unknown. Artist Lu Yang routinely taps into neuroscience to reinterpret how idol-making and worship might still operate in today's public life, visual culture, and our evolving relationship – collective and personal – with the gods, as human beings push towards new transformative thresholds. For her latest project *Delusional Crime and Punishment* (2016), the artist wonders "whether the sensations and sufferings described in naraka, or Buddhist purgatory, can be known from our own physiological experiences and empirical knowledge."⁴ Other projects have considered halos in religious iconography through prosthesis, post-gender super heroes, and Sahasra cosmology's prescient model of constellations of worlds, which now constitutes foundational scientific understanding of the universe.

Consider also the essay "Representation in the Real" by art historian Zainab Bahrani.⁵ It features an elaborate philosophical and semiotic exploration of *salmu*, the Assyro-Babylonian concept of image or likeness – except *salmu* has

Arthur Jafa is a visual artist, filmmaker, cinematographer, and TNEG (motion picture studio) cofounder born in Tupelo, Mississippi and currently residing in Los Angeles. Renowned for his cinematography on Julie Dash's pioneering film *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Jafa, also the film's coproducer, put into practice techniques he had long been theorizing. 'Black Visual Intonation' is but one of his radical notions about re-conceptualizing film. He is the director of *Slowly This* (1995), *Tree* (1999), and *Deshotten 1.0* (2009). Jafa was the director of photography on Spike Lee's *Crooklyn* (1994), Isaac Julien's *Darker Shade of Black* (1994), *A Litany for Survival* (1995), Ada Gay Griffin and Michelle Parkerson's biographical film on the late Audre Lorde, John Akomfrah's *Seven Songs for Malcolm X* (1993), Manthia Diawara's *Rouch in Reverse* (2000), Nefertite Nguvu's *In the Morning* (2014) and shot second unit on Ava DuVernay's *Selma* (2014). *Dreams are Colder Than Death*, a documentary directed and shot by Jafa to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech, garnered acclaim at the LA Film Festival, NY Film Festival and Black Star Film Festival where it won Best Documentary. His writing on black cultural politics has appeared in various publications such as *Black Popular Culture* and *Everything But the Burden*, among others. Jafa's notable solo, group, gallery and museum exhibitions include Artists Space, New York, NY (1999); Okwui Enwezor's traveling exhibition *Mirror's Edge* BildMuseum – University of Umea in Sweden / Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada / Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy / Tramway, Glasgow, Scotland (1999); 2000 Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Black Box, CCAC Institute, Oakland, CA (2000); Media City Seoul, Korea (2000); *Bitstreams*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2001); Social Formal, Westaelischer Kunstvein, Münster, Germany (2002); *My Black Death*, ARTPACE, San Antonio, (2002); The Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA (2016); The Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA (2016); Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York, NY (2016). Jafa will hold forthcoming solo exhibitions of his work at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, MI; and The Serpentine Gallery, London, UK later in 2017; his work is on view at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

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04/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Xin Wang
Asian Futurism and the Non-Other

09/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Arthur Jafa and Tina Campt
Love is the Message, the Plan is Death

on. You cannot oppress people without expending a certain type of psychic energy, unless the whole mechanism, the whole superstructure is supporting that understanding of the oppressed as being less human, less feeling than you are. I think you learn empathy. I think empathy is taught.

I was a cinematographer on this film *Daughters of the Dust* thirty years ago. *Daughters*, for those who don't know, is about a black family at the turn of the century in South Carolina – they're trying to decide if they should stay off-land, you know off the mainland, on the island. Of if they should go to the mainland and become a part of society at large. It's very much a film about Africans, African-Americans, becoming black.

The most memorable experience I've had talking about the film was at the New School. We showed the film and then afterwards we were talking, and I'll never forget this older white woman stood up and said, "This is an amazing film. When I see this film I don't see color. I see my grandmother. I don't see color when I see this film." And she was a very nice lady but I remember asking her, "Why can't you see color and see your grandmother?" Like why is that a split, you know? Why do you have to erase her blackness in order to see your grandmother in this woman? I think that's what's at stake. It comes to empathy.

The classic way in which cinema works is that you identify with the people on screen. You go to see a movie and you identify with somebody being projected. Generally, you identify with the good guy. And there's a whole battery of things, lighting, costumes, and everything that filmmakers use to get clear about who's going to be the good guy and who we are supposed to identify with. And one of the things that was radical about *Daughters*, if something was radical about it, was when you went to see that film the only subject positions you could occupy were those of black women. There's no other subject position. You can't even find white guys as bad guys. It's just black women, right? *Daughters* is what it does. It's not going to change people's attitudes but it does make it harder to pretend as if black women are less human because now you have to pick one to identify with. It erodes one of the psychic mechanisms in place that lets you pretend that that person has less feelings, less whatever, less humanity than you do, right?

So I'm very preoccupied with how the work that I do is trying to expand narrow notions of who we are. Who is "we"? You know, who identifies with what? This whole idea of empathy being learned. We know that women have better empathy muscles than men. Because they get to

08/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Arthur Jafa and Tina Campt
Love Is the Message, the Plan Is Death

go to films where they don't see themselves and they project themselves anyway. They get to exercise that muscle.

People of color have better empathy in cinema because they go to cinema all the time where they don't see figures that look anything like them and they have to have the capacity to project themselves into that space and empathetically take that experience. We need more cinema because we need more spaces for more types of people to be able to exercise their empathy muscles.

So it's one of the reasons I'm not interested in making films with white folks. I'm really interested in making work that is always foregrounding black people's humanity even when they are bad guys or good guys. I like *Alien* because I'm a big fan of the alien. I'm a big fan of Hannibal Lector, who I think is black and passing, basically. I just want to see black people who are complex. And competent at what they do, even if they're mad geniuses or whatever.

TC: I think that we should try and wrap up.

AJ: Well, hold up, I have to show something else. When I do these talks and then I show these things everybody's like, "Oh, it's just so heavy." It's so this, it's so that, but you know I like love, too. So I wanted to show something that's sweet and that's got a high love quotient. A more overtly high love quotient.

I just I hate people to go away thinking like, "Golly, man, it must be hard being AJ."

Last thing.

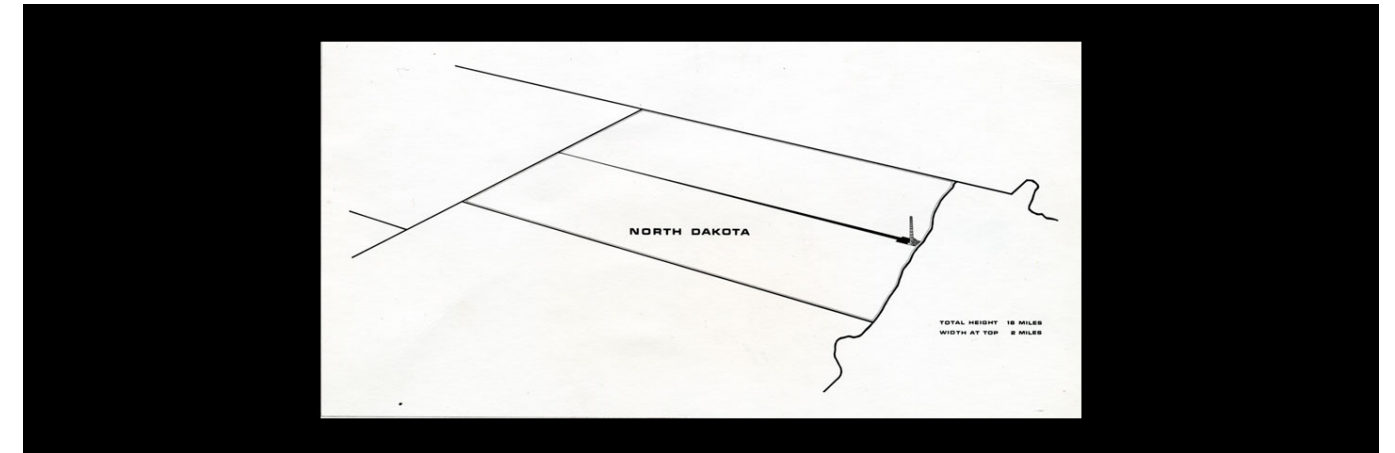
[music]

AJ: Can you get the light?

x

Installation views of *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death* (2016) are courtesy of Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York / Rome.

05/10



Siah Armajani, *North Dakota Tower*, 1968. The work considers a hypothetical monument, sited at the eastern edge of North Dakota, capable of casting a shadow that covers the entire width of the state. According to the artist's calculation, the monument will measure 18 miles tall. Collection of MAMCO Museum of Contemporary Art Geneva, image courtesy of the artist.



Morehshin Allahyari, *Material Speculation: ISIS*, 2015. 3D-printed Lamasu with a flash drive; the side details showcase flash drives and memory cards inside other 3D-printed objects.

a much more complex and potent meaning than “image” in English. Bahrani defines it as a “configuration that enables presence through reproduction” – as an ontological category rather than an aesthetic concept.⁶ To fully capture the distinct parameters that define *salmu*, Bahrani resorts to Baudrillard’s four stages of the image, along with other critiques of representation from the European philosophical canon. The curious phenomenon here is the strong pull that the dominant discourse of philosophy has on critical thinking, even as it continues to specialize in recuperative acts of putative self-deconstruction, thereby ironically perpetuating its power. Must we always resort to this canon, however brilliant or seemingly reliable it is, to approximate something different and *outside*? Perhaps only when we have sufficiently expanded our references – when terms like *salmu* are thrown around as casually as Saussure is in intellectual discourse – will we truly begin to inhabit not only a different world but many worlds simultaneously.

2. The Non-Other and Its Discontents

In 2014, when the art world embroiled itself in year-round celebrations of the internet’s quarter centennial, there were ample and thoughtful reflections on its multifaceted legacy, tracing the trajectory from early net art to “post-internet.” Yet the fact that the World Wide Web has never been worldwide – a fundamental reality for anyone living outside Europe or North America – was scarcely acknowledged or explored. Not that being late to the game has proven to be disadvantageous; on the contrary, the later a nation arrives at mass internet culture, the more nimble and innovative its adaptation tends to be, as the tech world has long acknowledged.⁷ (In contrast, the rhetoric of “belatedness” still permeates – and is still resisted – in the global discourse on modernism.) If a fact as germane as the uneven global distribution of the Web can be lost in the thicket of glaringly familiar, entrenched, and uncontested assumptions, one can only imagine the precarious trajectories faced by other intellectual and artistic inquiries in the long postmodern, postmedium, postcolonial moment we still find ourselves in.

More awkwardly, as curators and scholars working on modernism have come to treat their subjects with greater care and thoughtfulness – studying the languages, problematizing the historical frameworks, charting multiple temporalities and forms of ownership – many otherwise intelligent people working with contemporary, and particularly digital, materials seem to operate with the astounding illusion that the interconnected world is indeed flat and flattening. Entirely too much evidence testifies to

the alarming assumption that somehow art practices as volatile as quicksand can be captured by retaining vast networks of advisors and translators on safari-like research trips. The search for the next exotic frontier has already exhausted the earth’s surface – in every sense of the word – and we are reduced to waiting for the inevitable Antarctic Biennale. Naturally, attention has shifted to the speculative realms of cyberspace and science fiction.

And this is where things start to get tricky. Just as it has been more or less established that there are multiple modernities, the temporalities of the post-internet condition are, by nature, even more erratically stacked. The illusions of instant accessibility and simultaneity mask the elementary reality that time functions differently – radically so – across the web. The Chinese language alone, for instance, exhibits a remarkable range of temporalities in cyberspace. Antiquarian usages are still broadly employed – both earnestly and sarcastically – while new semiotic spaces and topic-specific discourses – evident in digital subcultures and nimble censorship-circumventing strategies – are being generated with exhilarating speed. Korean, Japanese, and English terms are swiftly and pragmatically borrowed without translation, absorbed, and put into wide circulation, mutating through lifecycles that span a matter of hours. This crucial significance of linguistic structure as an exogenous influence on internet discourse explains why even the most vigilant proponents of the “post-internet” discourse on art fail to grapple with any area of cyberspace mediated by languages other than major Western ones.

Consider the simultaneous and accumulating commentaries floating across online videos. These “bullet screens” enable real-time production of languages and syntax. The distortion of time-space that, according to the theory of relativity, occurs at very high speeds – a popular sci-fi trope seen in films such as *Interstellar* – may not be too far-fetched an analogy for the experience of different linguistically- and culturally-specific cyberspaces. The post-internet condition only accelerates relativity and differentiation. It is a fundamentally linguistic condition – not simply in the sense of language, but also because it concerns what is in circulation and how specific forms of circulation mediate meaning, including that of visual materials (especially those not conspicuously characterized by internet fashionableness).

This is why, when dealing with cultural production informed by these new temporal and semantic algorithms, translation has never been less effective. It can’t keep up. There is

front of them? How do you actually make people see it? And also, simultaneously, how do you see beauty? There’s something to be said about the ability to see beauty everywhere. I think it’s something black people have developed because we are not authorized – we are not affirmed – and so we’ve actually learned not just how to imbue moments with joy but how to see beauty in places where beauty doesn’t necessarily exist.

In the previous film I made, *Dreams are Colder Than Death*, there is a moment when Hortense Spillers utters a startling formulation about the difference between the body and flesh. She says the flesh gives empathy. That’s what I feel like I’m trying to manipulate in order to get at some sort of rendering of how black people feel now. The work feels very constructed to me; I’m struggling with it. Does the constructedness of it in any way undermine the real emotions that are elicited?

TC: But that’s the thing about the mechanics of empathy. Are you trying to get us to think about the constructedness of empathy? At this point in time, do we have any choice? Do we have any choice in terms of what empathy is?

AJ: I think empathy is maybe the single most important thing that’s at issue now in society. We know that the process of oppressing

people requires the person who is oppressing a person to dehumanize them. I mean this is the oldest strategy. We’ve seen it time and time again. We see it in Nazi Germany. They put people in situations where their humanity is thrown into question because it’s like, somebody said to me recently if you throw a bunch of crabs in a barrel it’s gonna look as if the barrel were the natural habitat of the crabs – you know? It’s going to produce and elicit certain kinds of behavior which, considered ahistorically, will appear to be innate, rather than just an adaption to the exceptional circumstances of the barrel. Same thing if you throw people into a barrel, they will make it look more natural than it is in the process of surviving the situation.

The people who are dehumanizing people are trying to maintain or hold onto the sense of their own humanity. If I step on a bug, I know maybe the American Society for the Protection of Animals might get mad, but I’m really not stressing it too deeply when I step on a roach. I’m just not. I don’t think about whether the roach has a family and children or anything like that. I just step on it. But you can’t do that with human beings unless in some way you convince yourself that they’re bugs. So the whole issue of empathy is what’s at stake around everything that’s going



churches, they're not Catholic churches; they're Protestant. And we know the distance between Protestant Christianity and Catholicism has a lot to do with their relationship to the visual.¹ So song and dance and these kind of things found support in the black church while visualization didn't.

Even if you go to somebody like Basquiat – one of his parents is Haitian and one is Puerto Rican. This is not a small fact because if you go to Haiti, Brazil, or other places where Catholicism is the dominant religious form that black people practice, you'll find more openness towards visual expression, particularly as it coalesced around describing saints and things like this. Whereas in the Protestant church that wasn't there.

Black American social dance functions in a space where there is no sort of external authority dictating what's good or what's not good – meaning that there is no commodification. Not that there's anything wrong with the amazing modernist dance that black folks do as well, but when you go to a social or popular dance, everyone is dancing and the dopest dance is the dopest dance. The person who is dancing who has the most charisma, who's doing the most amazing thing, is self-authorizing in a sense, right? Cornell was onto something but he mischaracterized it. It's not that there was black *visual* underdevelopment – there was what I call black *pictorial* underdevelopment.

We need to make the distinction between the visual and the pictorial because we apprehend dance visually. So I was really trying to think through what's going on when black people dance. On a phenomenological level, what's going on? I came up with the two things that black Americans are acutely sensitive to. One is rhythm. Everybody's familiar with the idea that black people have an acute sensitivity to rhythms. But there's another thing that people have a harder time putting their hands on, which is an acute sensitivity to what I term *vectors*, or spatial arrays.

One place you see this is in basketball. A person can move around and from almost anywhere on the floor can throw that ball into a trajectory where it'll arc and it will go through that hoop. You see the same thing in soccer – like with Pelé. And with capoeira. Stuff started to have an impact on how people operated in space. So there's this acute sensitivity to space.

And I started saying, "Oh, black people can predict the future" – and that sounds really crazy, but what I mean is that they have this acute sensitivity to vectors and trajectories. If a person throws a ball, they have to calculate on the fly the speed and trajectory at which that object has to be launched so that it's going to

land in a pre-designated point. A lot of times you're not talking about a fixed target. You're talking about a person who's moving in space with a person who's trying to stop them and they still have to predict what that ball is going to do.

I think when black people dance, a lot of what's happening is this play of setting up a series of vectors and then breaking them. Like a pun. The obvious example is Michael Jackson and the moonwalk. He looks like he's going in one direction but he's actually going in another direction. Something similar happens if I throw the ball to a moving target. If you can't anticipate where it's supposed to land, you can't appreciate when it does or is going to do something different. You have to perceive those two different things simultaneously. It's really about flow – flow through figures. I have been preoccupied these last three years with this whole question of flow through figures. And this dovetails with your distinction between motion and movement.

TC: Going back to Cornell – and forgetting whatever his judgment or assessment of black visual culture is, or its underdevelopment – and talking instead about it being the site of authorization: dance is visible in the church, as you say. Consider the importance the Pentecostal movement places on the visible black body possessed by Christ. The church actually becomes a site of navigating those vectors, visually enacting a specific trajectory of bodily motion.

AJ: We're here in Harlem at Gavin Brown's Enterprise. Gavin has said to me a couple times, "There's so much energy here. How do we tap that energy?" And I said to Gavin, "Oh, that's an ongoing project because even the Studio Museum that's been here for thirty years is constantly trying to figure out how to tap into energy. How do we get people in here?" So we got into this whole thing. We created these posters. And the posters we chose have these lynching images. And so there was a lot of back and forth about the appropriateness of putting these things in the street. My thing was like well, first of all, there's something to be said for just making explicit what is oftentimes implicit – which is that black people just get killed like we're not human beings. How do you put something in the space so that it can cut through the noise? There's a lot of ambiguity about the appropriateness of having an image of a man getting murdered. But this footage is all over the place. It's everywhere. It's not like we're talking about digging some stuff out of the archives that nobody's seen.

It's literally everywhere so the question becomes: How do you situate it so that actually people see it as opposed to just having it pass in

guaranteed semiotic breakage at every interpretive turn. Speaking the language isn't enough; one has to speak the meme in order to meaningfully participate, even as a spectator. The Englishness (English in the linguistic sense) and Britishness (British in the cultural and ideological sense) of Boaty McBoatface, for instance, can never be meaningfully translated.⁸ Fluency is no guarantee of comprehension when memes become ever more culturally, politically, and linguistically specific. Such an intricate set of specificities creates different kinds of representational politics which are too often reduced to postcolonial thought and American racial dynamics, both widely mistaken as universal. Curatorial or academic efforts to find digestible, local manifestations of the dominant "post-internet" rhetoric usually end up finding no more than preconceived spectacles. Of course, anyone can try to understand Chinese cyberspace without speaking the language, but it would be nearly impossible to fathom its quirks and glitches to say nothing of its heart of darkness.

The obligation towards translation is sinister. The "other" has gained a voice, but only to continuously explain, qualify, and make sense of itself. The dense hermeneutics of context-

explaining takes up much of the space necessary for the real dialogue required by any ambitiously speculative and interdisciplinary artistic practices operating outside the Euro-American epistemological comfort zone. More insidious is the continued prevalence of self-exoticizing art practices with built-in, bite-size, self-explanatory mechanisms. From the perspective of contemporary China, many have begun to realize the absurdity of a patronizing, well-intentioned, supposedly self-critical postcolonial gaze cast upon a cultural entity that never had an internalized colonial history (not to mention the colonial legacy of China); that gaze in turn attracts artistic and curatorial practices that cater and subscribe – consciously or otherwise – to the seductive charm of a fake intellectual consensus, albeit one with very real power at its disposal. The international curatorial circuit is permeated by such smug moral grandstanding. Experimental capacity within new forms of knowledge and aesthetic production is crippled or foreclosed in advance by the handsome rewards awaiting superficial engagements that turn a blind eye to the full, uncomfortable potency of their subjects.⁹

When asked about his choice of embodying a female astronaut figure for a project

06/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Arthur Jafa and Tina Campt
Love Is the Message, the Plan Is Death

07/10



Lu Yang, *Delusional Mandala – Crystal*, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist.

encompassing video installation and performance, artist Ming Wong responded: “A male figure is too obvious... a female space explorer is a place for people to project their own desires.” What’s more baffling, however, is the accompanying research-based pastiche of (mostly) female Chinese astronauts mined for speculative source material. What of the unique agency of these variegated characters? Some, as sci-fi classics such as the *Three Body Trilogy* handily show, are convincing as both savior and sociopath rather than cute, projection-ready meta tropes; their complex characteristics are thoughtfully developed and ideologically congruent with the distinct and distinctly problematic Maoist feminist legacy, which deserves more inspired reflection than being subsumed into trendy forms of identity performance and collaged fantasia.¹⁰ The art-star-studded *Ann Lee* franchise, which invites collaborative meditation on a manga character – a purple-haired Asian girl, no less – licensed from a Japanese agency, exhibits a mind-blowing obliviousness towards the cultural logic of that character in its original context of circulation. In contrast to the world of manga and other fandoms in which copyright, ownership, and authorship are transacted loosely, the *Ann Lee* project – which recently received generous exposure at the Whitney’s “Dreamlands” exhibition – divides and distributes absolute ownership. In Tino Sehgal’s iteration, young actresses are hired to “reanimate” *Ann Lee*. Sehgal asserts his authorship through scripts recited by the actresses, exposing an anachronistic desire for ownership in the face of digital cultures and subcultures defined, in some sense, by their opposition to this sort of personal branding.

The post-internet condition has also transformed the game of self-reflexivity in art and its medium. Art practitioners can no longer monopolize or even excel at this form of introspection, which is being overtaken by the most inspired TV shows, video games, and even memes. The eclipse extends to other familiar strategies of research-based art-making. For instance, in the video game *Resident Evil 6*, for instance, an entirely useless hallway appears on a dragon boat in post-apocalyptic Hong Kong; no storyline nor supplies to scavenge, just pure virtual world-building. At the end of the hallway is an elaborate painting of Mao reading to young children under a flowering tree. The level of contextual awareness and attentiveness to ideological nuance in an utterly trivial embellishment is uncanny, reflecting the critical capacity of the game makers.

The Islamic State’s use of social media is another phenomenon of the globalized internet

08/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Xin Wang
Asian Futurism and the Non-Other

that exposes epistemological cracks and misalignments. In a shrewd propaganda move, the Islamic State employs social media to promote its destruction of treasured world heritage sites, tapping into the West’s long standing misperception of Islam’s historical iconophobia to doubly reinforce its legitimacy through self-essentialization. Art historian Finbarr Barry Flood has eloquently examined the political and ideological nuances of this phenomenon by contextualizing it within historical discourses on Islamic art’s “image problem.”¹¹ He cites Ömür Harmanşah’s admonition that “we must responsibly consider the possibility that what we treat on our Facebook profiles, tweets, and blogs as documentation of violence is in fact the *raison d’être* of ISIS’s biopolitics.”¹² Far from being superficially antagonistic and sensationalized images of destruction, ISIS’s viral social media propaganda references a deep history, recalibrated through new technological temporalities.

Speaking of strange times and temporalities, it seems that late capitalism and soft-power warfare have laid the groundwork for the arrival of films like *The Great Wall* (2016). A Chinese blockbuster intended for wide release in both China and the US, the film features Matt Damon as a foreign mercenary in ancient China who ends up playing a prominent role in defending the country against violent beasts trying to breach “the wall.” Widely panned for its cultural tone-deafness, the film nevertheless holds up an ironic mirror to Hollywood’s own twisted and hypocritical identity politics. The art world, with its similarly problematic politics of otherness, seems more inclined to celebrate new art industries rather than cultivating genuine possibilities for new art discourses. As long as the patronizing “othering” gaze operates from the comfortable position of pre-framing, post-translating power – however mindful it is (or appears to be) of its problematic position – the “radically Other” of Foucault, that “something that doesn’t yet exist and about which we cannot know and what it will be,” will be forever elusive, unrecognized in plain sight, even foreclosed.¹³

3. A-Futurism

Dawn Chan begins her essay on Asian Futurism in the summer 2016 issue of *Artforum* with a provocative question: “Is it possible to be othered across time?”¹⁴ In contrast to the widely perceived notion of otherness as something lodged in geographical narratives, Chan is interested in its discursive and dynamic tensions over time, finding registers in the Asian American experience, cultural appropriation, and representation – or the lack there of – in the art

the culture that’s going to survive in the future is the culture that you carry around in your head.

The Middle Passage is a great example of that. Despite the fact that we came with all these incredible expressive traditions, black people tend to be strong in those spaces where the cultural traditions could be carried on by the nervous system. Architecture, painting, sculpture, those kinds of things tended to erode very very quickly, in contrast to things like dance, or oral traditions of whatever kind.

TC: Speaking of dance, it seems like in your work the motion of bodies is really crucial and it has to do with what we were talking about earlier, the relationship of black people to spatial navigation. There’s bodies and movement in violence and bodies in motion through dance – which is not always choreography – it’s a relationship to rhythm or music and then bodies in motion through athleticism, right?

So you’ve got Mohammed Ali, you’ve got the basketball – you’ve actually got the fans around the basketball court [doing the Swag Surf] who are synchronizing with the people on the floor, and this connects with what you were telling me about how you understand black people’s capacity to navigate space.

AJ: One of the reasons I spend so much time

05/10

thinking about music is because music is a great place to actually think through ideas that you can also share with people. Particularly black folks: we know all the music. We know everything that anybody’s ever made.

We can sing all the songs – even if you don’t know the words – we know the trajectory and the inflections and things like that. But increasingly I became interested in dance, African-American social dance. I was trying to think through what is happening when people actually dance. The first interview I ever read with Cornell West, in the early ’80s, he was talking in that expansive encyclopedic way about black culture and somebody asked about black visual culture and his response was, “As far as I can tell it’s not very apparent.” It set off a little bit of a shitstorm. Howardena Pindell was like, “Cornell’s ignorant. He doesn’t know what black visual artists have done. He’s giving ammunition to those racist forces that were wanting to keep black people out of this particular arena of the visual arts.” But I remember West went on and said, “I think the reason why it’s underdeveloped is because it never found support in the only institution that black people had, which was the church.”

And there’s reasons for this too, right? Most black churches are Baptist and Methodist





world and at large. There is, however, a danger in accepting the implication that *otherness* necessarily operates from a place of deficiency, which threatens to essentialize what is in fact radically heterogeneous.

In their illuminating introductory essay for a collection of texts on “Techno-Orientalism,” David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu examine this essentializing of otherness as a product of the uneasy, continuous encounter between a technologically advanced/dominant Asia, and a West that saw it as both aspiration and threat.¹⁵ Techno-orientalism, as they observe, has often been perpetuated through science fiction, due to the genre’s propensity for projecting and amplifying contemporary racial and imperialist attitudes. They argue that “if SF and its variants in historiography, cinema, and new media provide the content of techno-orientalist expressions, we believe that Asian American studies equips us with the best critical and theoretical toolboxes for documentation and interrogation.”¹⁶ This approach may be productive for interrogating sci-fi materials with problematic representations of Asian subjects (histories of struggle should be given due attention.) But this approach might also risk giving these materials more attention than they deserve, unwittingly confining critical reflections on speculative art and literature to the narrow arena of representational identity politics, which contributes to the continuing confusion in political, cultural, and curatorial understanding of Asian-American agency versus Asian agency and vice versa. I am not advocating a divisive rhetoric, however, but a rigorous approach to specificity. To paraphrase Judith Butler’s cautionary argument in her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”: in an understandable desire to forge bonds of solidarity, we have often assumed that “the other” has or is a universal experience. But this is a problematic ontological ground for political solidarity.¹⁷

This essay aims to smudge discourses that are suspiciously clean and to undermine certain homogenous methodological apparatuses. The goal is to further interesting chaos. Asian Futurism, a still new and undefined discourse, may have legitimate ideological roots in techno-orientalism, but it is ultimately unhelpful if it remains temporally or regionally defined, or if it limits itself to an established, uncontested system of critique. It should instead propagate different avenues of inquiry that facilitate radical speculation forwards and backwards, anthropocentric or otherwise. It may very well engender new tools for political action but needs not serve any utilitarian end besides producing “strange, new wisdom.”¹⁸

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09/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Xin Wang
Asian Futurism and the Non-Other

Xin Wang is a curator and art historian based in New York. She has worked on special exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and was the associate curator for the 2014 Asian Contemporary Art Week's inaugural FIELD MEETING program. Independent projects included the New York solo debut of artist Lu Yang, The BANK Show: Vive le Capital and The BANK Show: Hito Steyerl in Shanghai. Her writing frequently appears in exhibition catalogues, artist monographs, and journals such as Artforum, e-flux, Kaleidoscope, Art in America, Flash Art, the Metropolitan Museum's blog, Hyperallergic and Leap. She is currently building a discursive archive of Asian Futurisms at <http://afuturism.tumblr.com>, and is a PhD candidate in modern and contemporary art at NYU's Institute of Fine Arts.

10/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Xin Wang
Asian Futurism and the Non-Other

- 1
Geert Lovink and Yuk Hui, "Digital Objects and Metadata Schemes," *e-flux journal* 78 (December 2016) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/78/82706/digital-objects-and-metadata-schemes/>.
- 2
As cited in Julia Vaingurt, *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde: Technology and the Arts in Russia of the 1920s* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 12.
- 3
Liu Cixin, *China 2185*, written in 1989 and never published in print. It now circulates online and can be accessed on sites such as <http://www.kanunu8.com/book3/6655/>
- 4
Interview with the artist in February 2016.
- 5
Available in Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Images: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 121–48.
- 6
Ibid., 131.
- 7
See the Jonah M. Kessel and Paul Mozur, "How China is Changing Your Internet," video, *New York Times*, August 9, 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/video/technology/10000004574648/china-internet-wechat.html>
- 8
See Katie Rogers, "Boaty McBoatface: What You Get When You Let the Internet Decide," *New York Times*, March 21, 2016.
- 9
See Siegfried Kracauer, as cited in "Techniques of the Observer: Hito Steyerl and Laura Poitras in Conversation," *Artforum*, May 2015 <https://www.artforum.com/inprint/issue=201505&id=51563>.
- 10
See *Ran Dian* editors, "'We all just need to relax' – sound bites from ACAW," *Ran Dian*, November 2 2015 http://www.randian-online.com/np_blog/we-all-just-need-to-relax-sound-bites-from-acaw/.
- 11
Finbarr Barry Flood, "Idol Breaking as Image Making in the 'Islamic State,'" *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 7 (2016): 116–38.
- 12
Ömür Harmanşah, "ISIS, Heritage, and the Spectacles of Destruction in the Global Media," *Near Eastern Archaeology*, vol. 78, no. 3 (2015): 170–77.
- 13

Michel Foucault, *Remarks On Marx* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 121.

14
Dawn Chan, "Asia-futurism," *Artforum*, Summer 2016 <https://www.artforum.com/inprint/issue=201606&id=60088>.

15
David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu, "Techno-Orientalism: An Introduction," *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 1–19.

16
Ibid., 10.

17
Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4. (December 1988): 530.

18
Cao Fei/China Tracy, "RMB City Manifesto," reprinted in *Cao Fei: I Watch That Worlds Pass by*, ed. Renate Wiehager (Köln: Snoeck, 2015), 199.

Prior to this evening, I would watch *Love is the Message* over and over again on my computer and I would find myself positioning myself backwards and forwards, closer or farther away to the screen. I noticed that I was not trying to see the photos or the images more carefully or more closely. I was trying to tweak or to amplify the relationship to get the impact of the images. I needed to get that impact physically by way of the sound. I actually needed to feel the contact between the soundtrack and the way in which it actually makes bodies move.

To open yourself up to a different sensory experience of film or to a different sensory experience of images often means actually adjusting your physical proximity to them. One way that physical proximity is calibrated is through sonic penetration; the way in which music and sound connect us. At its most basic, most fundamental level, sound is the movement of particles through air. It's a vibration that is calibrated in waves. The extent to which we can hear it depends on their frequency. There are all sorts of different sounds that we as humans cannot hear. They're not audible to us because we physically can't pick them up. Except by touching them or as a vibration. Like sounds, images have a frequency, which we can adjust. We calibrate our sensibility to images in the way we let them impact and contact us.

Arthur Jafa: This goes back to something people have heard me say repeatedly over the years, which is that I have an overriding ambition to make a black cinema that has the power, beauty, and alienation of black music.

TC: Tell us what you mean by that?

AJ: Well, to go back a little bit: I'm from Mississippi and I went to Howard University to study architecture. I'd always wanted to study architecture; it's my first love to this day. My preoccupations were the same even then so I would have said I want to make a house that's like *Kind of Blue*. Or a house that's like *Electric Lady* or *Songs in the Key of Life* or any of the great records. But I got to Howard and by my third year I couldn't really see a path to victory in the things I was interested in, so to speak. I realized very early on that there was a class dimension to who got to practice and do the kinds of things they wanted to do. I became disenchanted with the possibilities of architecture. I didn't know black people owned their own homes. I didn't know many black people who were going to be able to commission me to make some experimental architecture. I remember telling my father at some point, "Dad, I think I'd rather be a failed filmmaker than a failed architect."

So I just wandered down to the film department at Howard and the first person I met there was Haile Gerima. And that was very

fortuitous. Haile had graduated three years prior from UCLA, where, for the first time, black filmmakers were consciously and collectively engaged with thinking through what it would mean to make black cinema. One of the first things Haile said to me was, "We have to make black cinema," in a way that dovetailed with this ongoing ambition I had to make the house and now the film that was like black music.

However, I realized very early on that this whole idea of black cinema was narrowly confined within a binary opposition to Hollywood. They would say, "What's black film? Black film is not Hollywood. It's against Hollywood." That's a fairly radical idea when you're first confronted with it. But very quickly my classmates and I were like, "Okay, so if that's the case, and if Hollywood has narratives, does that mean black film is necessarily non-narrative? If Hollywood films are in color does that mean black films have to be in black and white?"

It was a very narrow sort of definition. So we started to think about what black cinema could be if we didn't define it against Hollywood, but tried to define it on its own. For me it came to be about the music: How and why is the music so powerful? How does black music undermine the power of alienation? And how do we transpose this power into this other medium? I've spent a large part of the last thirty years thinking about what makes black music so powerful.

I realized that black music was powerful because the black voice was at its core. People had talked about cinema in terms of stories, narratives, thematics – but it quickly became clear that I needed to come up with different concepts. This idea of black visual intonation was intended to be the cinematic equivalent of the black voice. You would never confuse Billie Holiday with Fela or Bob Marley with Charlie Parker or Miles Davis or whomever, right? There's a certain relationship to the black voice, in particular black vocal intonation, either specifically in the voice of the performer or played out instrumentally. I was interested in how we understand this vocal intonation, how we understand these traditions or continuities or manipulate tonalities.

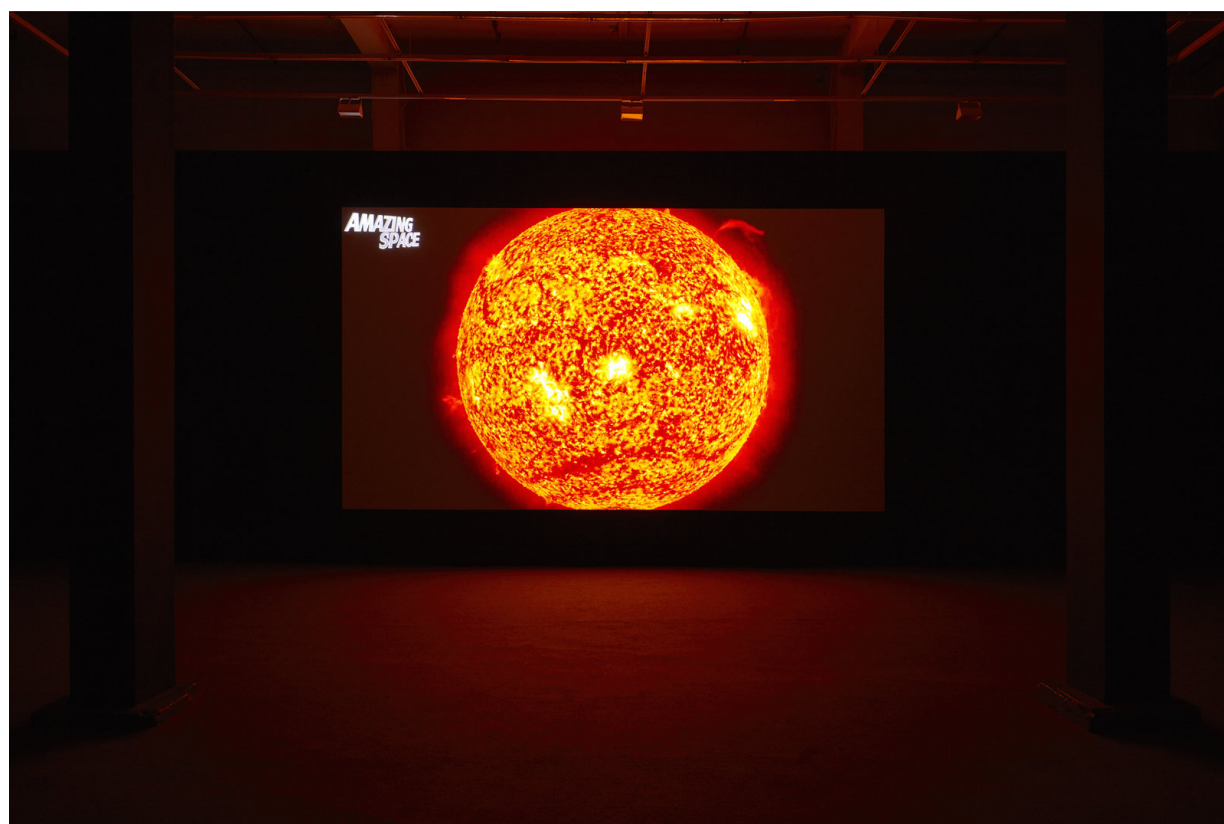
For example: What is the relationship between black music and Western music? African-American music is a Western music – a lot of people don't seem to realize that – and I like to say that we are illegitimate progeny of the West. In the sense that a lot of ideas were imposed on us without becoming ours, without us being seen as their legitimate heirs. Black people came to the Americas with this deep reservoir of cultural traditions of expressivity. There's a great quote by Nam June Paik who said

03/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Arthur Jafa and Tina Campt
Love is the Message, the Plan is Death



Vivian Zihert
**The Fourfold
Articulation**



The current rolling crises of liberal democracy has renewed the significance of formal critique as a *critique of forms*. This critique careens forward in spasms; sputtering into vision as the governing geometry of *market-nation-state* lurches and warps, seeking to mend breeches and to accommodate shifts in prevailing conditions.

This critique can be thought of as formalism at, or on, the frontier. It is like twentieth-century formalism insofar as it seeks concreteness and the underlying matter of things. It is crucially unlike, however, as formalism at, or on, the frontier cannot but confront the ethical as *integral* to mattering in and of itself.

Sven Lütticken has recently discussed such a renewed formal critique – by recalling the presentation of the aesthetic in German Idealism as an obscure and magical substance that somehow flows across – and reconnects – the divorced realms of reason and sense, subject and object, the ethical and the material. Responding to Natasha Ginwala’s recent Contour Biennale, entitled “Justice as a Medium,” Lütticken locates the law as art’s “uncanny doppelganger” – noting a proliferation of artists’ projects that address, mimic, and intervene in the matters of the law.¹

Speaking in classical terms, the arts as the proper field of *the aesthetic* resolve this division of things with events of transcendence that supersede the work of reason. Meanwhile, the law is the domain of an unending reasonable effort to suture together a fallen and divided world; to put things right and to make things just.

What formalism at, or on, the frontier does is to rotate or reorchestrate the deployment of this suturing aesthetic. What is radical in the center may not be so from the periphery. Where the courts of law seek to maintain justice for some, for others they maintain a separation from the very possibility of appearance within the dominion of justice. A Palestinian youth cannot reasonably be heard in the Jerusalem municipal courts, the geontological.² claims of indigenous belonging cannot testify under Australian tort law, the slow violence of workplace sexual harassment and domestic violence rarely reaches prosecution, and police summarily execute people of racial minorities without losing their jobs, etc. Such are the differential arrangements of ethical sense-making across globalizing systems.

Above all – as I’ve argued elsewhere³ – the frontier is an artifact of modernity that most concerns its modes of *contact*. The frontier is the place where the soaring ideals of the Enlightenment touch down and slow to a grind against the earthly contingency of global expansion. In this morphology of touch,

01/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Vivian Zihert
The Fourfold Articulation



Megan Cope, *RE-FORMATION 1*, 2016. Cast concrete oysters and locally-sourced clay dirt. Commissioned by Al-Ma'mal Foundation and Frontier Imaginaries, with the support of Arts Queensland. Photo: Issa Freij.

Arthur Jafa and Tina Campt Love Is the Message, the Plan Is Death

Arthur Jafa's seven-minute short film *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death* cuts together footage of Charles Ramsey; *Swag Surf*, a black variation on the wave at sports games; Fred Hampton's widow the day after his assassination; Bayard Rustin, organizer of the 1963 March on Washington; Storyboard P, dance legend; the 2015 murder of Walter Scott in South Carolina; kids dancing in a club; Hortense Spillers; Birth of a Nation; former president Obama singing "Amazing Grace"; Earl Sweatshirt; Ferguson, Missouri; Michael Jackson; Floyd Mayweather; the Civil Rights Movement; Beyoncé; Martine Syms; Odell Beckham Jr; Alien; Rob Peters; Bradford Young; Marshawn Lynch; Larry Davis; Thelonious Monk's hands; Chris Brown; Martin Luther King Jr.; IceJJFish, atonal R&B singer; astronomical images; Drake; Mahalia Jackson; and many others, in order to explore the distance and proximity between motion and movement. The film's title refers to the Nebula Award-winning 1973 short story by James Tiptree Jr., née Alice Sheldon, *Love is the Plan the Plan is Death*, about spider-like creatures who devour their mates in the course of their lifecycle.

The following excerpts a conversation between the filmmaker and Tina Campt, Professor of Africana and Women's Studies and Director of the Barnard Center for Research on Women, at a listening party for *Love Is the Message*, at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in Harlem on December 10, 2016.

Tina Campt: We were talking earlier today about the difference between movement and motion. We think of these two things as synonyms but they're not. Movement means changing the position of an object related to a fixed point in space; the focus is on that space. Motion, on the other hand, is a change in the location or position of an object with respect to time.

One of the things that your montage and sequencing technique does is provoke our relationship to images by exposing us to them at a certain velocity over time. The impact of a work like *Love is the Message, the Message is Death* keys off of how short the span of time is in which we actually have contact with a single one of these images – each of which is incredibly arresting – before it transitions to the next. This is why I talk about listening to images and why we've called this event a listening session. Listening to images is about allowing yourself to be accessible to the affects produced in all these different encounters. Which are the historical black-and-white images? Where are the bodies moving? How do you see the choreography of bodies and violence and music in relationship to each other?

1
This brief history derives mainly from the unpublished *A Record of Critical Events at the Losheng* (2009) by Hu Ching-ya, as well as Fann Yen-chiou, *Epidemic, Medicine and Colonial Modernity: The Medical History of Taiwan under Japanese Colonial Rule* (Daw Shiang Publishing, 2005).

2
Because *Mycobacterium leprae* cannot be cultivated outside the human body, academics still debate whether the experiments on Losheng residents using medications such as DDS can be deemed “human medical experiments.” However, during the USAID period in Taiwan, a “cellular immunity mechanism” project conducted on the leprosy patients likely faced unwillingness and disobedience on the part of the patients. For related research, see Fann Yen-chiou, “USAID Medicine, Hansen’s Disease Control Policy, and Patients’ Rights in Taiwan (1945–1960s),” *Taiwan Historical Research*, vol. 16, no. 4 (2010): 115–60.

3
On Japan’s national structure (*Kokutai*) since the Meiji Restoration, see Tsurumi Shunsuke, *An Intellectual History of Wartime Japan, 1931–1945* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten Publishers, 1982). The Chinese translation of this book was published by Flâneur Culture Lab. Regarding the “standard of civilization” and related subjects, see *Origins of Global Order: From the Meridian Lines to the Standard of Civilization*, ed. Lydia Liu (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2016).

4
See Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 2000).

5
The US PRISM project discussed in the documents leaked by Edward Snowden, along with other programs mentioned in documents uncovered by the recent hack of George Soros’s Open Society Foundations, demonstrate how the US and multinational capitalists interfere with “civic” movements around the world.

6
Japan passed its Worker Dispatch Law in 1985, implemented it in 1986, and amended it five times.

12/12

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Chen Chieh-jen
Dissenting Voices of the Unwashed, Disobedient, Noncitizens, and Exiles in their Own Homes

exposure, and exchange, the frontier signifies how modernity’s *outside* is produced, exploited, and policed.

From this *formal* view of the frontier – as demonstrated by artists working at, and on, the frontier – it is possible to chart a *fourfold articulation*. That is, a cosmology of time, being, and belonging produced through the fourfold categories of *the natural, the female, the racial, and the prior*.

This fourfold articulation acts as an interleaved and hyperbolic matrix, legislating the proper social body of Man (*homo economicus*) and its wastes. It is the fine sieve through which the extraction of surplus today takes place as a high-intensity, offshored, hedged, and public-private leveraged operation, leeching the sacrificial economies of the fourfold through the toxicity of the sovereign construct. *Articulation* is an operational concept culled from within this cosmology, but which may yet be useful in untangling its parts.

The Fourfold

The formalism of arts at, or on, the frontier is most emphatically not reductive in the abstract. This is not to say that it is maximalist, or necessarily prone to excess. Like the art-historical Art Concret, this formalism is driven to seek truth through matter, although emphatically not through a universalising vocabulary. Its concreteness lies within its *positionality* along enmeshed chains of value, and not within a concreteness in the abstract.

The posters, T-shirts, and agitprop of Demian DinéYahzi’, for example, rebel against both the macro-social erasure of First Nations Americans, as well as his own specific conditions as a young, queer Diné artist in the present-day vortex of art professionalization. These brilliant images are clearly intended as a self-production of “survance,” and are constantly updated at the the Tumblr blog Bury My Art At Wounded Knee / Blood & Guts In The Art School Industrial Complex.⁴

Such a concrete positionality also drives the painting of Shan artist Sawangwongse Yawngwhe. Trained in Canada and Italy – in exile from Burma – his painting since the passing of his father has depicted episodes from memory, from family photographs, from books on the ongoing strife of Burmese independence, from present-day NGO publications, and from what Yawngwhe calls the “Peace Industrial Complex.”

Upon completing a particularly gestural series of paintings, Yawngwhe was asked why he had “burdened” the canvasses with the names and dates of flash points in Burmese and Shan minority history. “Because it’s my life,” he responded.

Although positionality draws art into the narrative world of a lifetime, it is not to be mistaken for the categorical formations of *identity*. As the fourfold articulation shows, this can never be its object and cannot serve its interests. Formalism at, or on, the frontier rebels against interpellation into identitarian tropes, staging instead – through positional concreteness – a refusal of exchangeability.

I, The Artwork (2016), by Palestinian artist Yazan Khalili, dramatizes this and cleaves once again to the uncanny alliance of the arts and the law. The work was produced out of the artist’s frustration that an Israeli collector sought to purchase his work, despite its overt anti-occupation expression and despite the campaign of Boycott Divestment and Sanctions called by Palestinian civil society.

In response, Khalili worked with a lawyer to draft a contract – given as a “Deed of Ownership and Condition of Existence” – that forbade the artwork to be owned or controlled by an occupying or settler-colonial power, or supporters thereof. With the phrase “I, The Artwork,” Khalili vested the contract – exhibited as a photograph – with corporate personhood, assigning to it the moral rights usually held by an author.

Although it does not exhibit the usual insignia of militancy, Khalili’s *I, The Artwork* is nonetheless a maximally rebellious image. The shift this indicates in the Palestinian militant image – from the 1970s to now, and from the AK-47 to the written contract – is instructive in grasping postwar shifts among the coordinates of market-nation-state as seams of global governance. What both share, however, is a refusal of exchangeability – the inability to be substitutable into a particular system or order of things.

The unexamined significance of modes of exchange is the topic of Kojin Karatani’s dazzling recent synthesis *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production, to Modes of Exchange* (2014). His core argument is that a modes-of-exchange analytic offers powerful explanations of human social formations globally, and among other things reveals the archaic and ongoing structures of plunder that always underwrite the market-nation-state.

As Karatani explains: “The problem is, insofar as you look at material processes or economic substructures from the perspective of modes of production, you will never find the moral moment.”⁵

Through a modes-of-exchange analytic, the Marxian value chain may be turned upon its side – revealing the fourfold categories as in fact *produced* by the classical accounting of value. In this calculation – shown in Schema 1 below –

03/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Vivian Zihert
The Fourfold Articulation

HIV/AIDS AFFECTS INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

BECAUSE STIGMA OUTSIDE OF INDIAN RESERVATIONS EXISTS

BECAUSE COLONIZATION BEGETS GOVERNMENT MISTRUST

BECAUSE HIV/AIDS AFFECTS INDIGENOUS QUEER MEN

BECAUSE HIV/AIDS AFFECTS INDIGENOUS WOMEN

BECAUSE SUBSTANCE ABUSE AFFECTS INFECTION RATES

BECAUSE PREVENTION SPEAKS MANY LANGUAGES

BECAUSE POVERTY AFFECTS ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

BECAUSE SEX EDUCATION IS INSUFFICIENT

BECAUSE INDIGENOUS SUICIDE RATES ARE HIGH

BECAUSE RESISTANCE IS AWARENESS

BECAUSE AWARENESS IS SURVIVAL

BECAUSE WE ARE WARRIORS

BECAUSE OUR HEALTH MATTERS

BECAUSE WE HAVE A RIGHT TO SURVIVE

BECAUSE STIGMA ON INDIAN RESERVATIONS EXISTS

R.I.S.E.: *Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment*

Demian DinéYahzi' & R.I.S.E.: Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment, *HIV/AIDS Affects Indigenous Communities*, 2014. Color print on paper, 29.7 x 42cm, exhibition copy. Courtesy of the artist and R.I.S.E.: Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment.

patients; they are everyday people forced to live in a neoliberal society.

When we ponder the centuries-old question of what makes a more equal human society, we should not only think about secure and well-paid employment for dispatch workers and other precarious members of society. We should also think about the need to allow for the emergence and practice of alternative social visions. And we should understand that bourgeois democracy, which is in fact a new global colonialism, is a major obstacle to realizing such visions.

In addition, we should understand that when we talk about art, we are also reflecting upon how our thoughts and feelings came to be mediated and constructed.

We need to pull back the curtains that enclose us on all sides, to reexamine the cities we live in. Are the cities we call home really just New Losheng Sanatoriums? Are we complicit in the construction of these sanatoriums? Are we the forcibly isolated?

x

All images are courtesy of the artist.

11/12

Chen Chieh-jen was born in 1960 in Taoyuan, Taiwan, and currently lives and works in Taipei, Taiwan. Chen employed extra-institutional underground exhibitions and guerrilla-style art actions to challenge Taiwan's dominant political mechanisms during a period marked by the Cold War, anti-communist propaganda and martial law (1950 – 1987). After martial law ended, Chen ceased art activity for eight years. Returning to art in 1996, Chen started collaborating with local residents, unemployed laborers, day workers, migrant workers, foreign spouses, unemployed youth and social activists. They occupied factories owned by capitalists, slipped into areas cordoned off by the law and utilized discarded materials to build sets for his video productions. In order to visualize contemporary reality and a people's history that has been obscured by neo-liberalism, Chen embarked on a series of video projects in which he used strategies he calls "re-imagining, re-narrating, re-writing and re-connecting."

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Chen Chieh-jen
Dissenting Voices of the Unwashed, Disobedient, Noncitizens, and Exiles in their Own Homes

up into chronological sections, I will nonetheless employ that method here for the express purpose of destroying it.

The first generation of colonial modernity in Taiwan was the period from 1895 through 1945, when Japan attempted to colonize all of Asia. Japan sought to clean up and oppress the “unwashed” and “disobedient” people under its rule, both in its colonies and domestically. It formulated three principles of colonial governance in Taiwan: Japanization (*Kōmika*), industrialization, and the transformation of Taiwan into a base for further Japanese expansion southward. Japan implemented these policies in the guise of education reform. It also introduced into Taiwan and its other colonies the idea of a “standard of civilization.”³

The second period of colonial modernity, from 1950 through 1987, was the Martial Law period, when Taiwan positioned itself on the US side of the Cold War anticommunist divide. The US supported the anticommunist, monarchical Kuomintang regime, ferociously suppressing anyone in Taiwan with alternative political visions. Via the “cultural Cold War,” the US also introduced bourgeois democratic values such as “freedom” and “democracy” into Taiwan’s education, media, and pop-cultural systems, replacing the feudal values of Japanization. The human medical experiments conducted on Losheng residents from 1950 to 1965 under the US’s public health plan for Taiwan (including those experiments unrelated to healing Hansen’s Disease) could perhaps be read as visible manifestations of second-generation colonial modernity and a new standard of civilization imposed on Taiwanese people by the US. In other words, as Hansen’s Disease patients underwent medical experiments, the Taiwanese people were simultaneously undergoing another kind of “human experiment” aimed at reforming their thoughts and feelings.

Under US pressure, in 1984 the Kuomintang government announced plans to implement neoliberal economic reforms. The reforms were carried forward by the Democratic Progressive Party, which came to power after the end of the Martial Law period, setting the stage for the third era of colonial modernity in Taiwan, which has stretched from 1987 until the present. Early in this period, neoliberal policies resulted in lots of factories in the relatively less developed Xinzhuang district of Taipei (where the Losheng Sanatorium is located) moving offshore. In 1994, Taiwanese officials proposed building a new metro depot on the site of the sanatorium, pitching it to the local residents as a form of much-needed economic development. This helped rally forty to fifty thousand local Xinzhuang residents to oppose the aims of the

Losheng Preservation Movement. Here the ruling class used the “democratic” strategy of dividing and conquering the people. They pitted groups against each other in order to confine the process of discussion – a fundamental principle of direct democracy – within representative democracy and ballot calculations.

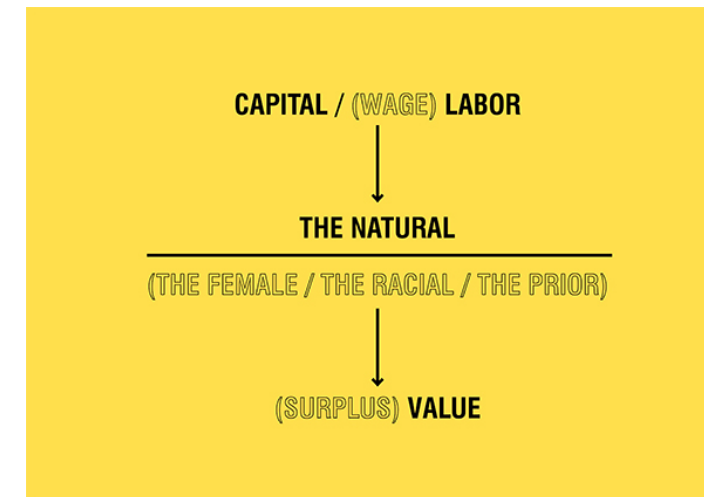
One core aim characterizes all three generations of colonial modernization in Taiwan: the extinction of the communist imagination.

The cultural Cold War employed a “left on left” policy to successfully suppress any stirrings of the communist imagination in capitalist nations.⁴ Are we not now engaged in a new Cold War in which governments like the US and transnational bodies like the International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization use neocolonial tactics to intentionally confuse the distinction between left-wing and right-wing ideologies?⁵ This approach involves pushing neoliberal privatization while simultaneously permitting a certain amount of seemingly left-wing speech and activism. It takes movements that target neoliberalism on a global scale and tries to shift their focus to regional and local oppressions resulting from neoliberal policies. As a result, people impoverished by neoliberalism place the blame for economic inequality on simplistic and delusional scapegoats such as labor unions, or even on people with alternative political imaginations, such as those who advance a communist vision of the future.

In East Asia, under the current Worker Dispatch Law and the overall push for labor flexibilization, an increasing number of people are forced to become exiles in their own land – “dispatched workers,” or temporary laborers without a stable income. The first country in East Asia to establish a Worker Dispatch Law was Japan, in 1985.⁶ In the twenty years since, 19.9 million Japanese people have become dispatched workers. Though Taiwan hasn’t formally established its own Worker Dispatch Law, policies intended to make work more flexible are concealed within various regulations and unspoken rules about “atypical employment.”

Are these dispatched workers not the new colonized slaves of bourgeois democracy and its internal colonialism? When empires that disseminate neoliberalism also try to guide people around the world in how to take action, while intentionally blurring the tremendous class disparity that separates citizen from citizen, is this not a “New Losheng Sanatorium,” one that uses labor flexibilization to implement an alternative form of exclusion under the guise of “freedom” and “democracy”? Now, however, the isolated and excluded are no longer just leprosy

value is simply that which is created where the agency of capital and labor act upon a disenchanting nature.



Here, *the natural* is a placeholder for all that is acted upon by value-creation, and as such it conceals the fourfold articulation that continues as *the female*, *the racial*, and *the prior*. All of these categories arise in what Marx called “primitive accumulation” and, counter to this title, all are in fact ongoing in the social fabric of the market-nation-state.⁶

A recent body of literature attests to this and has challenged the Marxian account of primitive accumulation, demonstrating the creation of the fourfold categories as crucial to the (ongoing) formation of market society.

Sylvia Federici, for example, has examined the dramatic persecution of peasant women in the Middle Ages – expunging pagan knowledges and instituting un-valued reproductive labor.⁷ Denise da Silva has examined the basis of blackness and *the racial* in the unaccounted-for value of enslaved labor in the nineteenth-century price of cotton, and Fred Moten has examined the impact of this violent ellipsis in Marx’s account of the commodity form.⁸

Distinct from the racial, Glen Sean Coulthard has also recently critiqued the chronopolitics of “primitive accumulation,” demonstrating the present-tenseness of dispossession to indigenous communities in Canada.⁹ In addition, Elizabeth A. Povinelli has addressed the “governance of the prior” as the arrangement by which settler and European societies designate themselves with/in development as the time of value-creation, and indigenous societies as ahistoric.¹⁰

At issue is the fundamental operation of “primitive accumulation” not as a mode of production, but as a mode of exchange in the form of plunder. As an existential architecture of belonging, owning, and obligating, the fourfold

charts a cartography of dispossession that readily adapts to cybernetic innovations in the technosphere. Its technologies of dispossession remain foundational, if intensified. And as such, it is the fourfold that continues to shape the conditions of possibility of the arts, the law, and of expressivity in general.

Before moving onto the notion of articulation, there are two short asides.

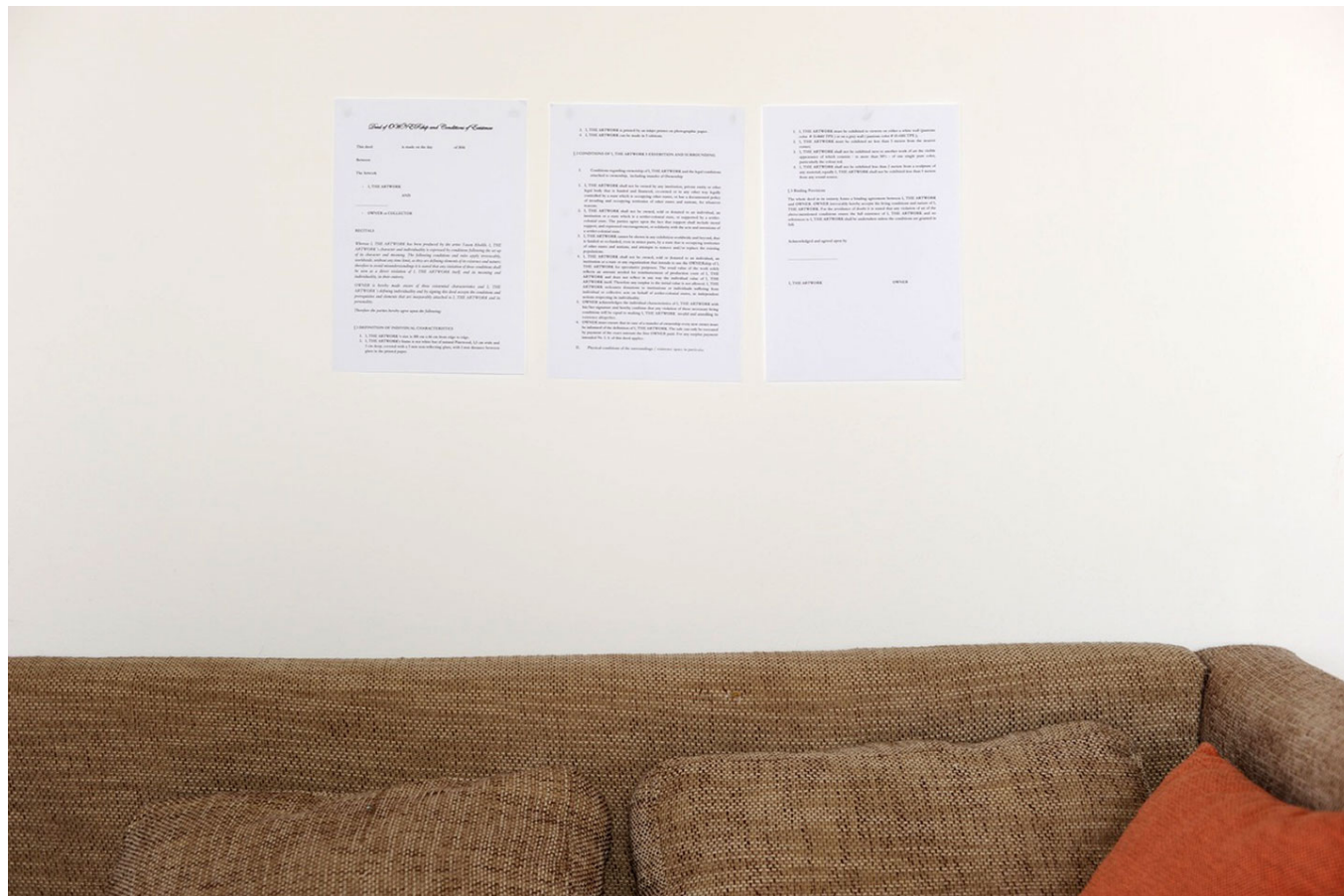
The first is to note that the conjunction of market-nation-state is borrowed from Karatani, who expresses these as a series of interdependent Borromean rings, also borrowed from Lacan. Whereas Karatani uses the term “capital,” the term “market” is used here in order to prioritize the competing and multiple systems of capital that are differentially territorialized and socialized. Thinking of Australia for example, the competing interests of tourism and mineral markets continually force fascinating contortions within the state and national bodies that seek to reconcile them.

Secondly, formalism is distinguished as “at, or on” the frontier in order to prioritize the asymmetrical ways in which the matrices of the fourfold are encountered. For example, Australian artist Rachel O’Reilly utilizes the smooth space of computer-aided design and the singularity of poetic language to dramatize the non-exchangeability of ecological and social spaces into the extraction-friendly business plans of state bureaucracy.

In a similar mode, and also from Australia, Tom Nicholson’s recreated sixth-century Byzantine mosaics explore chromatic exchange among small tesserae tiles as a means to piece together the horizons of Australian and Israeli settler expropriation. Both practices are dedicated to addressing the folds of the frontier, to drawing forward practices of dispossession that are often obscured from the hegemonic standpoint, and to unraveling their operations. Both artists acknowledge at the outset their differential position in this work compared to that of an indigenous artist, from a local or nonlocal area, for example. This sensitivity to how positionality capacitates practices differently is what “at, or on” the frontier seeks to preserve.

Articulation

Within conditions of crisis – such as those currently witnessed across the NATO sphere in tandem with its immediate adversaries – expressivity spikes. This may be witnessed in a rise in mass public gatherings, assemblies, and riots; or in the extraordinary 2016 profits of Facebook, for example. The renewed critique of forms calls for a critique of *expressivity* as that which under law denotes the realm of artistry,



Yazan Khalili, *I, The Artwork*, 2016. Photographic print 120 x 79.2cm. Contract documented within the artist studio; legal consultation provided by Martin Heller. Commissioned by Riwaq Biennial with support of Mophradat. Photo: Yazan Khalili. Courtesy of the artist.

tried to chat with him, he looked up at me with a smile and said repeatedly: “I’m ninety years old, neither of my ears can hear anymore, not anymore ...”

And so the three of us looked at the construction site silently, as the migrant construction workers continued working into the night and the skyscrapers in the distance gradually lit up. Although we were all looking out at the same construction site, our thoughts were likely very different. What was the ninety-year-old resident thinking about? His forced isolation years earlier, after his Hansen Disease symptoms began to show? Or perhaps his youth before he became ill? What was Chang thinking about? Those unending nights as a Losheng Patrol Team member during the height of the protests? Was she thinking about Uncle Yang, a resident who she was friends with for a long time until he passed away? Or was she perhaps thinking about the idea that she and her friends had developed for an alternative Losheng Museum, but that now seemed impossible to realize?

And how about myself? It was impossible for me to comprehend their life experiences. I could only look out on the gigantic construction site and imagine how, to the noncitizen migrant workers, the construction site and its enclosing metal fence might be a New Losheng Sanatorium.

A Fluid Museum, an Ineffable State

After that night, I began to think: if I, who was not present to take part in the Losheng Preservation Movement, hadn’t met Hu Ching-ya, Chang Li-ben, and Chang Fang-chi, I may never have come to visit the remnants of Losheng or to have these thoughts. Was it possible for me, a “latecomer” who had never seen the sanatorium before its demolition, to ever come to know the sanatorium’s complex history in full?

But perhaps, like the roots of the more than eight hundred trees that residents had planted inside the sanatorium, the Losheng Preservation Movement had expanded into a massive and complex movement not confined to a single time, place, or meaning. In other words, perhaps Losheng had been a site of manifold meanings from the very beginning.

A few days later I met with Hu Ching-ya and Chang Fang-chi to ask them about the alternative Losheng Museum project. What else did they imagine would be included besides a history of the sanatorium, the personal histories of the residents, and the clinical history Hansen’s Disease itself? Although they each had different answers, there was one shared wish: that the museum be a *fluid museum*, one that would start with the Losheng Sanatorium but then expand out to interconnect other groups of people

similarly excluded by state policies.

As I listened to their ideas, I wondered: Aren’t we all “latecomers” in one way or another? We are always situated at the before or after, on the outside or inside of any given event, and therefore we are always witnessing only certain tiny fragments of this world. Yet those who “came after” are given the opportunity to rearrange, collage, and piece together all these fragments, allowing alternative narrations as well as an alternative social vision.

I then began conceptualizing the film project *Realm of Reverberations*. The finished work involved four separate videos, assuming the perspectives of four different protagonists: *Tree Planters* was told from the perspective of Chou Fu-tzu, chairman of the Losheng Self-Help Organization; *Keeping Company* was told from the perspective of Chang Fang-chi, who has kept long-term company with the sanatorium residents until this day; *The Suspended Room* was told from the perspective of Liu Yue-ying, a woman from mainland Chinese who lived through the Cultural Revolution and worked as a caretaker at the sanatorium; and *Tracing Forward* was told from the perspective of a fictional female political prisoner, played by Hsu Yi-ting, who travels through Taiwanese history, from the Japanese colonial period to the present, to discuss whether the “conclusion” of an “event” is equivalent to its “ending.”

In the videos, I used very little spoken or textual content to relate the history of the sanatorium and the preservation movement. Instead, the videos were primarily dedicated to *fragments* – of the sanatorium scenery, of the ruins of the complex, of the “indefinable” people found there, and of other inexplicable objects and sounds associated with the place. I have a stubborn and perhaps single-minded belief that art in our post-internet era need not provide easily researchable knowledge or narratives. Rather, art today should be concerned with producing “ineffable images” or a kind of “ineffable state” that cannot easily be absorbed into social spectacles or biopolitical regimes.

Three Generations of Colonial Modernity and the New Losheng Sanatorium

After I completed *Realm of Reverberations*, the Losheng Sanatorium took on a more complex meaning for me. Rather than just a highly regulated space that forcibly housed and sterilized Hansen’s Disease patients, it became a place of broken fragments shaped by multiple, intertwining long-term conflicts, much like the Taiwanese people have been shaped by three generations of colonial modernity and its ruling ideology.

Although history cannot be easily dividing

another visit, we saw groundkeepers sawing down the damaged trees. I asked why and they told me that officials from the Ministry of Culture had come for an inspection and decided that the trees might fall and injure people. As I witnessed the groundkeepers saw down these trees – planted by residents a few decades ago – and burn their roots, I had an indescribable feeling, fading in and out of the diffusing smoke. I subsequently visited the remnants of Losheng even more often, as if driven by this indescribable and unknowable feeling.

During one of our Losheng visits, we found several boxes of slides that were going to be thrown out. These were likely used in the 1970s and '80s to display medical reports and images of the various stages of Hansen's Disease. The slides in one box had chemically eroded due to humidity and the passage of time, becoming indiscernible abstract images. To me, the erosion of these slides – the transition from explanatory images to abstract images – gestured to the fact that we will never be able to truly comprehend the manifold physical and psychological pains Hansen Disease patients endured.

During those days when I visited Losheng frequently, I often saw chairs, once used by the residents, now abandoned in piles by the road, waiting to be discarded. I wondered, wasn't the Ministry of Health and Welfare building a

08/12

Losheng Culture Park? And weren't these chairs, some of which bore scratch marks on the armrests left by the patients' gnarled fingers, truthful records of their writhing, agonized bodies and the pains that we will never really comprehend or witness? When I looked at those chairs destined for the garbage heap, I felt that what was being discarded was not so much the chairs as, one after another, the residents we will never come to know.

One day at dusk, Chang and I stood outside the sanatorium's Datun Dormitory, right by the fence surrounding the metro depot construction site. We looked at the site before us, where countless protests and self-organized events had taken place, as Chang told me about how the police had dispersed protesting residents and their allies at the end of 2008. The newly dug foundation for the metro depot had been the site of much of the sanatorium's housing, now vanished. Industrial noises from the construction overlapped with Chang's soft-spoken words, creating a symphony of disparate sounds. At that moment, Chang was no longer just an individual. She was, rather, a unity of all the residents and activists whose company she once kept.

As the daylight dwindled, a resident with whom Chang wasn't acquainted came and sat inside a shabby alcove nearby, silently watching the construction site. When I walked over and

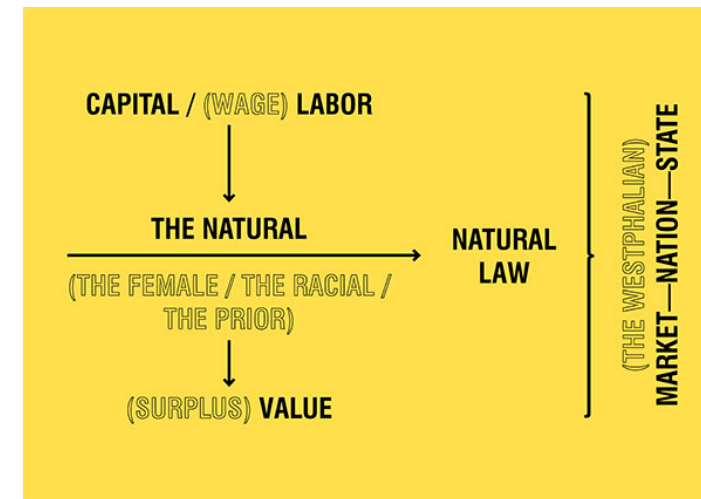


Chen Chieh-jen, *Realm of Reverberations: Keeping Company*, 2014.

and as “freedom of expression” has become such a flash point within liberal democratic malaise.¹¹ To this, the concept of articulation responds with a view from the long durée.

In the early 1500s, when the conquistadors returned from the “Indies,” many flocked to the Convent of St. Esteban in Salamanca, Spain to confess. In a brilliant essay on the origins of international law, legal scholar and former diplomat Martti Koskenniemi systematically traces how the crisis of faith provoked by colonial plunder – heard as confession – was resolved by the Church's formalization of an ethical offsetting between the public and the private. This divorce – naturalized as the basis of Natural Law – continues to underpin the international system, formalized through the institutions of the Westphalian nation-state system, as diagrammed in Schema 2.

07/10



This politico-theological fix was led by the *prima* (senior) professor of theology at the University of Salamanca, Francisco de Vitoria (c.1492–1546). The indisputable violence of dispossession in the “Indies” – without a justification for war – produced a double bind for Vitoria, caught between the testimonies of confession and the indisputable command of his king, Charles V.

Although convinced of the innocence of the conquistadors' victims – expressing in a letter that news of the colonists' acts “freezes the blood in my veins” – Vitoria simultaneously never doubted European superiority, or the right of conquistadors to encroach upon the territories of the New World.¹²

Vitoria's solution was an innovation in categorical terms, dividing human affairs into *dominium iurisdictionis* (public law), and *dominium proprietatis* (private ownership). The upshot, in Koskenniemi's words, was “a politico-theological vocabulary that would extend a certain idea about the justice of private

relationships on a universal basis.”¹³ In short, the conquistadors were merely pursuing their justified interests in private property.

This fundamental break – governing the global present as Natural Law – institutes a cosmos of ethical two-stepping, disconnecting certain moral chains and facilitating other value chains focused upon access to material wealth.

The fourfold articulation therefore takes place as an *arts of dispossession* wrought through the production and erasure of certain joints; turning taps on and off; permitting flows there, and accumulations here. In the general sense, this systemic work of producing and erasing connections can be called “articulation,” and thus Khalili's *I, The Artwork* can be grasped as a counterpractice of an *arts of articulation*, refusing to form a conjunction with the ideological space of settler capital.

Zooming out, Megan Cope's sculptural installation *RE-FORMATION* (2016) utilizes a similar set of coordinates in diagramming territorial dis-articulation as it occurs in Quandamooka country in South-East Queensland, Australia. The work mimics a midden – an indigenous architecture of accumulated shell and bone fragments – based upon the black mineral sands and white silica sands that are separated through extraction by Belgian multinational Silbelco.

The oyster shells of the black-sand midden are laboriously hand-cast in concrete – a reference to the mass destruction of middens by 1800s convict labor that burned the shells to extract lime for brick-and-mortar dwellings. When exhibited in Jerusalem, with the Al-Ma'mal Foundation, the black sand was replaced by the unmistakable rusty *terra rossa* dirt of Palestine's central highlands, connecting up global shorelines of European colonial encroachment.

The territorial dimension of these articulations also emerges in the recent bronze sculptures of Golan artist Randa Maddah, such as *A Hair Tie* (2016). The works were produced from the experience of Majdal Shams, a mountain village in the Occupied Golan that is perched above the Israeli fence line to Syria, and just southeast of a military base known as “the eye of the State.” In correspondence with Maddah shortly before his recent passing, the English critic John Berger wrote:

I want to try to describe to you how I place it [the sculpture] as a spectator in my imagination. I return to Palestine and I look at the earth I'm walking on: it's grasses, its boulders, its ditches, its tangled undergrowth, its corpses, the roots of its trees, its pools, and I think that what they endure as fragments, not of the earth, but

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Vivian Zihert
The Fourfold Articulation

of a homeland, is expressed in the figures you create. Through you the self-portraits of these territorial particles come into being. It is as if you hold a pebble from the Golan Heights in your left hand and with your right draw what is inside it.¹⁴

The terrestrial dimension of the term “articulation” is perhaps necessary. Within a Marxian genealogy it can be traced from its appearance within the late writings of *Grundrisse*, to the schisms of 1970s Anglo-Althusserian debates, and to the 1980s cultural turn of Stuart Hall. In the original German it appears as *Gliederung* – derived from *glied*, meaning “limb” – suggesting a system governed by connections in a sense similar to that of the Latin *artus* of articulation, meaning to join or fit together.

See, for example, Marx’s structural schema given in *Grundrisse*: “The coexistence of limbs [*membres*] and their relations in the whole is governed by the order of a dominant structure which introduces a specific order into the articulation [*Gliederung*] of the limbs [*membres*] and their relations.”¹⁵

A particular focus on articulation didn’t appear in historical materialist discourse until the 1970s, however, and as part of a number of system-scaled maneuvers that sought to grapple with the inadmissibly differential function of the global market system from the point of view of the Third World, or development’s “peripheries.”¹⁶

Stuart Hall’s subsequent use of the term aimed to prise open the doctrinal consideration of ideology towards a greater field of “culture” that would permit the significance of *the racial* to be grasped within a distributive analysis and towards a redistributive project. In a similar operation, articulation is used here to schematize the cosmology of market-nation-state as formed by the articulations and disarticulations of the fourfold. Emancipatory projects that seek transformation – without reckoning with this structure – will struggle to avoid reasserting the harm of its categorical form.

Improvisational Realism

As I touched upon earlier, there is a difference among practices working at, or on, the frontier. What appears to some as a fairly smooth world of opening airport gates, opening bank accounts, and pleasant social interactions, to others is encountered as a world of slamming doors.

What Karrabing Film Collective call their “Improvisational Realist” practice navigates the arts of articulation from this latter point of view. Their film and installation works are driven by

the exhaustive labor of survivance amid the fourfold articulation. As such, obtaining funds for national and international mobility, the infrastructures of passports, and the vocabularies of arts and bureaucratic worlds are all considered an integral part of their film and installation-making practice.

At the far-stretched frontiers of the Australian market-nation-state, governance can appear surreal – even psychedelic – as in Karrabing’s recent film *Wutharr: Saltwater Dreaming* (2016). The film plays out across Karrabing’s homelands, the Belyuen community, and conflicting explanations of the disastrous event of a boat-motor breakdown. Its narrative crisscrosses the accounts of three Karrabing members: 1) Trevor, who sees a jealous world of indigenous geontological ancestry; 2) Jojo, who sees a disciplining world of Christian virtue; and 3) Rex, who sees an exhausted material world of poverty, rusty wiring, and far-off sources of replacement. All are experienced as equally real – the settings of dizzying patterns of interference as they merge and subside.

Ultimately, the state intervenes to put things in place. This, however, is surreal in its own way – as the fine for setting off a rescue flare without proper safety equipment is AUD\$30,000, levied upon indigenous people who receive \$250 a fortnight in state subsidy.

The enormous scale, adaptability, and force of the fourfold articulation is hard to overestimate. Its centuries-long processes of world-making and world-destroying are quick to put the lie to shallow opposition and ill-worked-through revolutionary bluster.

As such, the expressiveness of articulation as a counterpractice is most emphatically not the expressiveness of declarative sovereignty. It is not summoned through proclamations; its subject is not the ideal artist in a self-realizing mode – a mode also heavily prioritized through corporatized social media.

The emergent emancipatory sovereignties of formalism at, and on, the frontier are perhaps no sovereignty at all. It may just be artists – in the guise of people – navigating the tender footholds of the present, and grasping for some stronger base upon which to stand. Not in the sense of self-determination and abstract freedoms, but as the world that emerges in the social and terrestrial capacity to form one’s own dependencies.

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Dedicated with a huge debt of thanks to the Al-Ma’al Foundation in Jerusalem and Karrabing Film Collective in Belyuen. Particular scholarly thanks to Denise Ferreira da Silva and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, and in particular for da Silva’s pointer to de Vitoria. Thanks to Stephen Squibb and Quentin Sprague for further editing, to Ziga Testen for graphic design, as well as to Yumi Maes for enabling the time out with

08/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Vivian Zihert
The Fourfold Articulation

07/12



The video component of the project *Realm of Reverberations* projected back at a Losheng crowd, 2015.

bourgeois democracy.

For my commission from the Reina Sofia I decided to construct a dialectical, fluctuating fictional field that mapped the spaces of the Military Court and Prison under Martial Law, the factories from the time when Taiwan was a world manufacturing center, and the to-be-inaugurated Jing-Mei Human Rights Memorial and Cultural Park. I also wanted to invite present-day activists, unemployed laborers, immigrant workers, and homeless people into this dialectical field. So I decided to have them come together at the Culture Park and engage in complex, nonverbal, fictional dialogues about what defines “equality” and “human rights.”

As I was seeking actors for this project, Hu Ching-ya introduced me to Chang Li-ben, also a member of the Youth Alliance. After in-depth conversations, I decided to cast him as a fictional political prisoner whose existence was suspended just before the day Martial Law was abolished, at 23:55:50. He cannot grow old, die, or ever leave the Military Court and Prison.

On December 10, 2007 (International Human Rights Day), as I was busy using found materials to build a fictional Military Court and Prison inside a corrugated metal building, on the actual site of the Military Court and Prison, a grand ceremony was held to inaugurate the Jing-Mei Human Rights Memorial and Cultural Park. Disguised as journalists, members of the Youth Alliance attended the ceremony to protest the Democratic Progressive Party government. The government was waving the flag of human rights while refusing to deal with the concurrent issue of the Hansen’s Disease patients being stripped of their human and residential rights.

During this protest, an astonishing thing happened: one of the family members of a White Terror victim slapped a protesting female student. This drove me to mull over the type of ideological apparatus that would condition the family member of a White Terror victim to react with literal violence to someone supporting the victims of another cause. In other words, after the historical transition in many parts of the world from autocratic dictatorship to neoliberal biopolitical governance, how do we think about human rights? How can we approach it in a way that not only connects it to histories like the White Terror period, but also deconstructs the biopolitical ideological apparatus that mediates our everyday life and identity?

After I completed the film *Military Court and Prison*, I was invited to the first New Orleans Biennial, which took place three years after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city in 2005. Wanting to further my previous field research on the reconstruction New Orleans, I applied for a US visa. Yet my research subject shifted to the

unequal visa policies of Taiwan and the US, because my visa interviewer from the American Institute in Taiwan suspected that I intended to immigrate illegally. Then, on December 3, 2008, the police force forcibly dispersed the demonstrating sanatorium residents, students, and members of the general public.

Burnt Tree Roots, Indiscernible Images, Empty Chairs

In the few years that followed, I focused on expanding my research on the notion of uprooting imperialist ideologies.

It was not until 2012, during my year-long production of *Happiness Building* inside a factory complex near the Losheng Sanatorium, that I met Chang Fang-chi, the eventual lead actor in *Keeping Company*, the second part of my four-part film *Realm of Reverberations*. We came to know each other well, and I learned that she was introduced to the Losheng Preservation Movement by a friend when she was eighteen years old and studying philosophy in college. After the decline of the movement, Chang decided to remain at Losheng. Besides keeping the elderly residents company, she also created an abundance of personal documentation in the form of emotional writings, sketches, and graffiti. What felt curious to me was that she never became a member of the Youth Alliance and only wanted to be a companion to the sanatorium residents and the movement itself.

My first visit to what remained of the sanatorium came when injured crew members from *Happiness Building* were taken to the new hospital adjacent to the sanatorium. After visiting them at the hospital, I walked across the overpass above the metro depot construction site and into Losheng’s remains. This was six years after I first met Hu Ching-ya and began hearing about the Losheng Preservation Movement from her.

After this, and because of Chang Fang-chi, my younger brother and I would spend our spare time at Losheng, chatting with Chang and the residents.

In 2013, Chang, my brother, and I visited Losheng after a typhoon. We saw many trees that had been blown over, including a chaulmoogra tree lying next to a toppled banyan tree. Those who are familiar with Hansen’s Disease know that, before modern medicines such as DSS, chaulmoogra oil was one of the traditional treatments used (although according to clinical reports as well as sanatorium residents, its effectiveness is limited). Chang told us that this chaulmoogra tree was the last one remaining after 70 percent of the sanatorium had been demolished.

A few days later, when we went back for

writing. An earlier edition of the Fourfold Articulation schema appears within *Feminist Takes* by Antonia Majaca and `tranzitdisplay`, with thanks to Rachel O’Reilly and Jelena Vesic for editorial guidance there.

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06/12

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 [Chen Chieh-jen](#)
[Dissenting Voices of the Unwashed, Disobedient, Noncitizens, and Exiles in their Own Homes](#)

09/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 [Vivian Zihert](#)
[The Fourfold Articulation](#)

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14
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15
Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1857.

16
The Anglo-Althusserian focus upon "articulation" in fact emerged out of Althusser's reception of Mao's *On Contradiction*, where it indicated a conjunction between modes of production.

10/10

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Vivian Zihlerl
The Fourfold Articulation

forced dispersal of the occupying protesters and residents, the Losheng Preservation Movement had waned, although the Losheng Self-Help Organization and the Youth Alliance for Losheng continued to protest against landslides and ground fractures caused by the construction of the new metro depot.

The Losheng Preservation Movement may have petered out, but at its height it stimulated various groups in Taiwanese society – through questions that emerged from the personal stories of patients and the history of Taiwanese public health policy – to investigate topics such as biological sovereignty, the meaning of "civilization," the relationship between pandemics and colonial modernity, and the human body under medical and public welfare systems. New agendas and areas of study also arose, such as the human rights of leprosy patients, the cultural heritage of the sanatorium, the politics of public construction projects, and the conservation of soil and water. Countless essays and reports on these topics were published. In addition, the Losheng Preservation Movement gave rise to a range of creative projects, including documentaries, photojournalism, plays, and musical compositions.

The Winding Journey

In 2006, the Losheng Preservation Movement had taken a series of actions to petition for a delay of the planned demolition and to call for a preservation project to maintain 90 percent of the sanatorium. That same year, I was invited to participate in the Liverpool Biennial. The biennial curator hoped that participating artists would create works related to Liverpool – a city that had been going downhill since World War II, losing nearly 70 percent of its original population.

Because my knowledge of Liverpool was limited, a friend introduced me to a young Taiwanese student who would assist me with my field research about the city. Her name was Hu Ching-ya. She was a member of the Youth Alliance for Losheng and was already participating in the Losheng Preservation Movement.

We traveled to Liverpool four times and visited the Liverpool Longshoremen's Union, which had organized a strike against the privatization of the Liverpool port 1995. The anti-privatization and anti-casualization movement ended in failure, but as Hu Ching-ya and I traveled back and forth between Taiwan and Liverpool, this movement and the Losheng Preservation Movement merged into one and the same cause in our discussions.

I thought the two seemingly distant and

starkly different movements might in fact share a certain essential connection. Yet at the time, I was not able to articulate exactly what this connection might be.

I then made the short film *The Route*, based on my field research in Liverpool. In the film, I invited members of the Kaohsiung Longshoreman's Union in Taiwan to cross over the fence between public areas and privatized wharfs, forming a fictional picket line. The film was my response to the Liverpool longshoremen's anti-privatization movement, which took the Liverpool strike as a beginning that would later develop into a globally connected anti-privatization movement involving longshoremen from around the world.

Although this globally connected movement was not able to stop port privatization, it led me to ponder how to use artistic creation to imaginatively extend these seemingly failed attempts, so as to bring out inspirational and positive meanings that would then allow the viewer to imagine further continuations of these stories, experiences, and strategies.

In 2007, as the Losheng Preservation Movement was protesting the government's rejection of the proposal from scholars to preserve 90 percent of the sanatorium, I received a commission from the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid. This was also the year when the Spanish Congress of Deputies passed the Historical Memory Law, written to formally condemn General Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1936–75) and to offer compensation and aid to victims of the White Terror period, which extended from the Spanish Civil War through the end of Franco's reign.

The commission provoked me think about Taiwan's notorious Military Court and Prison. My childhood home was located opposite this facility, where political prisoners were imprisoned and tortured during Taiwan's Martial Law period (1949–87). In 2002, the government of the Democratic Progressive Party listed it as a historic site and planned to transform it into the Jing-Mei Human Rights Memorial and Culture Park. This made me reflect on how, during the anticommunist Martial Law period, the state not only imprisoned dissidents, but also implemented rules and disciplinary programs throughout society to "surgically excise the minds" of average people. No longer exposed to the views of dissidents and critical thinkers, Taiwanese people gradually lost their imagination, values, and social agency. They were also shaped into docile low-wage factory workers and consumers pursuing consumerist desire. This was perhaps one of the reasons why, after the Martial Law period ended, Taiwan was able to transition smoothly to a neoliberal

05/12

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Chen Chieh-ien
Dissenting Voices of the Unwashed, Disobedient, Noncitizens, and Exiles in their Own Homes

as to “enrich the state, strengthen the military” (*fukoku kyōhei*), and build a “civilized” state, Japan regarded pandemics and leprosy as a “national disgrace,” indicative of a barbaric and backwards country.¹ In 1907, the Home Ministry (*Naimu-shō*) issued a law entitled “Matter Concerning the Prevention of Leprosy,” which aimed to forcibly isolate all Hansen’s Disease patients by establishing sanatoriums in which to house them.

In 1926, thirty-one years into Japan’s colonization of Taiwan, the Japanese government decided to implement the same public policy in its colonies. This decision was intended both to prevent the Japanese population in Taiwan from contracting leprosy – in accordance with Japan’s eugenic aspirations – and to maximize local labor efficiency, ensuring the continuing growth of Japan’s economic power.

That same year, Mannoshin Kamiyama, the Governor-General of Taiwan – the head of Japan’s colonial government on the island – made the decision to build a leprosy sanatorium in the country. In 1930, the Rakusei (Losheng) Sanatorium was completed in the foothills of Danfeng Mountain, in the Xinzhuang district of Taipei. Thus began the forced isolation of local Japanese and Taiwanese leprosy patients, who were sterilized and forbidden to marry. Wire fences enclosed the sanatorium to prevent escape.

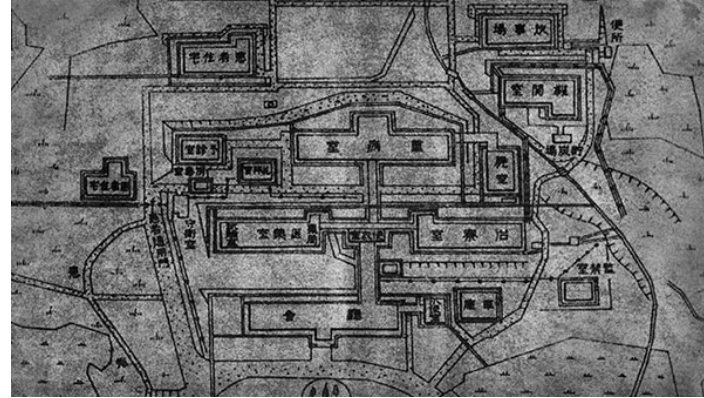
In 1945, after World War II, the Kuomintang government succeeded the Japanese colonial regime, and the Rakusei (Losheng) Sanatorium for Lepers of the Governor-General of Taiwan was renamed the Losheng Sanatorium of the Taiwanese Provincial Government. The Kuomintang largely carried forward colonial Japan’s practice of forcibly isolating leprosy patients, but this changed after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and the onset of the Cold War, when the US began to intervene in and dominate Taiwanese political, economic, military, and public health policy.

The US funded an expansion of the Losheng Sanatorium in order to house leprosy patients from the Kuomintang army and from the population at large, with the aim of ensuring a healthy Taiwanese military and labor force for the anticommunist effort. From the 1940s through the ‘60s, the US also gradually introduced biomedicines such as DDS (dapsone) into the sanatorium. Human medical experiments were conducted on the patients in order to test dosages and effectiveness.² Unable to withstand the neuropathic pain caused by over-dosages, a great number of sanatorium residents ended up tragically committing suicide.

Subsequent advances in global knowledge

about Hansen’s Disease led the Kuomintang to abolish the leprosy isolation policy in 1961. However, because the disease’s negative reputation had long been established and reinforced, most Hansen’s Disease patients faced tremendous difficulties reintegrating into society.

04/12



Blueprint drawing of Losheng Sanatorium, 1930.



Losheng Preservation Movement, on the morning of December 3, 2008. Photo: Chang Li-ben

In 1994, Taiwanese bureaucrats and local political forces conspired to have the Xinzhuang metro depot moved to the Losheng Sanatorium site. In 1995, sanatorium residents who were initially forced to “adopt the sanatorium as their only home” learned that they were to be relocated. They organized petitions and protests to preserve their right to stay. In 2002, the first round of demolition at the Losheng Sanatorium provoked a backlash from the Hansen’s Disease patients and the general public, resulting in the creation of the Losheng Preservation Movement. In addition to the Youth Alliance for Losheng, organized by students in 2004, and the Losheng Self-Help Organization, organized by sanatorium residents in 2005, groups of scholars, lawyers, engineers, and cultural workers joined the movement. By the end of 2008, following the

Chen Chieh-jen Dissenting Voices of the Unwashed, Disobedient, Noncitizens, and Exiles in their Own Homes

01/12

Thoughts on Taiwan’s Losheng Preservation Movement from a Latecomer to the Cause

On the morning of December 3, 2008, the Losheng Preservation Movement – ever expanding since it began in 2002 – set out to protest a joint proposal made in 1994 by Taiwanese state and local political forces to relocate the Xinzhuang metro depot to the Losheng Sanatorium site, which housed patients with Hansen’s Disease, formerly known as leprosy. After numerous petitions, negotiations, demonstrations, and protests, the Losheng Preservation Movement still failed to change the government’s decision to demolish more than 70 percent of the sanatorium. The morning of December 3, 2008 was when the government of Taipei County planned to send massive numbers of police to clear out all anti-relocation protesters, so as to assist the Taipei Department of Rapid Transit Systems in erecting a fence around the sanatorium in preparation for the construction of the new metro depot. To fend off this forced dispersal, over a hundred sanatorium residents, students, and members of the general public had occupied the space in front of the sanatorium’s Zhende Dormitory the night before. Immediately after the police dispersed all of the demonstrators, construction fences were erected, and the demolition of the sanatorium’s housing began promptly the following day.

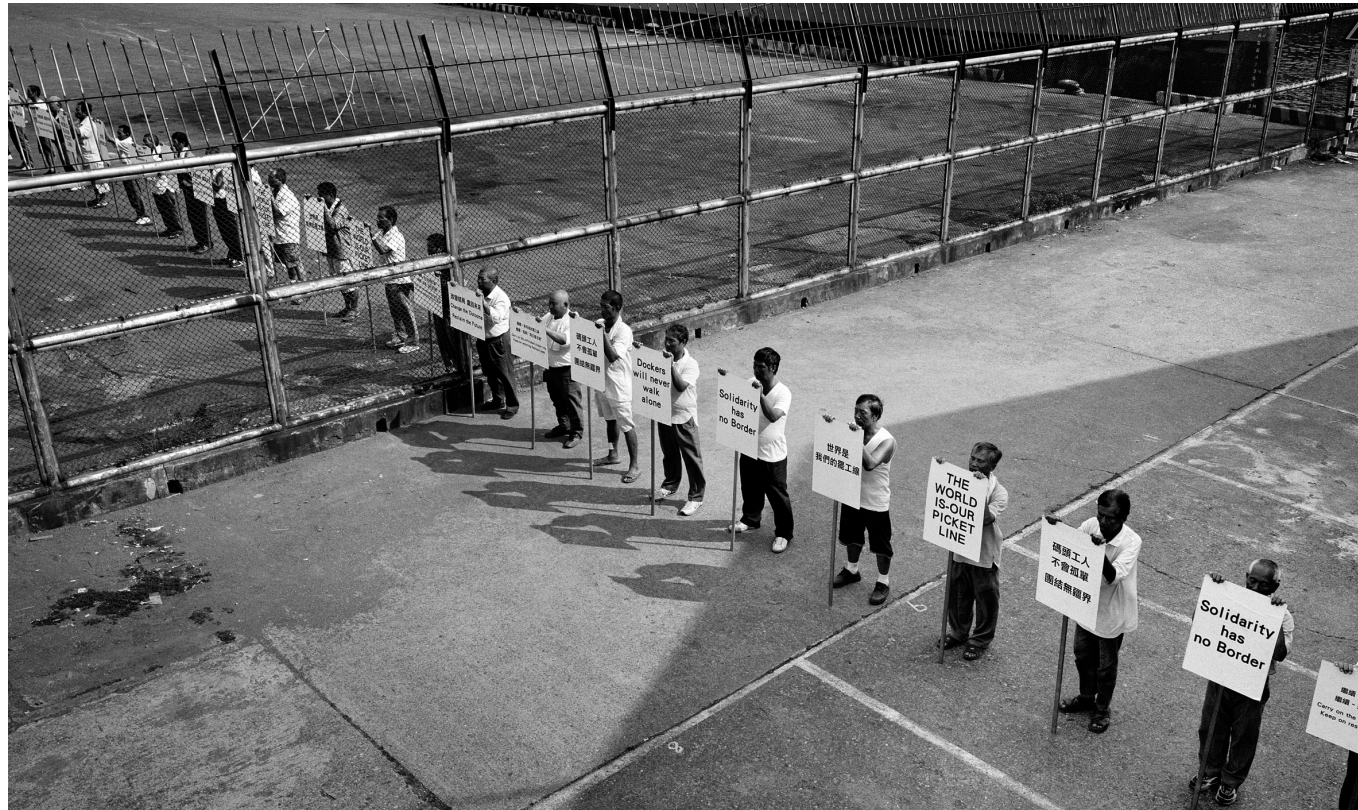
Although it was unable to prevent the demolition of the Losheng Sanatorium, this seemingly “failed” preservation movement stir us to reflect on its multiple dimensions and complex meanings – meanings that ripple out far beyond the sanatorium itself. Even after 70 percent of the sanatorium was demolished, we are confronted with the question of whether there exists another invisible yet permanent Losheng Sanatorium beyond the visible establishment. Are we participants in the construction of this invisible sanatorium?

As someone who never participated in the Losheng Preservation Movement, and as a nonprofessional who lacks extensive medical knowledge of Hansen’s Disease, how did I come to stand before the remnants of the sanatorium in 2013, long after the preservation movement’s heyday? How did I take these remnants as a starting point to create my four-part film *Realm of Reverberations*, as well as other follow-up works? Before taking you through this long, winding journey, let me briefly retrace the history of the Losheng Sanatorium as well as the Losheng Preservation Movement.

A History of the Losheng Sanatorium and the Losheng Preservation Movement

At the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, in an effort to catch up with Europe and the US as well

e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Chen Chieh-jen
Dissenting Voices of the Unwashed, Disobedient, Noncitizens, and Exiles in their Own Homes



Chen Chieh-jen, *The Route*, 2006.



Chen Chieh-jen, *Realm of Reverberations: The Suspended Room*, 2014.



Chen Chieh-jen, *Realm of Reverberations: Tree Planters*, 2014.