**Hito Steyerl
The Wretched of the Screen**

Contents

Preface

Written over the course of the past few years on a variety of topics, the essays gathered in this book can be said to revolve around a remarkably potent politics of the image that Hito Steyerl has steadily advanced in her work and writing. This is most clear in her landmark essay "In Defense of the Poor Image," and extends to "The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation," an essay on image-value as defined not by resolution and content, but by velocity, intensity, and speed. If reality and consciousness are not only reflected but also produced by images and screens, then Steyerl discovers a rich trove of information in the formal shifts and aberrant distortions of accelerated capitalism. It is a way of coming to terms with capitalism's immaterial and abstract flows by identifying a clear support structure beneath it, and releasing a kind of magical immediacy from its material. The digital image is not as ephemeral as one might think, because just as a photograph is lodged in paper, the digital image is lodged in a circulatory system of desire and exchange, which itself relies on a very specific economic regime.

For Steyerl, to look frankly at the forms produced by this regime is crucially not to also accept its techniques of exploitation. Rather, it is to resist a certain temptation to reflect nostalgically on a time when things were simpler, better. Her epic "In Free Fall" should make such nostalgia impossible: looking back to the single-point linear perspective developed primarily in the Renaissance, and accepted until today as an objective representation of empirical space, Steyerl shows this to be a total fiction produced by a Western worldview centered on the individual subject. The single point, it would seem,

is not the vanishing point, but the spectator. This blows open an entire metaphysics surrounding the picture plane as a highly unstable space of projection; what emerges is the idea that the poor images we see on the internet are not new innovations, but part of a centuries-long history of sculpting space and human consciousness using ideology masked as objective reality.

Abandoning the safety and certainty provided by centralized optics fast-forwards us to the present, where a condition of groundlessness begins to describe a moment when politics and representation, exploitation and affect, twist around each other in unforeseen ways, bursting apart at their seams, coming back together, and bursting apart again. Is this the space that contemporary art inhabits? In essays such as "Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy" and "Is a Museum a Factory?," Steyerl zooms in on the art system as a vast mine of labor extraction that survives on the passionate commitment of brilliant women, stressed-out freelancers, and unpaid interns. Are the many abandoned factories that have been turned into cultural spaces not the most conspicuous evidence that contemporary art serves to absorb the leftover ideological energy of history's failed political projects? Are they not the new mines for an emergent global class of soft labor?

In Steyerl's writing we begin to see how, even if the hopes and desires for coherent collective political projects have been displaced onto images and screens, it is precisely here that we must look frankly at the technology that seals in these aspirations. By undoing the lock, we might encounter the sheer pleasure of movement, of vertiginous uncontrollable flight through the wreckage of postcolonial and modernist discourses, from their failed promises

and totalizing claims to their unanticipated openings. Suddenly, sites of structural and literal violence are swallowed up in indeterminacy—made available for diversion, ready to be cracked open and reprogrammed with playfulness and mischief, affect and commitment, enchantment and fun.

When we first discussed starting an art journal in 2008, Steyerl's writing served as a crucial source of inspiration, and it is fair to say that the format and approach of *e-flux journal* would not be the same without her.

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

Introduction

"In a few hundred thousand years extraterrestrial forms of intelligence may incredulously sift through our wireless communications," writes Hito Steyerl in her essay "The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation."

It's true: in a few hundred thousand years someone from another galaxy may look with pity upon the agony of our time on this planet taken hostage by the dogma of capitalism. In trying to understand what happened and why, this extra-terrestrial intelligence will be astonished by our incredible mixture of technological refinement and extreme moral stupidity. This book will help the extraterrestrial to find some meaning, or at least some explanations.

In 1977, human history reached a turning point. Heroes died, or, more accurately, they disap-peared. They were not killed by the foes of heroism, but were transferred to another dimension, dis-solved, transformed into ghosts. The human race, misled by burlesque heroes made of deceptive electromagnetic substances, lost faith in the reality of life, and started believing only in the infinite proliferation of images.

It was the year when heroes faded, transmi-grating from the world of physical life and historical passion into the world of simulation and nervous stimulation. The year 1977 was a watershed: from the age of human evolution the world shifted to the age of de-evolution, or de-civilization. What had been built through labor and social solidarity began to be dissipated by a rapid and predatory process of de-realization. The material legacy of the modern con-flictive alliance between the industrious bourgeois and industrial workers—in public education, health

care, transportation, and welfare—was sacrificed to the religious dogma of a god called "the markets."

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the post-bourgeois dilapidation took the final form of a financial black hole. A drainage pump started to swallow and destroy the product of two hundred years of industriousness and collective intelligence, transforming the concrete reality of social civilization into abstractions—figures, algorithms, mathematical ferocity, and accumulation of nothing.

The seductive force of simulation transformed physical forms into vanishing images, submitted visual art to viral spreading, and subjected language to the fake regime of advertising. At the end of this process, real life disappeared into the black hole of financial accumulation. What is not totally clear at the moment is this: What happened to subjectivity, to sensibility and the ability to imagine, to create and to invent? Will the extraterrestrials find that the humans were, in the end, still able to come out of the black hole, to invest their energy in a new creative passion, in a new form of solidarity and mutuality?

This is the question Hito Steyerl's book asks, while also trying to say something about the possibilities to come, to show some traces of a possible future.

History has been replaced by the endless flowing recombination of fragmentary images. Political awareness and political strategy have been replaced by the random recombination of frantic precarious activity. And yet, a new form of intellectual research is emerging, and artists are looking for a common ground from which to understand these changes. As the philosopher who foresaw the destruction of the future said: "But where danger threatens / That which saves from it also grows."[1]

It was in the 1990s, the decade of crazy acceleration when the black hole began to form, that Net culture and recombinant imagination emerged from the ashes of visual art reduced to imaginary spam, and intermingled with media activism. In the swirl of de-realization a new form of solidarity started to emerge.

Hito Steyerl's essays in this book are a sort of reconnaissance mission, a cartography in the making of the wasteland of the frozen imagination, but also a cartography of the emerging new sensibility. From this cartography we will know where to move forward to discover a new form of activity that must take the place of art, of politics and of therapy, and that must mix these three different forms into a process of reactivating sensibility, so that humankind may become capable of recognizing itself again.

Will we succeed in this discovery? Will we be able to find the way out from the present darkness and confusion of dogma and falseness? Will we be able to escape the black hole?

At the moment, it is impossible to say—we don't know if there is hope beyond the black hole, if there will be a future after the future. We must ask the extraterrestrial forms of intelligence who, looking down to Earth, will detect the signs of our becoming lost, and possibly also the signs of our new life after capitalism.

—Franco "Bifo" Berardi

1
Friedrich Hölderlin, "Patmos," in *Selected Poems and Fragments*, ed. Jeremy Adler, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 231.

In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective

Imagine you are falling. But there is no ground.

Many contemporary philosophers have pointed out that the present moment is distinguished by a prevailing condition of groundlessness.[1] We cannot assume any stable ground on which to base metaphysical claims or foundational political myths. At best, we are faced with temporary, contingent, and partial attempts at grounding. But if there is no stable ground available for our social lives and philosophical aspirations, the consequence must be a permanent, or at least intermittent state of free fall for subjects and objects alike. But why don't we notice?

Paradoxically, while you are falling, you will probably feel as if you are floating—or not even moving at all. Falling is relational—if there is nothing to fall toward, you may not even be aware that you're falling. If there is no ground, gravity might be low and you'll feel weightless. Objects will stay suspended if you let go of them. Whole societies around you may be falling just as you are. And it may actually feel like perfect stasis—as if history and time have ended and you can't even remember that time ever moved forward.

As you are falling, your sense of orientation may start to play additional tricks on you. The horizon quivers in a maze of collapsing lines and you may lose any sense of above and below, of before and after, of yourself and your boundaries. Pilots have even reported that free fall can trigger a feeling of confusion between the self and the aircraft. While falling, people may sense themselves as being things, while things may sense that they are people. Traditional modes of seeing and feeling are shattered. Any sense of balance is disrupted. Perspectives are twisted and multiplied. New types of visuality arise.

This disorientation is partly due to the loss of a stable horizon. And with the loss of horizon also comes the departure of a stable paradigm of orientation, which has situated concepts of subject and object, of time and space, throughout modernity. In falling, the lines of the horizon shatter, twirl around, and superimpose.

A Brief History of the Horizon

Our sense of spatial and temporal orientation has changed dramatically in recent years, prompted by new technologies of surveillance, tracking, and targeting. One of the symptoms of this transformation is the growing importance of aerial views: overviews, Google Map views, satellite views. We are growing increasingly accustomed to what used to be called a God's-eye view. On the other hand, we also notice the decreasing importance of a paradigm of visuality that long dominated our vision: linear perspective. Its stable and single point of view is being supplemented (and often replaced) by multiple perspectives, overlapping windows, distorted flight lines, and divergent vanishing points. How could these changes be related to the phenomena of groundlessness and permanent fall?

First, let's take a step back and consider the crucial role of the horizon in all of this. Our traditional sense of orientation—and, with it, modern concepts of time and space—are based on a stable line: the horizon line. Its stability hinges on the stability of an observer, who is thought to be located on a ground of sorts, a shoreline, a boat—a ground that can be imagined as stable, even if in fact it is not. The horizon line was an extremely important element in navigation. It defined the limits of communication and understanding. Beyond the horizon, there was only muteness and silence. Within it,

things could be made visible. But it could also be used for determining one's own location and relation to one's surroundings, destinations, or ambitions.

Early navigation consisted of gestures and bodily poses relating to the horizon. "In early days, [Arab navigators] used one or two fingers width, a thumb and little finger on an outstretched arm, or an arrow held at arm's length to sight the horizon at the lower end and Polaris at the upper."[2] The angle between the horizon and the Pole star gave information about the altitude of one's position. This measurement method was known as *sighting* the object, *shooting* the object, or *taking a sight*. In this way, one's own location could be at least roughly determined.

Instruments like the astrolabe, quadrant, and sextant refined this way of gaining orientation by using the horizon and the stars. One of the main obstacles with this technology was the fact that the ground on which sailors stood was never stable in the first place. The stable horizon mostly remained a projection, until artificial horizons were eventually invented in order to create the illusion of stability. The use of the horizon to calculate position gave seafarers a sense of orientation, thus also enabling colonialism and the spread of a capitalist global market, but also became an important tool for the construction of the optical paradigms that came to define modernity, the most important paradigm being that of so-called linear perspective.

As early as 1028, Abu Ali al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham (965–1040), also known as Alhazen, wrote a book of visual theory, *Kitab al-Manazir*. After 1200, it became available in Europe and spawned numerous experiments in visual production between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, which culminated in the development of linear perspective.

In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective

Hito Steyerl
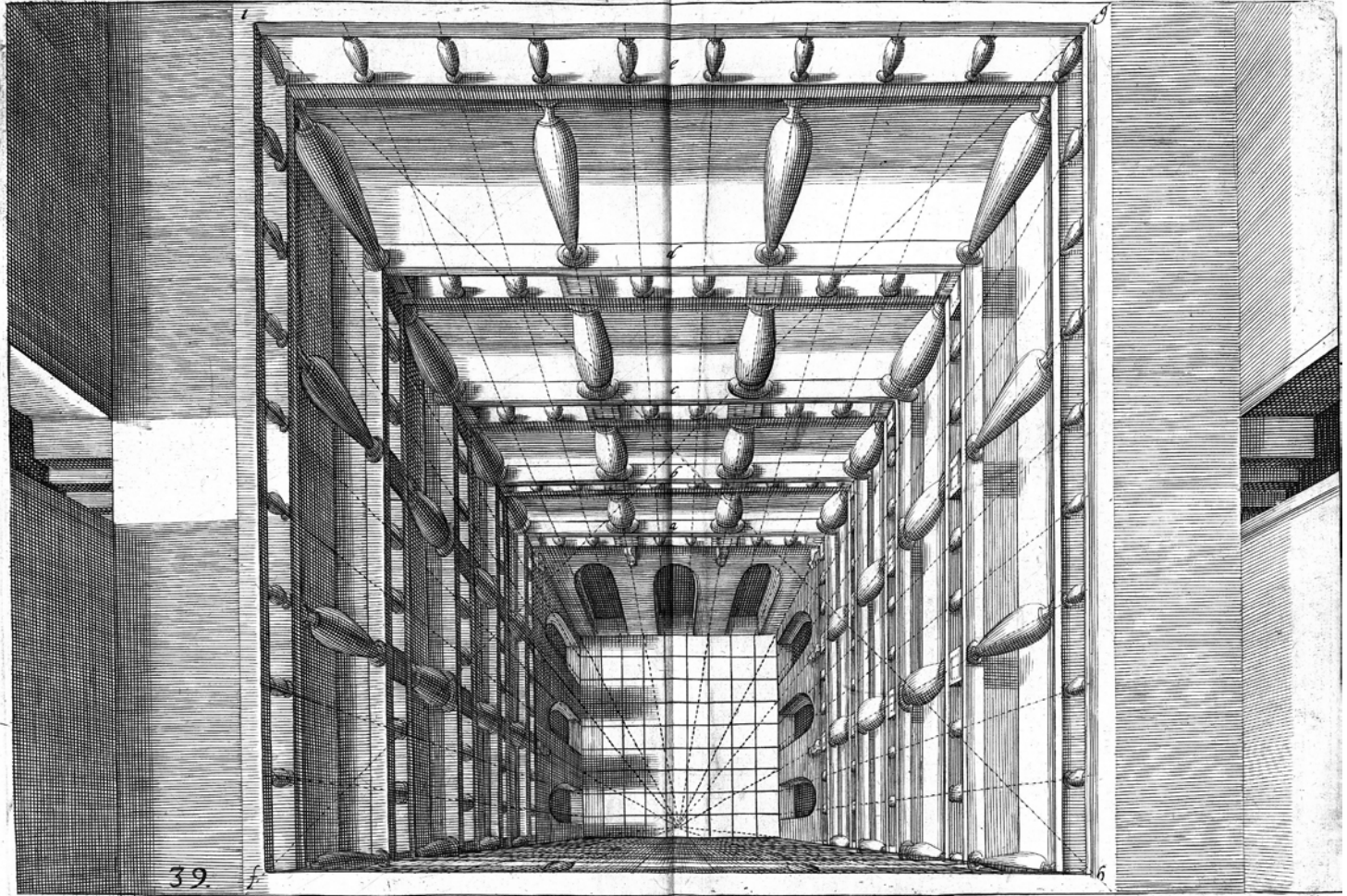
Hans Vredeman De Vries, *Perspective 39*, 1605, copperplate engraving.

In Duccio's *Last Supper* (1308–11), several vanishing points are still evident. The perspectives in this space do not coalesce into a horizon line, nor do they all intersect in one single vanishing point. But in *Miracle of the Desecrated Host (Scene I)* (1465–69), painted by Paolo Uccello, who was one of the most ardent experimenters in the development of linear perspective, the perspective is aligned to culminate in one single vanishing point, located on a virtual horizon defined by the eye line.

Linear perspective is based on several decisive negations. First, the curvature of the earth is typically disregarded. The horizon is conceived as an abstract flat line upon which the points on any horizontal plane converge. Additionally, as Erwin Panofsky argued, the construction of linear perspective declares the view of a one-eyed and immobile spectator as a norm—and this view is itself assumed to be natural, scientific, and objective. Thus, linear perspective is based on an abstraction, and does not correspond to any subjective perception.[3] Instead, it computes a mathematical, flattened, infinite, continuous, and homogenous space, and declares it to be reality. Linear perspective creates the illusion of a quasi-natural view to the "outside," as if the image plane was a window opening onto the "real" world. This is also the literal meaning of the Latin *perspectiva*: to see through.

This space defined by linear perspective is calculable, navigable, and predictable. It allows the calculation of future risk, which can be anticipated, and, therefore, managed. As a consequence, linear perspective not only transforms space, but also introduces the notion of a linear time, which allows mathematical prediction and, with it, linear progress. This is the second, temporal meaning of perspective: a view onto a calculable future. As

Walter Benjamin argued, time can become just as homogenous and empty as space.[4] And for all these calculations to operate, we must necessarily assume an observer standing on a stable ground looking out toward a vanishing point on a flat, and actually quite artificial, horizon.

But linear perspective also performs an ambivalent operation concerning the viewer. As the whole paradigm converges in one of the viewer's eyes, the viewer becomes central to the worldview established by it. The viewer is mirrored in the vanishing point, and thus constructed by it. The vanishing point gives the observer a body and a position. But on the other hand, the spectator's importance is also undermined by the assumption that vision follows scientific laws. While empowering the subject by placing it at the center of vision, linear perspective also undermines the viewer's individuality by subjecting it to supposedly objective laws of representation.

Needless to say, this reinvention of the subject, time, and space was an additional tool kit for enabling Western dominance, and the dominance of its concepts—as well as for redefining standards of representation, time, and space. All of these components are evident in Uccello's six-panel painting, *Miracle of the Desecrated Host*. In the first panel, a woman sells a Host to a Jewish merchant, who in the second panel tries to "desecrate" it. For this, the Jewish merchant ends up at the stakes. Along with his wife and two small children, he is tied to a pillar on which parallels converge as if it were a target mark. The date of these panels shortly prefigures the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain in 1492, also the year of Christopher Columbus's expedition to the West Indies.[5] In these paintings, linear perspective becomes a matrix for racial and religious

propaganda, and related atrocities. This so-called scientific worldview helped set standards for marking people as other, thus legitimizing their conquest or the domination over them.

On the other hand, linear perspective also carries the seeds of its own downfall. Its scientific allure and objectivist attitude established a universal claim for representation, a link to veracity that undermined particularistic worldviews, even if half-heartedly and belatedly. It thus became a hostage to the truth it had so confidently proclaimed. And a deep suspicion was planted alongside its claims for veracity from its inception.

The Downfall of Linear Perspective
But the situation now is somewhat different. We seem to be in a state of transition toward one or several other visual paradigms. Linear perspective has been supplemented by other types of vision to the point where we may have to conclude that its status as the dominant visual paradigm is changing.

This transition was already apparent in the nineteenth century in the field of painting. One work in particular expresses the circumstances of this transformation: *The Slave Ship* (1840), by J. M. W. Turner. The scene in the painting represents a real incident: when the captain of a slave ship discovered that his insurance only covered slaves lost at sea, and not those dying or ill on board, he ordered all dying and sick slaves to be thrown overboard. Turner's painting captures the moment where the slaves are beginning to go under.

In this painting, the horizon line, if distinguishable at all, is tilted, curved, and troubled. The observer has lost his stable position. There are no parallels that could converge at a single vanishing point. The sun, which is at the center of

the composition, is multiplied in reflections. The observer is upset, displaced, beside himself at the sight of the slaves, who are not only sinking but have also had their bodies reduced to fragments—their limbs devoured by sharks, mere shapes below the water's surface. At the sight of the effects of colonialism and slavery, linear perspective—the central viewpoint, the position of mastery, control, and subjecthood—is abandoned and starts tumbling and tilting, taking with it the idea of space and time as systematic constructions. The idea of a calculable and predictable future shows a murderous side through an insurance that prevents economic loss by inspiring cold-blooded murder. Space dissolves into mayhem on the unstable and treacherous surface of an unpredictable sea.

Turner experimented with moving perspectives early on. Legend has it that he had himself tied to the mast of a ship crossing from Dover to Calais, explicitly to watch the horizon change. In 1843 or 1844, he stuck his head out of the window of a moving train for exactly nine minutes, the result of which was a painting called *Rain, Steam, and Speed—The Great Western Railway* (1844). In it, linear perspective dissolves into the background. There is no resolution, no vanishing point, and no clear view to any past or future. Again, more interesting is the perspective of the spectator himself, who seems to be dangling in the air on the outer side of the rails of a railroad bridge. There is no clear ground under his assumed position. He might be suspended in the mist, floating over an absent ground.

In both of Turner's paintings, the horizon is blurred, tilted, and yet not necessarily denied. The paintings do not negate its existence altogether, but render it inaccessible to the viewer's perception. The question of horizon starts to float, so to speak.

Perspectives assume mobile points of view and communication is disabled even within one common horizon. One could say that the downward motion of the sinking slaves affects the point of view of the painter, who tears it away from a position of certitude, and subjects it to gravity and motion and the pull of a bottomless sea.

Acceleration

With the twentieth century, the further dismantling of linear perspective in a variety of areas began to take hold. Cinema supplements photography with the articulation of different temporal perspectives. Montage becomes a perfect device for destabilizing the observer's perspective and breaking down linear time. Painting abandons representation to a large extent and demolishes linear perspective in cubism, collage, and different types of abstraction. Time and space are reimagined through quantum physics and the theory of relativity, while perception is reorganized by warfare, advertisement, and the conveyor belt. With the invention of aviation, opportunities for falling, nose-diving, and crashing increase. With it—and especially with the conquest of outer space—comes the development of new perspectives and techniques of orientation, found especially in an increasing number of aerial views of all kinds. While all these developments can be described as typical characteristics of modernity, the past few years has seen visual culture saturated by military and entertainment images' views from above.

Aircraft expand the horizon of communication and act as aerial cameras providing backgrounds for aerial map views. Drones survey, track, and kill. But the entertainment industry is busy as well. Especially in 3-D cinema, the new characteristics of

aerial views are fully exploited by staging vertiginous flights into abysses. One could almost say that 3-D and the construction of imaginary vertical worlds (prefigured in the logic of computer games) are essential to each other. 3-D also intensifies hierarchies of material required to access this new visuality. As Thomas Elsaesser has argued, a hardware environment integrating military, surveillance, and entertainment applications produces new markets for hardware and software.[6]

In a fascinating text, Eyal Weizman analyzes verticality in political architecture, describing the spatial turn of sovereignty and surveillance in terms of a vertical 3-D sovereignty.[7] He argues that geopolitical power was once distributed on a planar map-like surface on which boundaries were drawn and defended. But at present, the distribution of power—he cites the Israeli occupation in Palestine as his example, but there could be many others—has increasingly come to occupy a vertical dimension. Vertical sovereignty splits space into stacked horizontal layers, separating not only airspace from ground, but also splitting ground from underground, and airspace into various layers. Different strata of community are divided from each other on a y-axis, multiplying sites of conflict and violence. As Achille Mbembe contends,

Occupation of the skies therefore acquires a critical importance, since most of the policing is done from the air. Various other technologies are mobilized to this effect: sensors aboard unmanned air vehicles (UAVs), aerial reconnaissance jets, early warning Hawkeye planes, assault helicopters, an Earth-observation satellite, techniques of "hologrammatization."[8]

Free Fall

But how to link this obsessive policing, division, and representation of ground to the philosophical assumption that in contemporary societies there is no ground to speak of? How do these aerial representations—in which grounding effectively constitutes a privileged subject—link to the hypothesis that we currently inhabit a condition of free fall?

The answer is simple: many of the aerial views, 3-D nose-dives, Google Maps, and surveillance panoramas do not actually portray a stable ground. Instead, they create a supposition that it exists in the first place. Retroactively, this virtual ground creates a perspective of overview and surveillance for a distanced, superior spectator safely floating up in the air. Just as linear perspective established an imaginary stable observer and horizon, so does the perspective from above establish an imaginary floating observer and an imaginary stable ground.

This establishes a new visual normality—a new subjectivity safely folded into surveillance technology and screen-based distraction.[9] One might conclude that this is in fact a radicalization—though not an overcoming—of the paradigm of linear perspective. In it, the former distinction between object and subject is exacerbated and turned into the one-way gaze of superiors onto inferiors, a looking down from high to low. Additionally, the displacement of perspective creates a disembodied and remote-controlled gaze, outsourced to machines and other objects.[10] Gazes already became decisively mobile and mechanized with the invention of photography, but new technologies have enabled the detached observant gaze to become ever more inclusive and all-knowing to the point of becoming massively intrusive—as militaristic as it is pornographic, as intense as extensive, both micro- and macroscopic.[11]

Space debris or junk (such as rocket stages, defunct satellites, and explosion and collision fragments) orbiting the earth.

The Politics of Verticality

The view from above is a perfect metonymy for a more general verticalization of class relations in the context of an intensified class war from above—seen through the lenses and on the screens of military, entertainment, and information industries.[12] It is a proxy perspective that projects delusions of stability, safety, and extreme mastery onto a backdrop of expanded 3-D sovereignty. But if the new views from above recreate societies as free-falling urban abysses and splintered terrains of occupation, surveilled aerially and policed biopolitically, they may also—as linear perspective did—carry the seeds of their own demise within them.

As linear perspective began to tumble down with the sinking bodies of slaves thrown into the ocean, for many people today the simulated grounds of aerial imagery provide an illusionary tool of orientation in a condition in which the horizons have, in fact, been shattered. Time is out of joint and we no longer know whether we are objects or subjects as we spiral down in an imperceptible free fall.[13]

But if we accept the multiplication and de-linearization of horizons and perspectives, the new tools of vision may also serve to express, and even alter, the contemporary conditions of disruption and disorientation. Recent 3-D animation technologies incorporate multiple perspectives, which are deliberately manipulated to create multifocal and non-linear imagery.[14] Cinematic space is twisted in any way imaginable, organized around heterogeneous, curved, and collaged perspectives. The tyranny of the photographic lens, cursed by the promise of its indexical relation to reality, has given way to hyper-real representations—not of space as it is, but of space as we can make it—for better or worse. There is no need for expensive renderings; a simple green-

screen collage yields impossible cubist perspectives and implausible concatenations of times and spaces alike.

Finally, cinema has caught up with the representational freedoms of painting and structural and experimental film. As it merges with graphic-design practices, drawing, and collage, cinema has gained independence from the prescribed focal dimensions that have normalized and limited the realm of its vision. While it could be argued that montage was the first step toward a liberation from cinematic linear perspective—and was for this reason ambivalent for most of its existence—only now can new and different sorts of spatial vision be created. Similar things can be said about multiscreen projections, which create a dynamic viewing space, dispersing perspective and possible points of view. The viewer is no longer unified by such a gaze, but is rather dissociated and overwhelmed, drafted into the production of content. None of these projection spaces suppose a single unified horizon. Rather, many call for a multiple spectator, who must be created and recreated by ever-new articulations of the crowd.[15]

In many of these new visualities, what seemed like a helpless tumble into an abyss actually turns out to be a new representational freedom. And perhaps this helps us get over the last assumption implicit in this thought experiment: the idea that we need a ground in the first place. In his discussion of the vertiginous, Theodor W. Adorno scoffs at philosophy's obsession with earth and origin, with a philosophy of belonging that obviously comes packaged within the most violent fear of the groundless and bottomless. For him, the vertiginous is not about the panicked loss of a ground imagined to be a safe haven of being:

A cognition that is to bear fruit will throw itself to the objects *à fond perdu* [without hope]. The vertigo which this causes is an *index veri*; the shock of inclusiveness, the negative as which it cannot help appearing in the frame-covered, never-changing realm, is true for untruth only.[16]

A fall toward objects without reservation, embracing a world of forces and matter, which lacks any original stability and sparks the sudden shock of the open: a freedom that is terrifying, utterly deterritorializing, and always already unknown. Falling means ruin and demise as well as love and abandon, passion and surrender, decline and catastrophe. Falling is corruption as well as liberation, a condition that turns people into things and vice versa.[17] It takes place in an opening we could endure or enjoy, embrace or suffer, or simply accept as reality.

Finally, the perspective of free fall teaches us to consider a social and political dreamscape of radicalized class war from above, one that throws jaw-dropping social inequalities into sharp focus. But falling does not only mean falling apart, it can also mean a new certainty falling into place. Grappling with crumbling futures that propel us backward onto an agonizing present, we may realize that the place we are falling toward is no longer grounded, nor is it stable. It promises no community, but a shifting formation.

1
Examples of so-called anti- and post-foundational philosophy are given in the preface to Oliver Marchart's introductory volume *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 1–10. Briefly speaking, such thought, as proffered by the philosophers under discussion, rejects the idea of a given and stable metaphysical ground and revolves around Heideggerian metaphors of abyss and ground, as well as the absence of ground. Ernesto Laclau describes the experience of contingency and groundlessness as a possible experience of freedom.

2
Peter Ifland, "The History of the Sextant" (lecture, University of Coimbra, Portugal, October 3, 2000); see http://www.mat.uc.pt/~helios/Mestre/Novemb00/H61iflan.htm.

3
See Erwin Panofsky, "Die Perspektive als symbolische Form," in *Erwin Panofsky: Deutschsprachige Aufsätze II,* ed. Wolfgang Kemp et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), 664–758.

4
Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 261. See http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm.

5
See Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991).

6
The following quote by Elsaesser can be seen as blueprint for this paper, whose inspiration derives from an informal conversation with the author: "This means that stereoscopic images and the 3-D movie are part of the new paradigm, which is turning our information society into a control society and our visual culture into a surveillance culture. The movie industry, civil society, and the military sector are all united in this surveillance paradigm, which, as part of a historic process, seeks to replace 'monocular vision,' the way of seeing that has defined Western thought and action for the last 500 years. It is this means of seeing that gave rise to a wide range of innovations like panel painting, colonial seafaring, and Cartesian philosophy, as well as the whole concept of projecting ideas, risks, chances, and courses of action into the future. Flight simulators and other types of military technology are part of a new effort to introduce 3-D as the standard means of perception—but the development goes even further to include surveillance. This encompasses an entire catalog of movements and behaviors, all of which are intrinsically connected to the monitoring, steering, and observation of ongoing processes, and which delegate or outsource what was once referred to as introspection, self-awareness, and personal responsibility." Thomas Elsaesser, "The Dimension of Depth and Objects Rushing Towards Us. Or: The Tail that Wags the Dog. A Discourse on Digital 3-D Cinema," http://www.filmmakersfestival.com/en/magazine/ausgabe-12010/the-dimension-of-depth/the-dimesion-of-depth-and-objects-rushing-towards-us.html.

7
See Eyal Weizman, "The Politics of Verticality," http://www.opendemocracy.net/ecology-politicsverticality/article_801.jsp.

8
Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 29, http://www.jhfc.duke.edu/icuss/pdfs/Mbembe.pdf.

9
Dieter Roelstraete and Jennifer Allen both describe this new normality from different perspectives in very good texts. See Dieter Roelstraete, "(Jena Revisited) Ten Tentative Tenets," *e-flux journal*, no. 16 (May 2010), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/137; and Jennifer Allen, "That Eye, The Sky," *frieze*, no. 132 (June–August 2010) , http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/that_eye_the_sky/.

10

See Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

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In fact, the perspective of the floating camera belongs to a dead man. Most recently, a dehumanization (or post-humanization) of the gaze is perhaps nowhere as literally allegorized as in the film *Enter the Void* (Gaspar Noé, 2010), where, for most of the film, a disembodied point of view endlessly drifts over Tokyo. This gaze penetrates any space, moving without constraint and with unrestricted mobility, looking for a body in which to biologically reproduce itself and reincarnate. The point of view in *Enter the Void* is reminiscent of the gaze of a drone. But instead of bringing death, it is looking to recreate its own life. To this end, the protagonist basically wants to hijack a fetus. But the film is also very picky about this procedure: mixed race fetuses get aborted in favor of white ones. There are more issues that link the movie to reactionary breeding ideologies. Floating and biopolitical policing are mixed into a computer-animated obsession with superior bodies, remote control, and digital aerial vision. The floating gaze of the dead man thus literally echoes Achille Mbembe's powerful description of necropower: necropower regulates life through the perspective of death. Could these tropes allegorized in a single (and frankly, god-awful) movie be expanded into a more general analysis of disembodied hovering point of views? Do the aerial views, drone perspectives, and 3-D dives into abysses stand in for the gazes of "dead white males," a worldview that lost its vitality, yet persists as an undead but powerful tool to police the world and control its own reproduction?

12

Paraphrasing Elsaesser's notion of the "military-surveillance-entertainment complex." See http://www.edit-frankfurt.de/en/magazine/ausgabe-12010/the-dimension-of-depth/the-dimesion-of-depth-and-objects-rushing-towards-us.html.

13

Assuming there is no ground, even those on the bottom of hierarchies keep falling.

14

These techniques are described in Maneesh Agrawala, Denis Zorin, and Tamara Munzner, "Artistic Multiprojection Rendering," in *Proceedings of the Eurographics Workshop on Rendering Techniques 2000*, ed. Bernard Peroche and Holly E. Rusgmaier (London: Springer-Verlag, 2000), 125–36; Patrick Coleman and Karan Singh, "Ryan: Rendering Your Animation Nonlinearly Projected," in *NPAR '04: Proceedings of the 3rd International Symposium on Non-photorealistic Animation and Rendering* (New York: ACM Press, 2004), 129–56; Andrew Glassner, "Digital Cubism, part 2," *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications* 25, no. 4 (July 2004): 84–95; Karan Singh, "A Fresh Perspective," in Peroche et al., *Proceedings of the Eurographics Workshop*, 17–24; Nisha Sudarsanam, Cindy Grimm, and Karan Singh, "Interactive Manipulation of Projections with a Curved Perspective," *Computer Graphics Forum* 24 (2005): 105–8; and Yonggao Yang, Jim X. Chen, and Mohsen Beheshti, "Nonlinear Perspective Projections and Magic Lenses: 3-D View Deformation," *IEEE Computer Graphics Applications* 25, no. 1 (January/February 2005): 76–84.

15

See Hito Steyerl, "Is a Museum a Factory?" *e-flux journal*, no. 7 (June 2009), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/71; and on page 60 in this book.

16

Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1972), 43.

17

Taking the cue from Gil Leung's reflection, "After before now: Notes on In Free Fall," August 8, 2010, http://www.picture-this.org.uk/library/essays1/2010/after-before-now-notes-on-in-free-fall.

In Defense of the Poor Image

The poor image is a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.

The poor image is a rag or a rip; an AVI or a JPEG, a lumpen proletariat in the class society of appearances, ranked and valued according to its resolution. The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction. The image is liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance. The poor image tends toward abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming.

The poor image is an illicit fifth-generation bastard of an original image. Its genealogy is dubious. Its file names are deliberately misspelled. It often defies patrimony, national culture, or indeed copyright. It is passed on as a lure, a decoy, an index, or as a reminder of its former visual self. It mocks the promises of digital technology. Not only is it often degraded to the point of being just a hurried blur, one even doubts whether it could be called an image at all. Only digital technology could produce such a dilapidated image in the first place.

Poor images are the contemporary Wretched of the Screen, the debris of audiovisual production, the trash that washes up on the digital economies' shores. They testify to the violent dislocation, transferrals, and displacement of images—their acceleration and circulation within the vicious cycles of audiovisual capitalism. Poor images are dragged around the globe as commodities or their effigies, as gifts or as bounty. They spread pleasure or death threats, conspiracy theories or bootlegs, resistance or stultification. Poor images show the rare, the obvious, and the unbelievable—that is, if we can still manage to decipher it.

Low Resolutions

In one of Woody Allen's films the main character is out of focus.[1] It's not a technical problem but some sort of disease that has befallen him: his image is consistently blurred. Since Allen's character is an actor, this becomes a major problem: he is unable to find work. His lack of definition turns into a material problem. Focus is identified as a class position, a position of ease and privilege, while being out of focus lowers one's value as an image. The contemporary hierarchy of images, however, is not only based on sharpness, but also and primarily on resolution. Just look at any electronics store and this system, described by Harun Farocki in a notable 2007 interview, becomes immediately apparent.[2] In the class society of images, cinema takes on the role of a flagship store. In flagship stores high-end products are marketed in an upscale environment. More affordable derivatives of the same images circulate as DVDs, on broadcast television, or online, as poor images.

Obviously, a high-resolution image looks more brilliant and impressive, more mimetic and magic, more scary and seductive than a poor one. It is more rich, so to speak. Now, even consumer formats are increasingly adapting to the tastes of cineastes and esthetes, who insisted on 35 mm film as a guarantee of pristine visuality. The insistence upon analog film as the sole medium of visual importance resounded

Public ceremony organized by the mayor of Puebla, Mexico, to destroy pirated DVDs in circulation.

throughout discourses on cinema, almost regardless of their ideological inflection. It never mattered that these high-end economies of film production were (and still are) firmly anchored in systems of national culture, capitalist studio production, the cult of mostly male genius, and the original version, and thus are often conservative in their very structure. Resolution was fetishized as if its lack amounted to castration of the author. The cult of film gauge dominated even independent film production. The rich image established its own set of hierarchies, with new technologies offering more and more possibilities to creatively degrade it.
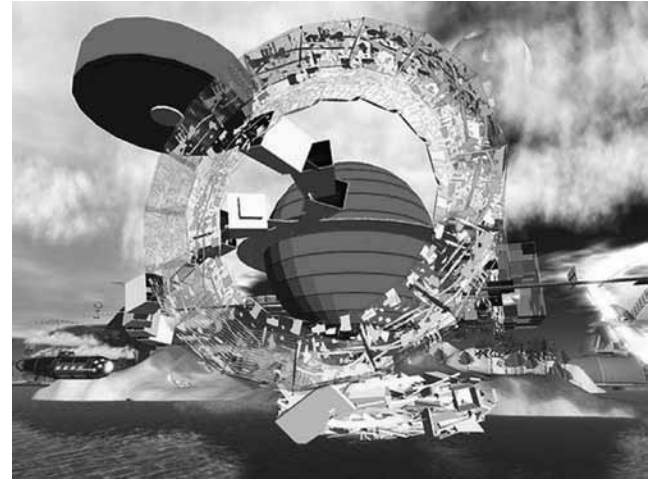
Resurrection (as Poor Images)

But insisting on rich images also had more serious consequences. A speaker at a recent conference on the film essay refused to show clips from a piece by Humphrey Jennings because no proper film projection was available. Although there was at the speaker's disposal a perfectly standard DVD player and video projector, the audience was left to imagine what those images might have looked like.

In this case the invisibility of the image was more or less voluntary and based on aesthetic premises. But it has a much more general equivalent based on the consequences of neoliberal policies. Twenty or even thirty years ago, the neoliberal restructuring of media production began slowly obscuring noncommercial imagery, to the point where experimental and essayistic cinema became almost invisible. As it became prohibitively expensive to keep these works circulating in cinemas, so were they also deemed too marginal to be broadcast on television. Thus they slowly disappeared not just from cinemas, but from the public sphere as well. Video essays and experimental

films remained for the most part unseen save for some rare screenings in metropolitan film museums or film clubs, projected in their original resolution before disappearing again into the darkness of the archive.

This development was of course connected to the neoliberal radicalization of the concept of culture as commodity, to the commercialization of cinema, its dispersion into multiplexes, and the marginalization of independent filmmaking. It was also connected to the restructuring of global media industries and the establishment of monopolies over the audiovisual in certain countries or territories. In this way, resistant or nonconformist visual matter disappeared from the surface into an underground of alternative archives and collections, kept alive only by a network of committed organizations and individuals, who would circulate bootlegged VHS copies among themselves. Sources for these were extremely rare—tapes moved from hand to hand, depending on word of mouth, within circles of friends and colleagues. With the possibility to stream video online, this condition started to dramatically change. An increasing number of rare materials reappeared on publicly accessible platforms, some of them carefully curated (UbuWeb) and some just a pile of stuff (YouTube).

At present, there are at least twenty torrents of Chris Marker's film essays available online. If you want a retrospective, you can have it. But the economy of poor images is about more than just downloads: you can keep the files, watch them again, even reedit or improve them if you think it necessary. And the results circulate. Blurred AVI files of half-forgotten masterpieces are exchanged on semi-secret P2P platforms. Clandestine cellphone videos smuggled out of museums are broadcast on YouTube. DVDs of

Chris Marker's virtual home as found in Second Life, May 29, 2009.

artists' viewing copies are bartered.[3] Many works of avant-garde, essayistic, and noncommercial cinema have been resurrected as poor images. Whether they like it or not.

Privatization and Piracy

That rare prints of militant, experimental, and classical works of cinema as well as video art reappear as poor images is significant on another level. Their situation reveals much more than the content or appearance of the images themselves: it also reveals the conditions of their marginalization, the constellation of social forces leading to their online circulation as poor images.[4] Poor images are poor because they are not assigned any value within the class society of images—their status as illicit or degraded grants them exemption from its criteria. Their lack of resolution attests to their appropriation and displacement.[5]

Obviously, this condition is not only connected to the neoliberal restructuring of media production and digital technology; it also has to do with the post-socialist and postcolonial restructuring of nation-states, their cultures, and their archives. While some nation-states are dismantled or fall apart, new cultures and traditions are invented and new histories created. This obviously also affects film archives—in many cases, a whole heritage of film prints is left without its supporting framework of national culture. As I once observed in the case of a film museum in Sarajevo, the national archive can find its next life in the form of a video-rental store.[6] Pirate copies seep out of such archives through disorganized privatization. On the other hand, even the British Library sells off its contents online at astronomical prices.

As Kodwo Eshun has noted, poor images circulate partly in the void left by state cinema

organizations who find it too difficult to operate as a 16/35 mm archive or to maintain any kind of distribution infrastructure in the contemporary era.[7] From this perspective, the poor image reveals the decline and degradation of the film essay, or indeed any experimental and noncommercial cinema, which in many places was made possible because the production of culture was considered a task of the state. Privatization of media production gradually grew more important than state-controlled/sponsored media production. But, on the other hand, the rampant privatization of intellectual content, along with online marketing and commodification, also enables piracy and appropriation; it gives rise to the circulation of poor images.

Imperfect Cinema

The emergence of poor images reminds one of a classic Third Cinema manifesto, "For an Imperfect Cinema," by Juan García Espinosa, written in Cuba in the late 1960s.[8] Espinosa argues for an imperfect cinema because, in his words, "perfect cinema—technically and artistically masterful—is almost always reactionary cinema." The imperfect cinema is one that strives to overcome the divisions of labor within class society. It merges art with life and science, blurring the distinction between consumer and producer, audience and author. It insists upon its own imperfection, is popular but not consumerist, committed without becoming bureaucratic.

In his manifesto, Espinosa also reflects on the promises of new media. He clearly predicts that the development of video technology will jeopardize the elitist position of traditional filmmakers and enable some sort of mass film production: an art of the people. Like the economy of poor images,

imperfect cinema diminishes the distinctions between author and audience and merges life and art. Most of all, its visuality is resolutely compromised: blurred, amateurish, and full of artifacts.

In some way, the economy of poor images corresponds to the description of imperfect cinema, while the description of perfect cinema represents rather the concept of cinema as a flagship store. But the real and contemporary imperfect cinema is also much more ambivalent and affective than Espinosa had anticipated. On the one hand, the economy of poor images, with its immediate possibility of worldwide distribution and its ethics of remix and appropriation, enables the participation of a much larger group of producers than ever before. But this does not mean that these opportunities are only used for progressive ends. Hate speech, spam, and other rubbish make their way through digital connections as well. Digital communication has also become one of the most contested markets—a zone that has long been subjected to an ongoing original accumulation and to massive (and, to a certain extent, successful) attempts at privatization.

The networks in which poor images circulate thus constitute both a platform for a fragile new common interest and a battleground for commercial and national agendas. They contain experimental and artistic material, but also incredible amounts of porn and paranoia. While the territory of poor images allows access to excluded imagery, it is also permeated by the most advanced commodification techniques. While it enables the users' active participation in the creation and distribution of content, it also drafts them into production. Users become the editors, critics, translators, and (co)-authors of poor images.

Poor images are thus popular images—images that can be made and seen by the many. They express all the contradictions of the contemporary crowd: its opportunism, narcissism, desire for autonomy and creation, its inability to focus or make up its mind, its constant readiness for transgression and simultaneous submission.[9] Altogether, poor images present a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun, and distraction. The condition of the images speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, reedit, or upload them.

In this light, perhaps one has to redefine the value of the image, or, more precisely, to create a new perspective for it. Apart from resolution and exchange value, one might imagine another form of value defined by velocity, intensity, and spread. Poor images are poor because they are heavily compressed and travel quickly. They lose matter and gain speed. But they also express a condition of dematerialization, shared not only with the legacy of Conceptual art but above all with contemporary modes of semiotic production.[10] Capital's semiotic turn, as described by Félix Guattari,[11] plays in favor of the creation and dissemination of compressed and flexible data packages that can be integrated into ever-newer combinations and sequences.[12]

This flattening-out of visual content—the concept-in-becoming of the images—positions them within a general informational turn, within economies of knowledge that tear images and their captions out of context into the swirl of permanent capitalist deterritorialization.[13] The history of Conceptual art describes this dematerialization

of the art object first as a resistant move against the fetish value of visibility. Then, however, the dematerialized art object turns out to be perfectly adapted to the semioticization of capital, and thus to the conceptual turn of capitalism.[14] In a way, the poor image is subject to a similar tension. On the one hand, it operates against the fetish value of high resolution. On the other hand, this is precisely why it also ends up being perfectly integrated into an information capitalism thriving on compressed attention spans, on impression rather than immersion, on intensity rather than contemplation, on previews rather than screenings.

Comrade, what is your visual bond today?

But, simultaneously, a paradoxical reversal happens. The circulation of poor images creates a circuit, which fulfills the original ambitions of militant and (some) essayistic and experimental cinema—to create an alternative economy of images, an imperfect cinema existing inside as well as beyond and under commercial media streams. In the age of file sharing, even marginalized content circulates again and reconnects dispersed worldwide audiences.

The poor image thus constructs anonymous global networks just as it creates a shared history. It builds alliances as it travels, provokes translation or mistranslation, and creates new publics and debates. By losing its visual substance it recovers some of its political punch and creates a new aura around it. This aura is no longer based on the permanence of the "original," but on the transience of the copy. It is no longer anchored within a classical public sphere mediated and supported by the frame of the nation-state or corporation, but floats on the surface of temporary and dubious data pools.[15]

By drifting away from the vaults of cinema, it is propelled onto new and ephemeral screens stitched together by the desires of dispersed spectators.

The circulation of poor images thus creates "visual bonds," as Dziga Vertov once called them.[16] This visual bond was, according to Vertov, supposed to link the workers of the world with each other.[17] He imagined a sort of communist, visual, Adamic language that could not only inform or entertain, but also organize its viewers. In a sense, his dream has come true, if mostly under the rule of a global information capitalism whose audiences are linked almost in a physical sense by mutual excitement, affective attunement, and anxiety.

But there is also the circulation and production of poor images based on cellphone cameras, home computers, and unconventional forms of distribution. Its optical connections—collective editing, file sharing, or grassroots distribution circuits—reveal erratic and coincidental links between producers everywhere, which simultaneously constitute dispersed audiences.

The circulation of poor images feeds into both capitalist media assembly lines and alternative audiovisual economies. In addition to a lot of confusion and stupefaction, it also possibly creates disruptive movements of thought and affect. The circulation of poor images thus initiates another chapter in the historical genealogy of nonconformist information circuits: Vertov's visual bonds, the internationalist workers' pedagogies that Peter Weiss described in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, the circuits of Third Cinema and Tricontinentalism, of nonaligned filmmaking and thinking. The poor image—ambivalent as its status may be—thus takes its place in the genealogy of carbon-copied pamphlets, cine-train agit-prop films, underground

video magazines and other nonconformist materials, which aesthetically often used poor materials. Moreover, it reactualizes many of the historical ideas associated with these circuits, among others Vertov's idea of the visual bond.

Imagine somebody from the past with a beret asking you, "Comrade, what is your visual bond today?"

You might answer: it is this link to the present.

Now!

The poor image embodies the afterlife of many former masterpieces of cinema and video art. It has been expelled from the sheltered paradise that cinema seems to have once been.[18] After being kicked out of the protected and often protectionist arena of national culture, discarded from commercial circulation, these works have become travelers in a digital no-man's-land, constantly shifting their resolution and format, speed and media, sometimes even losing names and credits along the way.

Now many of these works are back—as poor images, I admit. One could of course argue that this is not the real thing, but then—please, anybody— show me this real thing.

The poor image is no longer about the real thing—the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation.

In short: it is about reality.

1
See Woody Allen, dir., *Deconstructing Harry*, 1997.

2
See "Wer Gemälde wirklich sehen will, geht ja schließlich auch ins Museum," conversation between Harun Farocki and Alexander Horwath, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 14, 2007.

3
Sven Lütticken's excellent text "Viewing Copies: On the Mobility of Moving Images," *e-flux journal*, no. 8 (May 2009), drew my attention to this aspect of poor images. See http://e-flux.com/journal/view/75.

4
Thanks to Kodwo Eshun for pointing this out.

5
Of course in some cases images with low resolution also appear in mainstream media environments (mainly news), where they are associated with urgency, immediacy, and catastrophe—and are extremely valuable. See Hito Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty," *A Prior* 15 (2007).

6
See Hito Steyerl, "Politics of the Archive: Translations in Film," *transversal* (March 2008), http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/steyerl/en.

7
From correspondence with the author via e-mail.

8
Julio García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," trans. Julianne Burton, *Jump Cut*, no. 20 (1979): 24–26.

9
See Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life,* trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e),2004).

10
See Alex Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

11
Félix Guattari, "Capital as the Integral of Power Formations," in *Soft Subversions*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1996), 202.

12
All these developments are discussed in detail in an excellent text by Simon Sheikh, "Objects of Study or Commodification of Knowledge? Remarks on Artistic Research," *Art & Research* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2009), http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/sheikh.html.

13
See also Alan Sekula, "Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital," in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, ed. Stuart Hall and Jessica Evans (London: Routledge 1999), 181–92.

14
See Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*.

15
The Pirate Bay even seems to have tried acquiring the extraterritorial oil platform of Sealand in order to install its servers there. See Jan Libbenga, "The Pirate Bay plans to buy Sealand," *The Register*, January 12, 2007, http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/01/12/pirate_bay_buys_island.

16
Dziga Vertov, "Kinopravda and Radiopravda," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 52.

17
Ibid.

18
At least from the perspective of nostalgic delusion.

A Thing Like You and Me

Whatever happened to Leon Trotsky?
He got an ice pick, that made his ears burn.

Whatever happened to dear old Lenny?
The great Elmyra, and Sancho Panza?
Whatever happened to the heroes?

Whatever happened to all the heroes?
All the Shakespearoes?
They watched their Rome burn.

Whatever happened to the heroes?
No more heroes anymore.
—The Stranglers, 1977

1.

In 1977, the short decade of the New Left violently comes to an end. Militant groups such as the Red Army Faction (RAF) have descended into political sectarianism. Gratuitous violence, macho posing, pithy slogans, and an embarrassing cult of personality have come to dominate the scene. Yet it is not 1977 that sees the myth of the leftist hero come crumbling down. The figure has on the contrary already lost all credibility, beyond rehabilitation— even if this will only become clear much later.

In 1977, the punk band The Stranglers delivers a crystal clear analysis of the situation by stating the obvious: heroism is over. Trotsky, Lenin, and Shakespeare are dead. In 1977, as leftists flock to the funerals of RAF members Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan Carl Raspe, The Stranglers' album cover delivers its own giant wreath of red carnations and declares: NO MORE HEROES. Anymore.

Ad for David Bowie's record *Ziggy Stardust Manifests to All* as published in the press around 1972.

2.

But, also in 1977, David Bowie releases his single "Heroes." He sings about a new brand of hero, just in time for the neoliberal revolution. The hero is dead—long live the hero! Yet Bowie's hero is no longer a subject, but an object: a thing, an image, a splendid fetish—a commodity soaked with desire, resurrected from beyond the squalor of its own demise.

Just look at a 1977 video of the song to see why: the clip shows Bowie singing to himself from three simultaneous angles, with layering techniques tripling his image; not only has Bowie's hero been cloned, he has above all become an image that can be reproduced, multiplied, and copied, a riff that travels effortlessly through commercials for almost anything, a fetish that packages Bowie's glamorous and unfazed post-gender look as product.[1] Bowie's hero is no longer a larger-than-life human being carrying out exemplary and sensational exploits, and he is not even an icon, but a shiny product endowed with post-human beauty: an image and nothing but an image.[2]

This hero's immortality no longer originates in the strength to survive all possible ordeals, but from its ability to be xeroxed, recycled, and reincarnated. Destruction will alter its form and appearance, yet its substance will be untouched. The immortality of the thing is its finitude, not its eternity.

3.

What happens to identification at this point? Who can we identify with? Of course, identification is always with an image. But ask anybody whether they'd actually like to be a JPEG file. And this is precisely my point: if identification is to go anywhere, it has to be with this material aspect of the image,

with the image as thing, not as representation. And then it perhaps ceases to be identification, and instead becomes participation.[3] I will come back to this point later.

But first of all: why should anybody want to become this thing—an object—in the first place? Elisabeth Lebovici once made this clear to me in a brilliant remark.[4] Traditionally, emancipatory practice has been tied to a desire to become a subject. Emancipation was conceived as becoming a subject of history, of representation, or of politics. To become a subject carried with it the promise of autonomy, sovereignty, agency. To be a subject was good; to be an object was bad. But, as we all know, being a subject can be tricky. The subject is always already subjected. Though the position of the subject suggests a degree of control, its reality is rather one of being subjected to power relations. Nevertheless, generations of feminists—including myself—have strived to get rid of patriarchal objectification in order to become subjects. The feminist movement, until quite recently (and for a number of reasons), worked toward claiming autonomy and full subjecthood.

But as the struggle to become a subject became mired in its own contradictions, a different possibility emerged. How about siding with the object for a change? Why not affirm it? Why *not* be a thing? An object without a subject? A thing among other things? "A thing that feels," as Mario Perniola seductively phrased it:

> To give oneself as a thing that feels and to take a thing that feels is the new experience that asserts itself today on contemporary feeling, a radical and extreme experience that has its cornerstone in the encounter between philosophy and sexuality. […] It would seem that things and the senses are no longer in conflict with one another but have struck an alliance thanks to which the most detached abstraction and the most unrestrained excitement are almost inseparable and are often indistinguishable.[5]

A desire to become this thing—in this case an image—is the upshot of the struggle over representation. Senses and things, abstraction and excitement, speculation and power, desire and matter actually converge within images.

The struggle over representation, however, was based on a sharp split between these levels: here thing—there image. Here I—there it. Here subject—there object. The senses here—dumb matter over there. Slightly paranoid assumptions concerning authenticity came into the equation as well. Did the public image—of women or other groups, for example—actually correspond to reality? Was *it* stereotyped? Misrepresented? Thus one got tangled in a whole web of presuppositions, the most problematic of which being, of course, that an authentic image exists in the first place. A campaign was thus unleashed to find a more accurate form of representation, but without questioning its own, quite realist, paradigm.

But what if the truth is neither in the represented nor in the representation? What if the truth is in its material configuration? What if the medium is really a massage? Or actually—in its corporate media version—a barrage of commodified intensities?

To participate in an image—rather than merely identify with it—could perhaps abolish this relation. This would mean participating in the material of the image as well as in the desires and forces it accumulates. How about acknowledging that this image

is not some ideological misconception, but a thing simultaneously couched in affect and availability, a fetish made of crystals and electricity, animated by our wishes and fears—a perfect embodiment of its own conditions of existence? As such, the image is—to use yet another phrase of Walter Benjamin's—without expression.[6] It doesn't represent reality. It is a fragment of the real world. It is a thing just like any other—a thing like you and me.

This shift in perspective has far-reaching consequences. There might still be an internal and inaccessible trauma that constitutes subjectivity. But trauma is also the contemporary opium of the masses—an apparently private property that simultaneously invites and resists foreclosure. And the economy of this trauma constitutes the remnant of the independent subject. But then if we are to acknowledge that subjectivity is no longer a privi-leged site for emancipation, we might as well just face it and get on with it.

On the other hand, the increased appeal of becoming a thing doesn't necessarily mean that we have reached the age of unlimited positivity, whose prophets—if we are to believe them—extol an age in which desire flows freely, negativity and history are a thing of the past, and vital drives happily splash all over the place.

No, the negativity of the thing can be dis-cerned by its bruises, which mark the site of his-tory's impact. As Eyal Weizman and Tom Keenan remark in a fascinating conversation on forensics and the fetish, objects increasingly take on the role of witnesses in court cases concerned with human-rights violations.[7] The bruises of things are deciphered, and then subjected to interpretation. Things are made to speak—often by subjecting them to additional violence. The field of forensics

can be understood as the torture of objects, which are expected to tell all, just as when humans are interrogated. Things often have to be destroyed, dissolved in acid, cut apart, or dismantled in order to tell their full story. To affirm the thing also means participating in its collision with history.

Because a thing is usually not a shiny new Boeing taking off on its virgin flight. Rather, it might be its wreck, painstakingly pieced together from scrap inside a hangar after its unexpected nosedive into catastrophe. A thing is the ruin of a house in Gaza. A film reel lost or destroyed in civil war. A female body tied up with ropes, fixed in obscene positions. Things condense power and violence. Just as a thing accumulates productive forces and desires, so does it also accumulate destruction and decay.

So then how about a specific thing called "image"? It is a complete mystification to think of the digital image as a shiny immortal clone of itself. On the contrary, not even the digital image is outside history. It bears the bruises of its crashes with politics and violence. It is nothing like, say, a carbon copy of Trotsky brought back to life through digital manipulation (though of course it could *show* him); rather, the material articulation of the image is like a clone of Trotsky walking around with an ice pick in his head. The bruises of images are its glitches and artifacts, the traces of its rips and transfers. Images are violated, ripped apart, subjected to interrogation and probing. They are stolen, cropped, edited, and re-appropriated. They are bought, sold, leased. Manipulated and adulated. Reviled and revered. To participate in the image means to take part in all of this.

Chuck Welch, *Art Strike Mantra*, 1991, cassette tape. A mail-art edition developed for the protest "Art Strike 1990–93."

4.

Our things in our hands must be equals, comrades.
—Aleksandr Rodchenko[8]

So, what's the point of becoming a thing or an image? Why should one accept alienation, bruises, and objectification?

In writing about the Surrealists, Walter Benjamin emphasizes the liberating force within things.[9] In the commodity fetish, material drives intersect with affect and desire, and Benjamin fantasizes about igniting these compressed forces, to awaken "the slumbering collective from the dream-filled sleep of capitalist production" to tap into these forces.[10] He also thinks that *things* could speak to one another through these forces.[11] Benjamin's idea of participation—a partly subversive take on early twentieth-century primitivism—claims that it is possible to join in this symphony of matter. For him, modest and even abject objects are hieroglyphs in whose dark prism social relations lay congealed and in fragments. They are understood as nodes, in which the tensions of a historical moment materialize in a flash of awareness or twist grotesquely into the commodity fetish. In this perspective, a thing is never just an object, but a fossil in which a constellation of forces are petrified. Things are never just inert objects, passive items, or lifeless shucks, but consist of tensions, forces, hidden powers, all being constantly exchanged. While this opinion borders on magical thought, according to which *things* are invested with supernatural powers, it is also a classical materialist take. Because the commodity, too, is understood not as a simple object, but a condensation of social forces.[12]

From a slightly different perspective, members of the Soviet avant-garde also tried to develop alternative relations to things. In his text "Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing," Boris Arvatov claims that the object should be liberated from the enslavement of its status as capitalist commodity.[13] Things should no longer remain passive, uncreative, and dead, but should be free to participate actively in the transformation of everyday reality.[14]

"By imagining an object that is differently animated from the commodity fetish[…] Arvatov attempts to return a kind of social agency to the fetish."[15] In a similar vein, Aleksandr Rodchenko calls on things to become comrades and equals. By releasing the energy stored in them, things become coworkers, potentially friends, even lovers.[16] Where images are concerned, this potential agency has already been explored to some extent.[17] To participate in the image as thing means to participate in its potential agency—an agency that is not necessarily beneficial, as it can be used for every imaginable purpose. It is vigorous and sometimes even viral. And it will never be full and glorious, as images are bruised and damaged, just as everything else within history. History, as Benjamin told us, is a pile of rubble. Only we are not staring at it any longer from the point of view of Benjamin's shell-shocked angel. We are not the angel. We are the rubble. We are this pile of scrap.

5.
The revolution is my boyfriend!
—Bruce LaBruce, *Raspberry Reich*

We have unexpectedly arrived at quite an interesting idea of the object and objectivity. Activating the thing means perhaps to create an objective—not as a fact, but as the task of unfreezing the forces congealed within the trash of history. Objectivity thus becomes a lens, one that recreates us as things mutually acting upon one another. From this "objective" perspective, the idea of emancipation opens up somewhat differently. Bruce LaBruce's queer porn film *Raspberry Reich* shows us how by presenting a completely different view on 1977. In it, the former heroes of the RAF have been reincarnated as gay porn actors who enjoy being each other's playthings. They masturbate on pixelated photocopied wall-size images of Baader and Che. But the point is not to be found in the gayness or pornness of the film, and certainly not in its so-called "transgressivity." The point is that the actors do not identify with heroes, but rip their images. They become bruised images: sixth-generation copies of dodgy leftist pinups. This bunch looks much worse than Bowie, but is much more desirable for it. Because they love the pixel, not the hero. The hero is dead. Long live the thing.

1

I tried unsuccessfully to find production details for Bowie's video. I am referring to this 1977 version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejJmZHRIzhY.

Elsewhere, I have come across a note concerning the 1979 video for Michael Jackson's "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," which uses similar layering techniques to show a tripled Michael Jackson. This technology is considered new at this point and is explicitly mentioned in reviews. Apart from that, any psychoanalytic reading of Bowie's video would have a ball superimposing its specific take on post-gender narcissism onto the East–West divide (the Berlin Wall indicated by pantomime!). But this is not my intention here.

2

David Riff pointed out the connection to Andy Warhol's work, especially in Bowie's song "Andy Warhol" ("Andy Warhol looks a scream / Hang him on my wall / Andy Warhol, Silver Screen / Can't tell them apart at all"), and introduced this amazing quote to me: "To desire fame—not the glory of the hero but the glamour of the star—with the intensity and awareness Warhol did, is to desire to be nothing, nothing of the human, the interior, the profound. It is to want to be nothing but image, surface, a bit of light on a screen, a mirror for the fantasies and a magnet for the desires of others—a thing of absolute narcissism. And to desire to outlive these desires there as a thing not to be consumed." Thierry de Duve, "Andy Warhol, or The Machine Perfected," trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October* 48 (Spring 1989): 4.

3

The concept of participation is explained in detail in Christopher Bracken, "The Language of Things: Walter Benjamin's Primitive Thought," *Semiotica*, no. 138 (February 2002): 321–49. "Participation, which is the 'absence of relation,' merges the subject of knowledge, which is not necessarily a human being, with the object known." Ibid., 327. Bracken goes on to quote Benjamin directly: "In the medium of reflection, moreover, the

thing and the knowing being *merge into each other*. Both are only relative unities of reflection. Thus, there is in fact no knowledge of an object by a subject. Every instance of knowing is an immanent connection in the absolute, or, if one prefers, in the subject. The term 'object' designates not a relation within knowledge but an absence of relation." Walter Benjamin, "The Concept of Criticism," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996), 1:146, emphasis added, quoted in Bracken, "Language of Things," 327–28. Accordingly, participating in an image is not the same as being represented by it. The image is the thing in which senses merge with matter. Things are not being represented by it but participate in it.

4

This comment was based on her interpretation of Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's propositions in *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), in which both authors investigate the role of the inanimate in cinema. Another great proposition by which to think through this issue was made by Carsten Juhl, who suggested Mario Perniola's *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*.

5

Mario Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic,* trans. Massimo Verdicchio (New York: Continuum, 2004), 1.

6

According to Benjamin, the expressionless is a critical violence that "completes the work, by shattering it into a thing of shards, into a fragment of the true world." Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 1:340.

7

According to Weizman, their idea is based on putting forensics back in the frame of rhetoric (where it originated in Roman times) meaning "in front of the forum," and implying the speech of objects in professional or legal courts. When evidence is given the capacity to speak, objects are treated as "material

witnesses"; they also therefore possess the capacity to lie.

8

Quoted in Christina Kiaer, "Rodchenko in Paris," *October* 75 (Winter 1996): 3.

9

See Bracken, "The Language of Things," 346ff.

10

Ibid., 347.

11

Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and the Languages of Man," in *Selected Writings*, 1:69.

12

The last paragraph is taken from: Hito Steyerl, "The Language of Things," *translate* (June 2006), http://translate.eipcp.net/transversal/0606/steyerl/en.

13

See Boris Arvatov, "Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (Toward the Formulation of the Question)," trans. Christina Kiaer, *October* 81 (Summer 1997): 119–28.

14

Ibid., 110.

15

Ibid., 111.

16

Lars Laumann's touching and amazing video *Berlinmuren* (2008), about a Swedish lady who married the Berlin Wall, makes a strong and very convincing case for object-love. The lover would not just love the Berlin Wall while it was functional but would continue to love it long after it had come down, after history had impacted violently on the object she desired. She would love it through its destruction and agony. She also claimed that her love was not directed to the things the Wall represented, but to its material form and reality.

17

See, for example, Maurizio Lazzarato, "Struggle, Event, Media," trans. Aileen Derieg, *republicart* (May 2003), http://www.republicart.net/disc/representations/lazzarato01_en.htm; or Steyerl, "The Language of Things": "To engage in the language of things in the realm of the documentary form is not equivalent to using realist forms in representing them. It is not about representation at all, but about actualising whatever the things have to say in the present. And to do so is not a matter of realism, but rather of relationalism—it is a matter of presencing and thus transforming the social, historical and also material relations, which determine things."

Is a Museum a Factory?

The film *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*, 1968), a Third Cinema manifesto against neocolonialism, has a brilliant installation specification.[1] A banner was to be hung at every screening with text reading: "Every spectator is either a coward or a traitor."[2] It was intended to break down the distinctions between filmmaker and audience, author and producer, and thus create a sphere of political action. And where was this film shown? In factories, of course.

Now, political films are no longer shown in factories.[3] They are shown in the museum, or the gallery—the art space. That is, in any sort of white cube.[4]

How did this happen? First of all, the traditional Fordist factory is, for the most part, gone.[5] It's been emptied out, machines packed up and shipped off to China. Former workers have been retrained for further retraining, or become software programmers and started working from home. Secondly, the cinema has been transformed almost as dramatically as the factory. It's been multiplexed, digitized, and sequelized, as well as rapidly commercialized as neoliberalism became hegemonic in its reach and influence. Before cinema's recent demise, political films sought refuge elsewhere. Their return to cinematic space is rather recent, and the cinema was never the space for formally more experimental works. Now, political and experimental films alike are shown in black boxes set within white cubes— in fortresses, bunkers, docks, and former churches. The sound is almost always awful.

But terrible projections and dismal installation notwithstanding, these works catalyze surprising desire. Crowds of people can be seen bending and crouching in order to catch glimpses of political cinema and video art. Is this audience sick of media

monopolies? Are they trying to find answers to the obvious crisis of everything? And why should they be looking for these answers in art spaces?

Afraid of the Real?

The conservative response to the exodus of political films (or video installations) to the museum is to assume that they are thus losing relevance. It deplores their internment in the bourgeois ivory tower of high culture. The works are thought to be isolated inside this elitist cordon sanitaire—sanitized, sequestered, cut off from "reality." Indeed, Jean-Luc Godard reportedly said that video installation artists shouldn't be "afraid of reality," assuming of course that they in fact were.[6]

Where is reality then? Out there, beyond the white cube and its display technologies? How about inverting this claim, somewhat polemically, to assert that the white cube *is* in fact the Real: the blank horror and emptiness of the bourgeois interior.

On the other hand—and in a much more optimistic vein—there is no need to have recourse to Lacan in order to contest Godard's accusation. This is because the displacement from factory to museum never took place. In reality, political films are very often screened in the exact same place as they always were: in former factories, which are today, more often than not, museums. A gallery, an art space, a white cube with abysmal sound isolation. Which will certainly show political films. But which also has become a hotbed of contemporary production. Of images, jargon, lifestyles, and values. Of exhibition value, speculation value, and cult value. Of entertainment plus gravitas. Or of aura minus distance. A flagship store of Cultural Industries, staffed by eager interns who work for free.

A factory, so to speak, but a different one. It is still a space for production, still a space of exploitation and even of political screenings. It is a space of physical meeting and sometimes even common discussion. At the same time, it has changed almost beyond recognition. So what sort of factory is this?

Productive Turn

The typical setup of the museum-as-factory looks like this. Before: an industrial workplace. Now: people spending their leisure time in front of TV monitors. Before: people working in these factories. Now: people working at home in front of computer monitors.

Andy Warhol's Factory served as model for the new museum in its productive turn toward being a "social factory."[7] By now, descriptions of the social factory abound.[8] It exceeds its traditional boundaries and spills over into almost everything else. It pervades bedrooms and dreams alike, as well as perception, affection, and attention. It transforms everything it touches into culture, if not art. It is an a-factory, which produces affect as effect. It integrates intimacy, eccentricity, and other formally unofficial forms of creation. Private and public spheres get entangled in a blurred zone of hyperproduction.

In the museum-as-factory, something continues to be produced. Installation, planning, carpentry, viewing, discussing, maintenance, betting on rising values, and networking alternate in cycles. An art space is a factory, which is simultaneously a supermarket—a casino and a place of worship whose reproductive work is performed by cleaning ladies and cellphone-video bloggers alike.

3-D rendition of Office for Metropolitan Archtecture's design for the Riga Contemporary Art Museum, built on the grounds of a former factory, 2006.

In this economy, even spectators are transformed into workers. As Jonathan Beller argues, cinema and its derivatives (television, Internet, and so on) are factories, in which spectators work. Now, "to look is to labor."[9] Cinema, which integrated the logic of Taylorist production and the conveyor belt, now spreads the factory wherever it travels. But this type of production is much more intensive than the industrial one. The senses are drafted into production, the media capitalize upon the aesthetic faculties and imaginary practices of viewers.[10] In that sense, any space that integrates cinema and its successors has now become a factory, and this obviously includes the museum. While in the history of political filmmaking the factory became a cinema, cinema now turns museum spaces back into factories.

Workers Leaving the Factory

It is quite curious that the first films ever made by Louis Lumière show workers leaving the factory. At the beginning of cinema, workers leave the industrial workplace. The invention of cinema thus symbolically marks the start of the exodus of workers from industrial modes of production. But even if they leave the factory building, it doesn't mean that they have left labor behind. Rather, they take it along with them and disperse it into every sector of life.

A brilliant installation by Harun Farocki makes clear where the workers leaving the factory are headed. Farocki collected and installed different cinematic versions of *Workers Leaving the Factory*, from the original silent version(s) by Lumière to contemporary surveillance footage.[11] Workers are streaming out of factories on several monitors simultaneously: from different eras and in different

cinematic styles.[12] But where are these workers streaming to? Into the art space, where the work is installed.

Not only is Farocki's *Workers Leaving the Factory*, on the level of content, a wonderful archaeology of the (non)representation of labor; on the level of form it points to the spilling over of the factory into the art space. Workers who left the factory have ended up inside another one: the museum.

It might even be the same factory. Because the former Lumière factory, whose gates are portrayed in the original *Workers Leaving The Lumière Factory* is today just that: a museum of cinema.[13] In 1995, the ruin of the former factory was declared a historical monument and developed into a site of culture. The Lumière factory, which used to produce photographic film, is today a cinema with a reception space to be rented by companies: "a location loaded with history and emotion for your brunches, cocktails and dinners."[14] The workers who left the factory in 1895 have today been recaptured on the screen of the cinema within the same space. They only left the factory to reemerge as a spectacle inside it.

As workers exit the factory, the space they enter is one of cinema and cultural industry, producing emotion and attention. How do *its* spectators look inside this new factory?

Cinema and Factory

At this point, a decisive difference emerges between classical cinema and the museum. While the classical space of cinema resembles the space of the industrial factory, the museum corresponds to the dispersed space of the social factory. Both cinema and Fordist factory are organized as locations of confinement, arrest, and temporal control. Imagine: Workers leaving the factory. Spectators leaving the cinema—a similar mass, disciplined and controlled in time, assembled and released at regular intervals. As the traditional factory arrests its workers, the cinema arrests the spectator. Both are disciplinary spaces and spaces of confinement.[15]

But now imagine: Workers leaving the factory. Spectators trickling out of the museum (or even queuing to get in). An entirely different constellation of time and space. This second crowd is not a mass, but a multitude.[16] The museum doesn't organize a coherent crowd of people. People are dispersed in time and space—a silent crowd, immersed and atomized, struggling between passivity and overstimulation.

This spatial transformation is reflected by the format of many newer cinematic works. Whereas traditional cinematic works are single-channel, focusing the gaze and organizing time, many of the newer works explode into space. While the traditional cinema setup works from a single central perspective, multiscreen projections create a multifocal space. While cinema is a mass medium, multiscreen installations address a multitude spread out in space, connected only by distraction, separation, and difference.[17]

The difference between mass and multitude arises on the line between confinement and dispersion, between homogeneity and multiplicity, between cinema space and museum installation space. This is a very important distinction, because it will also affect the question of the museum as public space.

Harun Farocki, *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades*, 2006, video still.

Visitors entering the museum. Edo-Tokyo Museum, 2003.

Public Space

It is obvious that the space of the factory is traditionally more or less invisible in public. Its visibility is policed, and surveillance produces a one-way gaze. Paradoxically, a museum is not so different. In a lucid 1972 interview Godard pointed out that, because filming is prohibited in factories, museums, and airports, effectively 80 percent of productive activity in France is rendered invisible: "The exploiter doesn't show the exploitation to the exploited."[18] This still applies today, if for different reasons. Museums prohibit filming or charge exorbitant shooting fees.[19] Just as the work performed in the factory cannot be shown outside it, most of the works on display in a museum cannot be shown outside its walls. A paradoxical situation arises: a museum predicated on producing and marketing visibility can itself not be shown—the labor performed there is just as publicly invisible as that of any sausage factory.

This extreme control over visibility sits rather uncomfortably alongside the perception of the museum as a public space. What does this invisibility then say about the contemporary museum as a public space? And how does the inclusion of cinematic works complicate this picture?

The current discussion of cinema and the museum as public sphere is an animated one. Thomas Elsaesser, for example, asks whether cinema in the museum might constitute the last remaining bourgeois public sphere.[20] Jürgen Habermas outlined the conditions in this arena in which people speak in turn and others respond, all participating together in the same rational, equal, and transparent discourse surrounding public matters.[21] In actuality, the contemporary museum is more like a cacophony—installations blare

simultaneously while nobody listens. To make matters worse, the time-based mode of many cinematic installation works precludes a truly shared discourse around them; if works are too long, spectators will simply desert them. What would be seen as an act of betrayal in a cinema—leaving the projection while it lasts—becomes standard behavior in any spatial installation situation. In the installation space of the museum, spectators indeed become traitors—traitors of cinematic duration itself. In circulating through the space, spectators are actively montaging, zapping, combining fragments—effectively co-curating the show. Rationally conversing about shared impressions then becomes next to impossible. A bourgeois public sphere? Instead of its ideal manifestation, the contemporary museum rather represents its unfulfilled reality.

Sovereign Subjects

In his choice of words, Elsaesser also addresses a less democratic dimension of this space. By, as he dramatically phrases it, arresting cinema—suspending it, suspending its license, or even holding it under a suspended sentence—cinema is preserved at its own expense when it is taken into "protective custody."[22] Protective custody is no simple arrest. It refers to a state of exception or (at least) a temporal suspension of legality that allows the suspension of the law itself. This state of exception is also addressed in Boris Groys' essay "Politics of Installation."[23] Harking back to Carl Schmitt, Groys assigns the role of sovereign to the artist who—in a state of exception—violently establishes his own law by "arresting" a space in the form of an installation. The artist then assumes a role as sovereign founder of the exhibition's public sphere.

At first glance, this repeats the old myth of artist as crazy genius, or more precisely, as petty-bourgeois dictator. But the point is: if this works well as an artistic mode of production, it becomes standard practice in any social factory. So then, how about the idea that inside the museum, almost everybody tries to behave like a sovereign (or petty-bourgeois dictator)? After all, the multitude inside museums is composed of competing sovereigns: curators, spectators, artists, critics.

Let's have a closer look at the spectator-as-sovereign. In judging an exhibition, many attempt to assume the compromised sovereignty of the traditional bourgeois subject, who aims to (re)-master the show, to tame the unruly multiplicity of its meanings, to pronounce a verdict, and to assign value. But, unfortunately, cinematic duration makes this subject position unavailable. It reduces all parties involved to the role of workers—unable to gain an overview of the whole process of production. Many—primarily critics—are thus frustrated by archival shows and their abundance of cinematic time. Remember the vitriolic attacks on the length of films and video in documenta 11? To multiply cinematic duration means to blow apart the vantage point of sovereign judgment. It also makes it impossible to reconfigure yourself as its subject. Cinema in the museum renders overview, review, and survey impossible. Partial impressions dominate the picture. The true labor of spectatorship can no longer be ignored by casting oneself as master of judgment. Under these circumstances, a transparent, informed, inclusive discourse becomes difficult, if not impossible.

The question of cinema makes clear that the museum is not a public sphere, but rather places its consistent *lack* on display—it makes this *lack*

public, so to speak. Instead of filling this space, it conserves its absence. But it also simultaneously displays its *potential* and the *desire* for something to be realized in its place.

As a multitude, the public operates under the condition of partial invisibility, incomplete access, fragmented realities—of commodification within clandestinity. Transparency, overview, and the sovereign gaze cloud over to become opaque. Cinema itself explodes into multiplicity—into spatially dispersed multiscreen arrangements that cannot be contained by a single point of view. The full picture, so to speak, remains unavailable. There is always something missing—people miss parts of the screening, the sound doesn't work, the screen itself or any vantage point from which it could be seen are missing.

Rupture

Without notice, the question of political cinema has been inverted. What began as a discussion of political cinema in the museum has turned into a question of cinematic politics in a factory. Traditionally, political cinema was meant to educate—it was an instrumental effort at "representation" in order to achieve its effects in "reality." It was measured in terms of efficiency, of revolutionary revelation, of gains in consciousness, or as potential triggers of action.

Today, cinematic politics are post-representational. They do not educate the crowd, but produce it. They articulate the crowd in space and in time. They submerge it in partial invisibility and then orchestrate their dispersion, movement, and reconfiguration. They organize the crowd without preaching to it. They replace the gaze of the bourgeois sovereign spectator of the white cube with the

incomplete, obscured, fractured, and overwhelmed vision of the spectator-as-laborer.

But there is one aspect that goes well beyond this. What else is missing from these cinematic installations?[24] Let's return to the liminal case of documenta 11, which was said to contain more cinematic material than could be seen by a single person in the 100 days that the exhibition was open to the public. No single spectator could even claim to have even seen everything, much less to have exhausted the meanings in this volume of work. It is obvious what is missing from this arrangement: since no single spectator can possibly make sense of such a volume of work, it calls for a multiplicity of spectators. In fact, the exhibition could only be seen by a multiplicity of gazes and points of view, which then supplements the impressions of others. Only if the night guards and various spectators worked together in shifts could the cinematic material of documenta 11 be viewed. But in order to understand what (and how) they are watching, they must meet to make sense of it. This shared activity is completely different from that of spectators narcissistically gazing at themselves and each other inside exhibitions—it does not simply ignore the artwork (or treat it as mere pretext), but takes it to another level.

Cinema inside the museum thus calls for a multiple gaze, which is no longer collective, but common, which is incomplete, but in process, which is distracted and singular, but can be edited into various sequences and combinations. This gaze is no longer the gaze of the individual sovereign master, nor, more precisely, of the self-deluded sovereign (even if "just for one day," as David Bowie sang). It isn't even a product of common labor, but focuses its point of rupture on the paradigm of productivity.

The museum-as-factory and its cinematic politics interpellate this missing, multiple subject. But by displaying its absence and its lack, they simultaneously activate a desire for this subject.

Cinematic Politics

But does this now mean that all cinematic works have become political? Or, rather, is there still any difference between different forms of cinematic politics? The answer is simple. Any conventional cinematic work will try to reproduce the existing setup: a projection of a public, which is not public after all, and in which participation and exploitation become indistinguishable. But a political cinematic articulation might try to come up with something completely different.

What else is desperately missing from the museum-as-factory? An exit. If the factory is everywhere, then there is no longer a gate by which to leave it—there is no way to escape relentless productivity. Political cinema could then become the screen through which people could leave the museum-as-social-factory. But on which screen could this exit take place? On the one that is currently missing, of course.

1
Grupo Cine Liberación (Fernando E. Solanas, Octavio Getino), dir., *La hora de los hornos*, Argentina, 1968. The work is one of the most important films of Third Cinema.

2
A quote from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). The film was of course banned and had to be shown clandestinely.

3
Or videos or video/film installations. To properly make the distinctions (which exist and are important) would require another text.

4
I am aware of the problem of treating all these spaces as similar.

5
At least in Western countries.

6
The context of Godard's comment is a conversation—a monologue, apparently—with young installation artists, whom he reprimands for their use of what he calls technological *dispositifs* in exhibitions. See "Debrief de conversations avec Jean-Luc Godard," *Sans casser des briques* (blog), March 10, 2009, http://bbjt. wordpress.com/2009/03/10/debrief-de-conversations-avec-jean-luc-godard/ (blog discontinued).

7
See Brian Holmes, "Warhol in the Rising Sun: Art, Subcultures and Semiotic Production," *16 Beaver ARTicles*, August 8, 2004, http:// www.16beavergroup.org/mtarchive/archives/001177.php.

8
Sabeth Buchmann quotes Hardt and Negri: "The 'social factory' is a form of production which touches on and penetrates every sphere and aspect of public and private life, of knowledge production and communication." "From Systems-Oriented Art to Biopolitical Art Practice," in *Media Mutandis: A NODE.London Reader*, ed. Marina Vishmidt (London: NODE.London, 2006).

9
Jonathan L. Beller, "Kino-I, Kino-World," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 2002), 61.

10
Ibid., 67.

11
For a great essay about this work see Harun Farocki, "Workers Leaving the Factory," in *Nachdruck/Imprint: Texte/Writings*, trans. Laurent Faasch-Ibrahim (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2001), reprinted on the *Senses of Cinema* Web site, http://archive. sensesofcinema.com/contents/02/21/farocki_workers.html.

12
My description refers to the Generali Foundation show, "Kino wie noch nie" (2005). See http://foundation. generali.at/index.php?id=429.

13
"Aujourd'hui le décor du premier film est sauvé et abrite une salle de cinéma de 270 fauteuils. Là où sortirent les ouvriers et les ouvrières de l'usine, les spectateurs vont au cinéma, sur le lieu de son invention," Institut Lumière, "Le Hanger du Premier-Film," http:// www.institut-lumiere.org/francais/hangar/hangaraccueil.html.

14
"La partie Hangar, spacieux hall de réception chargé d'histoire et d'émotion pour tous vos déjeuners, cocktail, dîners. [Formule assise 250 personnes ou formule debout jusqu'à 300 personnes]," Institut Lumière, "Nos espaces de location," http://www. institut-lumiere.org/francais/location/location.html.

15
There is however one interesting difference between cinema and factory: in the rebuilt scenery of the Lumière museum, the opening of the former gate is now blocked by a transparent glass pane to indicate the framing of the early film. Leaving spectators have to go around this obstacle, and leave through the former location of the gate itself, which no longer exists. Thus,

the current situation is like a negative of the former one: people are blocked by the former opening, which has now turned into a glass screen; they have to exit through the former walls of the factory, which have now partly vanished. See photographs at ibid.

16
For a more sober description of the generally quite idealized condition of multitude, see Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004).

17
As do multiple single screen arrangements.

18
"Godard on *Tout va bien* (1972)," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnx7mxjm1k0.

19
"Photography, filming, or audio recording within paying exhibitions or ticketed events and screenings is not permitted at any time." See "Tate gallery rules," http://www.tate.org.uk/about/who-we-are/policies-and-procedures/gallery-rules. However, filming there is welcomed on a commercial basis, with location fees starting at £200 an hour. See "Location filming and photography," http://www.tate.org.uk/about/media/filming/. Policy at the Centre Pompidou is more confusing: "You may film or photograph works from permanent collections (which you will find on levels 4 and 5 and in the Atelier Brancusi) for your own personal use. You may not, however, photograph or film works that have a red dot, and you may not use a flash or stand." See "FAQ: 7. Photo/Video," http://www.centrepompidou.fr/Pompidou/Communication.nsf/0/3590D3A7D1BDB820C125707C004512D4?OpenDocument&L=2.

20
Thomas Elsaesser, "The Cinema in the Museum: Our Last Bourgeois Public Sphere?" (paper presented at the International Film Studies Conference, "Perspectives on the Public Sphere:

Cinematic Configurations of 'I' and 'We,'" Berlin, Germany, April 23–25, 2009).

21
See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

22
Elsaesser, "Cinema in the Museum."

23
Boris Groys, "Politics of Installation," *e-flux journal*, no. 2 (January 2009), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/31.

24
A good example would be *Democracies* (2009) by Artur Żmijewski, an unsynchronized, multiscreen installation with trillions of possibilities of screen-content combinations.

The Articulation of Protest

Every articulation is a montage of various elements—voices, images, colors, passions, or dogmas—in time and space. The significance of the articulated moments depends on this. They only make sense within this articulation and depending on their position. So how is protest articulated? What does it articulate and what articulates it?

The articulation of protest has two levels. On one level, the articulation entails finding a language for protest, the vocalization, the verbalization, or the visualization of political protest. On another level, however, the articulation also shapes the structure or internal organization of protest movements. In other words, there are two different kinds of concatenations: one is at the level of symbols, the other at the level of political forces. The dynamic of desire and refusal, attraction and repulsion, the contradiction and the convergence of different elements unfolds on both levels. In relation to protest, the question of articulation concerns the organization of its expression—but also the expression of its organization.

Naturally, protest movements are articulated on many levels: on the level of their programs, demands, self-obligations, manifestos, and actions. This also involves montage—in the form of inclusions and exclusions based on subject matter, priorities, and blind spots. In addition, though, protest movements are articulated as concatenations or conjunctions of different interest groups, NGOs, political parties, associations, individuals, or groups. Alliances, coalitions, factions, feuds, or even indifference are articulated in this structure. There is also a form of montage at the political—combinations of interests, organized in a grammar of the political that reinvents itself again and again. At this level, articulation designates the form of

the internal organization of protest movements. By what rules is this montage organized?

And what does this mean for articulations that are critical of globalization—both at the level of the organization of their expression and at the level of the expression of their organization? How are global conjunctions represented? How are different protest movements mediated through one another? Are they placed next to one another—in other words, simply added together—or are they related to one another in some other way? What is the image of a protest movement? Is it the sum of the "talking heads" from the individual groups added together? Is it pictures of confrontations and marches? Is it new forms of depiction? Is it the reflection of a protest movement's forms? Or the invention of new relations between individual elements of political linkages? With these thoughts about articulation, I refer to a very specific field of theory, namely the theory of montage or film cuts. This is also because the relationship between art and politics is usually treated in the field of political theory, and art often appears as its ornament. What happens, though, if we conversely relate a form of artistic production, namely the theory of montage, to the field of politics? In other words, how is the political field edited, and what kinds of political significance could be derived from this form of articulation?

Chains of Production

I would like to discuss these issues on the basis of two film segments, and to address their implicit or explicit political thinking based on the form of their articulation. The films will be compared from a very specific perspective: both contain a sequence in which the conditions of their own articulation are addressed. Both of these sequences

present the chains of production and production procedures through which these films were made. And on the basis of the self-reflexive discussion of their manner of producing political significance, the creation of chains and montages of aesthetic forms and political demands, I would like to explain the political implications of forms of montage.

The first segment is from the film *Showdown in Seattle*, produced in 1999 by the Seattle Independent Media Center and broadcast by Deep Dish Television. The second segment is from a film by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville from 1975 entitled *Ici et ailleurs* (*Here and Elsewhere*). Both deal with transnational and international circumstances of political articulation. *Showdown in Seattle* documents the protests against the WTO negotiations in Seattle and the internal articulation of these protests as a heterogeneous combination of diverse interests. The theme of *Ici et ailleurs*, on the other hand, is the fluctuations of French solidarity with Palestine, particularly in the 1970s, and a radical critique of the poses, stagings, and counterproductive linkages of emancipation in general. The two films are not really comparable on the surface—the first is a quickly produced utilitarian document that functions in the register of counter-information, while *Ici et ailleurs* captures a long and even embarrassing process of reflection. The latter film does not place information in the foreground, but rather analyzes its organization and staging. My comparison of the films is therefore not to be read as a statement on the films per se, but rather illuminates only one particular aspect of them, namely their self-reflection on their own forms of articulation.

Showdown in Seattle

The film *Showdown in Seattle* is an impassioned document of the protests revolving around the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999.[1] The days of protest and their events are edited in chronological order. At the same time, the developments on the street are grounded with background information about the work of the WTO. Numerous short statements are given by a multitude of speakers from diverse political groups, especially unions, but also indigenous groups and farmers' organizations. The film (which consists of five half-hour parts) is extraordinarily stirring and employs the style of conventional reportage. Along with this, it demonstrates a specific notion of filmic space-time, which could be described in Walter Benjamin's terms as "homogenous" and "empty," organized by chronological sequences and uniform spaces.

Toward the end of the two-and-a-half-hour film there is a segment in which the viewer is taken on a tour through the production site of the film, the studio setup in Seattle. What is seen there is impressive. The entire film was shot and edited over the course of the five-day protests. A half-hour program was broadcast every evening. This requires a considerable logistical effort. Accordingly, the internal organization of the Indymedia office is not very different from a commercial TV studio. We see how footage from countless video cameras comes into the studio, how it is viewed, how useable sections are excerpted, how they are edited into new footage, and so forth. Various media are listed, in which and through which publicity is carried out, such as fax, telephone, Internet, satellite, and so forth. We see how the work of organizing information—pictures and sounds—is conducted: there is a video desk, production plans, and so forth. What is portrayed

is a chain of the production of information, or in the terms of the producers, "counter-information," which is negatively defined by its distance from the information circulated by the corporate media. What this involves, then, is a faithful reproduction of the corporate media's manner of production— albeit for a different purpose.

This different purpose is described by many metaphors: "getting the word across," "getting the message across," "getting the truth out." What is to be disseminated is counter-information that is described as truth. It is the "voice of the people," and this voice must be heard. The voice of the people is conceived as the unity of differences, of different political groups, and it reverberates within the resonator of a filmic space-time, the homogeneity of which is never called into question.

Yet we must not only ask ourselves how this voice of the people is articulated and organized, but also what this voice of the people actually consists of. In *Showdown in Seattle*, this expression—"voice of the people"—is used unproblematically: as the sum of the voices of individual speakers from protest groups, NGOs, unions, and so forth. Their demands and positions are articulated across broad segments of the film in the form of talking heads. Because the shots of these talking heads are formally similar, their diverse positions are standardized and thus made comparable. At the level of the standardized language of form, the different statements are thus transformed into a chain of formal equivalencies, which adds the political demands together in the same way that pictures and sounds are strung together in the conventional chain of media montage. In this way, the form employed by *Showdown in Seattle* is completely analogous to the form used by the corporate media, only the content is different,

Promotion for Deep Dish TV's first transmission series, produced by Paper Tiger TV.

namely an additive compilation of voices resulting in the voice of the people—regardless of the fact that the speakers' different political demands sometimes radically contradict one another, such as those from environmentalists and union members, different minorities, feminist groups, and so forth. It is not clear how these demands can be mediated. What takes the place of this missing mediation is a filmic and political addition—of shots, statements, and positions—and an aesthetic form of concatenation, which unquestioningly adopts the organizational principles of its adversary.[2]

In *Ici et ailleurs*, on the other hand, this method of the mere addition of demands resulting in the voice of the people is severely criticized—along with the concept of the voice of the people itself.

Ici et ailleurs

Godard and Miéville, the directors (or rather the editors) of *Ici et ailleurs* take a radically critical position with respect to the terms of the popular.[3] Their film consists of a self-critique of a self-produced film fragment. The Dziga Vertov Group (Godard/Jean-Pierre Gorin) shot a commissioned film on the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1970. This heroizing propaganda film that blusters about the people's battle was called *Until Victory* and was never finished. It consisted of several parts with titles such as "The Armed Battle," "Political Work," "The Will of the People," and "The Extended War—Until Victory." It showed battle training, scenes of exercise and shooting, and scenes of PLO agitation, in a formally almost senseless chain of equivalencies in which every image is forced to express an anti-imperialistic fantasy. Four years later in *Ici et ailleurs*, Godard and Miéville inspect the material more closely. They note that parts of the statements

of PLO adherents were never translated or were staged to begin with. They reflect on the stagings and the blatant lies of the material—but most of all on their own participation in this, in the way they organized the pictures and sounds. They ask: How did the adjuring formula of the "voice of the people" function here as populist noise to eliminate contradictions? What does it mean to edit "The Internationale" into any and every picture, rather like the way butter is smeared on bread? What political and aesthetic notions are added together under the pretext of the voice of the people? Why did this equation not work? Godard and Miéville arrive at an important conclusion: the additive *and* of the montage is far from innocent and unproblematic.

Today the film is shockingly up to date, but not in the sense of offering a position on the Middle East conflict. On the contrary, what makes it so topical is the problematizing of the concepts and patterns in which conflicts and solidarity are reduced to binary oppositions of betrayal or loyalty and reduced to unproblematic additions and pseudo-causalities. For what if the model of addition is wrong? Or if the additive *and* does not represent an addition, but rather grounds a subtraction, a division, or no relation at all? Specifically, what if the *and* in this *Here and Elsewhere*, in this France and Palestine, does not represent an addition but rather a subtraction?[4] What if two political movements not only do not join, but actually hinder, contradict, ignore, or even mutually exclude one another? What if the *and* should really be *or*, *because*, or even *instead of*? And what does an empty phrase like "the will of the people" mean?

Transposed to a political level, the questions are thus: On what basis can we draw a political comparison between different positions or establish

equivalencies or even alliances? What exactly is made comparable? What is added together, edited together, and which differences and opposites are leveled for the sake of establishing a chain of equivalencies? What if this *and* of political montage is functionalized specifically for the sake of a populist mobilization? And what does this question mean for the articulation of protest today, if nationalists, protectionists, anti-Semites, conspiracy theorists, Nazis, religious groups, and reactionaries all line up together at antiglobalization demos, in a dispiriting chain of equivalencies? Is this a simple case of the principle of unproblematic addition, a blind *and* that presumes that if sufficient numbers of different interests are added up, at some point the sum will constitute "the people"?

Godard and Miéville do not relate their critique solely to the level of political articulation— in other words, the expression of internal organization—but also to the organization of expression. Both are closely connected. An essential component of this problematic issue is *how* pictures and sounds are organized, edited, and arranged. A Fordist articulation organized according to the principles of mass culture will blindly reproduce the templates of its masters, according to their thesis, so it has to be broken up and problematized. This is also the reason why Godard and Miéville are concerned with the chain of production of pictures and sounds, although they choose an entirely different kind of scene than Indymedia—they show a crowd of people holding pictures, wandering past a camera as though on a conveyor belt and pushing each other aside at the same time. A row of people carrying pictures of the "battle" is linked together by a machine, following the logic of the assembly line and camera mechanics. Here, Godard and Miéville translate

the temporal arrangement of the film images into a spatial arrangement. It becomes evident that chains of pictures do not run one after the other, but rather are shown at the same time. They place the pictures next to one another and shift the focus of attention onto their framing. What is revealed is the principle of their concatenation. What appears in the montage as an often invisible addition is problematized in this way and set in relation to the logic of machine production. This reflection on the chain of production of pictures and sounds in this sequence makes it possible to think about the conditions of representation in film in general. The montage is the result of an industrial system of pictures and sounds, whose concatenation is organized from the start—just as the principle of the production sequence from *Showdown in Seattle* is marked by its adoption of conventional schemata of production.

In contrast, Godard and Miéville ask: How do the pictures hang on the chain? How are they chained together? What organizes their articulation and what kinds of political significance are generated in this way? Here we see an experimental situation of concatenation, in which pictures are relationally organized. Pictures and sounds from Nazi Germany, Palestine, Latin America, Vietnam, and other places are mixed together wildly—and combined with a number of folk songs or songs that invoke "the people" from both right-wing and left-wing contexts. This produces the impression that the pictures naturally attain their significance through their concatenation. But more importantly, we see that incongruous concatenations occur: pictures from concentration camps and Venceremos songs, Hitler's voice and a picture of My Lai, Hitler's voice and a picture of Golda Meir, My Lai and Lenin.

Promotional image for a user-friendly Cinepress film splicer developed by Hama, 1972.

It becomes clear that the voice of the people, which we hear in its wildly diverse articulations, is not in fact a basis for creating equivalencies. Instead, this sequence expose the radical political contradictions that the voice of the people strives to cover up. It generates sharp discrepancies within the silent coercion—as Theodor W. Adorno would say—of the identity relationship. It produces contraries instead of equations, and even provokes sheer dread—everything except an unproblematic addition of political desire. For what this populist chain of equivalencies displays is the void that it is structured around, the empty inclusivist *and* that keeps blindly adding and adding, outside the realm of any political criteria.

In summary, we can say that the principle of the voice of the people assumes an entirely different role in the two films. Although it is the organizing principle in Seattle, the principle that constitutes the gaze, it is never problematized. The voice of the people functions here like a blind spot, a lacuna, which, according to Jacques Lacan, constitutes the entire field of the visible but only becomes visible itself as a kind of cover. The voice of the people organizes the chain of equivalencies without allowing breaks; it conceals the fact that its political objective does not go beyond an unquestioned notion of inclusivity. The voice of the people is thus simultaneously the organizing principle of both a concatenation and a suppression. Yet what does it suppress? The empty topos of the voice of the people covers up a lacuna, specifically the lacuna of the question of the political measures and goals that are supposed to be legitimized by invoking the people.

So what are the prospects for the articulation of a protest movement based on the model of an *and*—as though inclusion at any cost were its

primary goal? Why and for whom is the political concatenation organized? What goals and criteria have to be formulated—even if they might not be very popular? And does there not have to be a much more radical critique of the articulation of ideology using pictures and sounds? Does not a conventional form mean a mimetic clinging to the conditions that are to be critiqued, a populist form of blind faith in the power of the addition of arbitrary desires? Is it not therefore sometimes better to break the chains than to organize everyone into a network at all costs?

Addition or Exponentiation

So what turns a movement into an oppositional one? For there are many movements that call themselves protest movements but should rightly be called reactionary, if not outright fascist. Such movements are those in which existing conditions are radicalized in breathless transgression, scattering fragmented identities like bone splinters along the way. The energy of the movement glides seamlessly from one element to the next—traversing the homogeneous empty time like a wave moving through the crowd. Images, sounds, and positions are linked without reflection in a movement of blind inclusion. A tremendous dynamic unfolds in these figures—only to leave everything as it was before.

What kind of movement of political montage would result in oppositional articulations, instead of a mere addition of elements for the sake of reproducing the status quo? Or to phrase the question differently, what kind of montage of two images/elements would produce something beyond and outside these two images/elements, something that would not represent a compromise, but would

instead belong to a different order—roughly the way someone might tenaciously pound two dull stones together to create a spark in the darkness? Whether this spark, which one could also call the spark of the political, can be created at all is a question of this articulation.

1
Independent Media Center, *Showdown in Seattle* (New York: Deep Dish Television, 1999).

2
This is not intended to imply that there is any film that could take on this work of mediation. However, a film could insist that this cannot be replaced by simple adjurations.

3
Ici et ailleurs, dir. Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Gaumont, 1975).

4
And what does *Here and Elsewhere* mean now, in 2002, when synagogues are burning in France?

Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy

A standard way of relating politics to art assumes that art represents political issues in one way or another. But there is a much more interesting perspective: the politics of the field of art as a place of work.[1] Simply look at what it does—not what it shows.

Among all other forms of art, fine art has been most closely linked to post-Fordist speculation, with bling, boom, and bust. Contemporary art is no unworldly discipline nestled away in some remote ivory tower. On the contrary, it is squarely placed in the neoliberal thick of things. We cannot dissociate the hype around contemporary art from the shock policies used to defibrillate slowing economies. Such hype embodies the affective dimension of global economies tied to Ponzi schemes, credit addiction, and bygone bull markets. Contemporary art is a brand name without a brand, ready to be slapped onto almost anything, a quick face-lift touting the new creative imperative for places in need of an extreme makeover, the suspense of gambling combined with the stern pleasures of upper-class boarding school education, a licensed playground for a world confused and collapsed by dizzying deregulation. If contemporary art is the answer, the question is, how can capitalism be made more beautiful?

But contemporary art is not only about beauty. It is also about function. What is the function of art within disaster capitalism? Contemporary art feeds on the crumbs of a massive and widespread redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich, conducted by means of an ongoing class struggle from above.[2] It lends primordial accumulation a whiff of postconceptual razzmatazz. Additionally, its reach has grown much more decentralized—important hubs of art are no longer only located in the Western metropolis. Today, deconstructivist contemporary

art museums pop up in any self-respecting autoc-racy. A country with human-rights violations? Bring on the Gehry gallery!

The Global Guggenheim is a cultural refinery for a set of post-democratic oligarchies, as are the countless international biennials tasked with upgrading and reeducating the surplus population.[3] Art thus facilitates the development of a new multi-polar distribution of geopolitical power whose predatory economies are often fueled by internal oppression, class war from above, and radical shock-and-awe policies.

Contemporary art thus not only reflects, but actively intervenes in the transition toward a new post-Cold War world order. It is a major player in unevenly advancing semiocapitalism wherever T-Mobile plants its flag. It is involved in mining for raw materials for dual-core processors. It pollutes, gentrifies, and ravishes. It seduces and consumes, then suddenly walks off, breaking your heart. From the deserts of Mongolia to the high plains of Peru, contemporary art is everywhere. And when it is finally dragged into Gagosian dripping from head to toe with blood and dirt, it triggers off rounds and rounds of rapturous applause.

Why and for whom is contemporary art so attractive? One guess: the production of art pres-ents a mirror image of post-democratic forms of hypercapitalism that look set to become the domi-nant political post-Cold War paradigm. It seems unpredictable, unaccountable, brilliant, mercurial, moody, guided by inspiration and genius. Just as any oligarch aspiring to dictatorship might want to see himself. The traditional conception of the artist's role corresponds all too well with the self-image of wannabe autocrats who see government potentially—and dangerously—as an art form.

Post-democratic government is very much related to this erratic type of male-genius-artist behavior. It is opaque, corrupt, and completely unaccount-able. Both models operate within male bonding structures that are as democratic as your local mafia chapter. Rule of law? Why don't we just leave it to taste? Checks and balances? Cheques and balances! Good governance? Bad curating! You see why the contemporary oligarch loves contemporary art: it's just what works for him.

Thus, traditional art production may be a role model for the nouveaux riches created by privatiza-tion, expropriation, and speculation. But the actual production of art is simultaneously a workshop for many of the nouveaux poor, trying their luck as JPEG virtuosos and conceptual impostors, as gal-lerinas and overdrive content providers. Because art also means work, more precisely, strike work.[4] It is produced as spectacle, on post-Fordist all-you-can-work conveyor belts. Strike or shock work is affective labor at insane speeds—enthusiastic, hyperactive, and deeply compromised.

Originally, strike workers were excess labor-ers in the early Soviet Union. The term is derived from the expression *udarny trud* for "superproduc-tive, enthusiastic labor" (*udar* for "shock, strike, blow"). Now, transferred to present-day cultural factories, strike work relates to the sensual dimen-sion of shock. Rather than painting, welding, and molding, artistic strike work consists of ripping, chatting, and posing. This accelerated form of artistic production creates punch and glitz, sensa-tion and impact. Its historical origin as format for Stalinist model brigades brings an additional edge to the paradigm of hyperproductivity. Strike work-ers churn out feelings, perception, and distinction in all possible sizes and variations. Intensity or

evacuation, sublime or crap, readymade or ready-made reality—strike work supplies consumers with all they never knew they wanted.

Strike work feeds on exhaustion and tempo, on deadlines and curatorial bullshit, on small talk and fine print. It also thrives on accelerated exploita-tion. I'd guess that—apart from domestic and care work—art is the industry with the most unpaid labor around. It sustains itself on the time and energy of unpaid interns and self-exploiting actors on pretty much every level and in almost every function. Free labor and rampant exploitation are the invisible dark matter that keeps the cultural sector going.

Free-floating strike workers plus new (and old) elites and oligarchies equal the framework of the contemporary politics of art. While the latter manage the transition to post-democracy, the former image it. But what does this situation actually indicate? Nothing but the ways in which contemporary art is implicated in transforming global power patterns.

Contemporary art's workforce consists largely of people who, despite working constantly, do not correspond to any traditional image of labor. They stubbornly resist settling into any entity recogniz-able enough to be identified as a class. While the easy way out would be to classify this constituency as multitude or crowd, it might be less romantic to ask whether they are not global lumpenfreelancers, deterritorialized and ideologically free-floating: a reserve army of imagination communicating via Google Translate.

Instead of shaping up as a new class, this fragile constituency may well consist—as Hannah Arendt once spitefully formulated—of the "refuse of all classes." These dispossessed adventurers described by Arendt, the urban pimps and hood-lums ready to be hired as colonial mercenaries and

Hito Steyerl, *Strike,* 2010, 1', HD video.

exploiters, are faintly (and quite distortedly) mirrored in the brigades of creative strike workers propelled into the global sphere of circulation known today as the art world.[5] If we acknowledge that current strike workers might inhabit similarly shifting grounds—the opaque disaster zones of shock capitalism—a decidedly un-heroic, conflicted, and ambivalent picture of artistic labor emerges.

We have to face up to the fact that there is no automatically available road to resistance and organization for artistic labor. That opportunism and competition are not a deviation of this form of labor but its inherent structure. That this workforce is not ever going to march in unison, except perhaps while dancing to a viral Lady Gaga imitation video. The international is over. Now let's get on with the global.

Here is the bad news: political art routinely shies away from discussing all these matters.[6] Addressing the intrinsic conditions of the art field, as well as the blatant corruption within it—think of bribes to get this or that large-scale biennial into one peripheral region or another—is a taboo even on the agenda of most artists who consider themselves political. Even though political art manages to represent so-called local situations from all over the globe, and routinely packages injustice and destitution, the conditions of its own production and display remain pretty much unexplored. One could even say that the politics of art are the blind spot of much contemporary political art.

Of course, institutional critique has traditionally been interested in similar issues. But today we need a quite extensive expansion of it.[7] Because in contrast to the age of an institutional criticism, which focused on art institutions, or even the sphere of representation at large, art production (consumption, distribution, marketing, etc.) takes on a

different and extended role within post-democratic globalization. One example, which is a quite absurd but also common phenomenon, is that radical art is nowadays very often sponsored by the most predatory banks or arms traders and completely embedded in rhetorics of city marketing, branding, and social engineering.[8] For very obvious reasons, this condition is rarely explored within political art, which is in many cases content to offer exotic self-ethnicization, pithy gestures, and militant nostalgia.

I am certainly not arguing for a position of innocence.[9] It is at best illusory, at worst just another selling point. Most of all it is very boring. But I do think that political artists could become more relevant if they were to confront these issues instead of safely parade as Stalinist realists, CNN situationists, or Jamie Oliver-meets-probation officer social engineers. It's time to kick the hammer-and-sickle souvenir art into the dustbin. If politics is thought of as the Other, happening somewhere else, always belonging to disenfranchised communities in whose name no one can speak, we end up missing what makes art intrinsically political nowadays: its function as a place for labor, conflict, and … fun—a site of condensation of the contradictions of capital and of extremely entertaining and sometimes devastating misunderstandings between the global and the local.

The art field is a space of wild contradiction and phenomenal exploitation. It is a place of power mongering, speculation, financial engineering, and massive and crooked manipulation. But it is also a site of commonality, movement, energy, and desire. In its best iterations it is a terrific cosmopolitan arena populated by mobile strike workers, itinerant salesmen of self, tech whiz kids, budget tricksters, supersonic translators, PhD interns, and other

digital vagrants and day laborers. It's hardwired, thin-skinned, plastic-fantastic. A potential commonplace where competition is ruthless and solidarity remains the only foreign expression. Peopled with charming scumbags, bully-kings, almost-beauty-queens. It's HDMI, CMYK, LGBT. Pretentious, flirtatious, mesmerizing.

This mess is kept afloat by the sheer dynamism of loads and loads of hardworking women. A hive of affective labor under close scrutiny and controlled by capital, woven tightly into its multiple contradictions. All of this makes it relevant to contemporary reality. Art affects this reality precisely because it is entangled into all of its aspects. It's messy, embedded, troubled, irresistible. We could try to understand its space as a political one instead of trying to represent a politics that is always happening elsewhere. Art is not outside politics, but politics resides within its production, its distribution, and its reception. If we take this on, we might surpass the plane of a politics of representation and embark on a politics that is there, in front of our eyes, ready to embrace.

1
I am expanding on a notion developed by Hongjohn Lin in his curatorial statement for the Taipei Biennial 2010. Hongjohn Lin, "Curatorial Statement," in *10TB Taipei Biennial Guidebook* (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2010), 10–11.

2
This has been described as a global and ongoing process of expropriation since the 1970s. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

As for the resulting distribution of wealth, a study by the Helsinki-based World Institute for Development Economics Research of the United Nations University (UNU-WIDER) found that in the year 2000, the richest 1 percent of adults alone owned 40 percent of global assets. The bottom half of the world's adult population owned 1 percent of global wealth. See http://www.wider.unu.edu/events/past-events/2006-events/en_GB/05-12-2006/.

3
For just one example of oligarch involvement, see Kate Taylor and Andrew E. Kramer, "Museum Board Member Caught in Russian Intrigue," *New York Times*, April 27, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/28/nyregion/28trustee.html. While such biennials span from Moscow to Dubai to Shanghai and many of the so-called transitional countries, we shouldn't consider post-democracy to be a non-Western phenomenon. The Schengen area is a brilliant example of post-democratic rule, with a whole host of political institutions not legitimized by popular vote and a substantial section of the population excluded from citizenship (not to mention the Old World's growing fondness for democratically elected fascists). The 2011 exhibition at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, "The Potosí Principle," organized by Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, and Max Jorge Hinderer, highlights the connection between oligarchy and image production from another historically relevant perspective.

4
I am drawing on a field of meaning developed by Ekaterina Degot, Cosmin Costinaş, and David Riff for their 1st Ural Industrial Biennial, 2010.

5
Arendt may have been wrong on the matter of taste. Taste is not necessarily a matter of the common, as she argued, following Kant. In this context, it is a matter of manufacturing consensus, engineering reputation, and other delicate machinations, which—whoops—metamorphose into art-historical bibliographies. Let's face it: the politics of taste are not about the collective, but about the collector. Not about the common but about the patron. Not about sharing but about sponsoring.

6
There are of course many laudable and great exceptions, and I admit that I myself may bow my head in shame, too.

7
As is also argued in Alex Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds., *Institutional Critique* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). See also the collected issues of the online journal *transform*: http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0106.

8
Recently on show at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter in Oslo was *Guggenheim Visibility Study Group,* a very interesting project by Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas that unpacked the tensions between local (and partly indigenist) art scenes and the Guggenheim franchise system, with the Guggenheim effect analyzed in detail in a case study. See http://www.vilma.cc/2G/. Also see Joseba Zulaika, *Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa: Museums, Architecture, and City Renewal* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2003). Another case study: Beat Weber and Therese Kaufmann, "The Foundation, the State Secretary and the Bank: A Journey into the Cultural Policy of a Private Institution," *transform* (April 25, 2006), http://transform.eipcp.net/correspondence/1145970626. See also Martha Rosler, "Take the Money and Run? Can Political and Socio-Critical Art 'Survive'?" *e-flux journal*, no. 12, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/107; and Tirdad Zolghadr, "11th Istanbul Biennial," *frieze*, no. 127 (November–December 2009), http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/11th_istanbul_biennial/.

9
This is evident from this text's placement on e-flux as an advertisement supplement. The situation is furthermore complicated by the fact that these ads may well flaunt my own shows. At the risk of repeating myself, I would like to emphasize that I do not consider innocence a political position, but a moral one, and thus politically irrelevant. An interesting comment on this situation can be found in Luis Camnitzer, "The Corruption in the Arts / the Art of Corruption," published in the context of the "Marco Polo Syndrome," a symposium at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (April 11, 1995). See http://www.universes-in-universe.de/magazin/marco-polo/s-camnitzer.htm.

Art as Occupation: Claims for an Autonomy of Life

I want you to take out your cellphone. Open the video. Record whatever you see for a couple of seconds. No cuts. You are allowed to move around, to pan and zoom. Use effects only if they are built in. Keep doing this for one month, every day. Now stop. Listen.

Lets start with a simple proposition: what used to be work has increasingly been turned into occupation.[1]

This change in terminology may look trivial. In fact, almost everything changes on the way from work to occupation—the economic framework, but also its implications for space and temporality.

If we think of work as labor, it implies a beginning, a producer, and, eventually, a result. Work is primarily seen as a means to an end: a product, a reward, or a wage. It is an instrumental relation. It also produces a subject by means of alienation.

An occupation is the opposite. An occupation keeps people busy instead of giving them paid labor.[2] An occupation is not hinged on any result; it has no necessary conclusion. As such, it knows no traditional alienation, nor any corresponding idea of subjectivity. An occupation doesn't necessarily assume remuneration either, since the process is thought to contain its own gratification. It has no temporal framework except the passing of time itself. It is not centered on a producer/worker, but includes consumers, reproducers, even destroyers, time-wasters, and bystanders—in essence, anybody seeking distraction or engagement.

Occupation

The shift from work to occupation applies in the most different areas of contemporary daily activity. It marks a transition far greater than the often-described shift from a Fordist to post-Fordist economy. Instead of being seen as a means of

earning, it is seen as a way of spending time and resources. It clearly accents the passage from an economy based on production to an economy fueled by waste, from time progressing to time spent or even idled away, from a space defined by clear divisions to an entangled and complex territory.

Perhaps most importantly: occupation is not a means to an end, as traditional labor is. Occupation is in many cases an end in itself.

Occupation is connected to activity, service, distraction, therapy, and engagement. But also to conquest, invasion, and seizure. In the military, occupation refers to extreme power relations, spatial complication, and 3-D sovereignty. It is imposed by the occupier on the occupied, who may or may not resist it. The objective is often expansion, but also neutralization, stranglehold, and the quelling of autonomy.

Occupation often implies endless mediation, eternal process, indeterminate negotiation, and the blurring of spatial divisions. It has no built-in outcome or resolution. It also refers to appropriation, colonization, and extraction. In its processual aspect occupation is both permanent and uneven— and its connotations are completely different for the occupied and the occupier.

Of course occupations—in all the different senses of the word—are not the same. But the mimetic force of the term operates in each of the different meanings and draws them toward each other. There is a magic affinity within the word itself: if it sounds the same, the force of similarity works from within it.[3] The force of naming reaches across difference to uncomfortably approximate situations that are otherwise segregated and hierarchized by tradition, interest, and privilege.
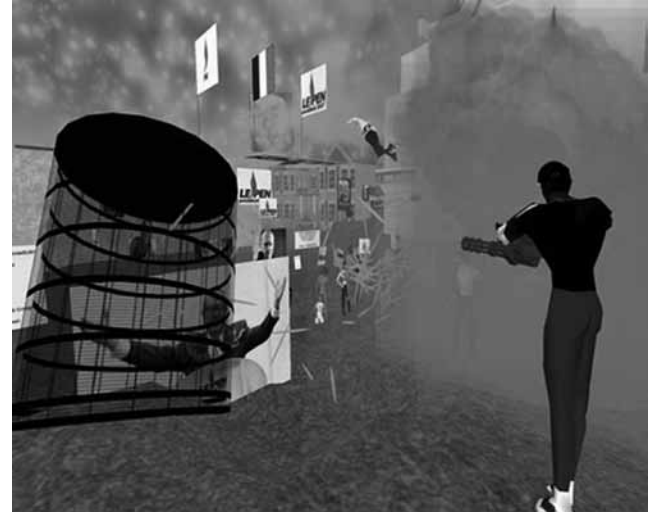
French political party Front National is violently attacked in Second Life by avatars as a means of protest against its ongoing Second Life campaign.

Portrait of an intern as found online. The intern is named Justine, like the main character in Marquis de Sade's 1791 book *Justine, or The Misfortunes of Virtue*.

Art as Occupation: Claims for an Autonomy of Life

Hito Steyerl

Occupation as Art

In the context of art, the transition from work to occupation has additional implications. What happens to the work of art in this process? Does it too transform into an occupation?

In part, it does. What used to materialize exclusively as object or product—as (art)work—now tends to appear as activity or performance. These can be as endless as strained budgets and attention spans will allow. Today the traditional work of art has been largely supplemented by art as a process—as an occupation.[4]

Art is an occupation in that it keeps people busy—spectators and many others. In many rich countries art denotes a quite popular occupational scheme. The idea that it contains its own gratification and needs no remuneration is quite accepted in the cultural workplace. The paradigm of the culture industry provided an example of an economy that functioned by producing an increasing number of occupations (and distractions) for people who were in many cases working for free. Additionally, there are now occupational schemes in the guise of art education. More and more post- and post-post-graduate programs shield prospective artists from the pressure of (public or private) art markets. Art education now takes longer—it creates zones of occupation, which yield fewer "works" but more processes, forms of knowledge, fields of engagement, and planes of relationality. It also produces ever-more educators, mediators, guides, and even guards—all of whose conditions of occupation are again processual (and ill- or unpaid).

The professional and militarized meaning of occupation unexpectedly intersect here—in the role of the guard or attendant—to create a contradictory space. Recently, a professor at the University of

Chicago suggested that museum guards should be armed.[5] Of course, he was referring primarily to guards in (formerly) occupied countries like Iraq and other states in the midst of political upheaval, but by citing potential breakdowns of civic order he folded First World locations into his appeal. What's more, art occupation as a means of killing time intersects with the military sense of spatial control in the figure of the museum guard—some of whom may already be military veterans. Intensified security mutates the sites of art and inscribes the museum or gallery into a sequence of stages of potential violence.

Another prime example in the complicated topology of occupation is the figure of the intern (in a museum, a gallery, or, most likely, an isolated project).[6] The term "intern" is linked to internment, confinement, and detention, whether involuntary or voluntary. She is supposed to be on the inside of the system, yet is excluded from payment. She is inside labor but outside remuneration: stuck in a space that includes the outside and excludes the inside simultaneously. As a result, she works to sustain her own occupation.

Both examples produce a fractured time-space with varying degrees of occupational intensity. These zones are very much shut off from one another, yet interlocked and interdependent. The schematics of art occupation reveal a check-pointed system, complete with gatekeepers, access levels, and close management of movement and information. Its architecture is astonishingly complex. Some parts are forcefully immobilized, their autonomy denied and quelled in order to keep other parts more mobile. Occupation works on both sides: forcefully seizing and keeping out, inclusion and exclusion, managing access and flow. It may

not come as surprise that this pattern often but not always follows fault lines of class and political economy.

In poorer and underdeveloped parts of the world, the immediate grip of art might seem to lessen. But art-as-occupation in these places can more powerfully serve the larger ideological deflections within capitalism and even profit concretely from labor stripped of rights.[7] Here, migrant, liberal, and urban squalor can again be exploited by artists who use misery as raw material. Art "upgrades" poorer neighborhoods by aestheticizing their status as urban ruins and drives out long-term inhabitants after the area becomes fashionable.[8] Thus art assists in the structuring, hierarchizing, seizing, up- or downgrading of space; in organizing, wasting, or simply consuming time through vague distraction or committed pursuit of largely unpaid para-productive activity; and it divvies up roles in the figures of artist, audience, freelance curator, or uploader of cellphone videos to a museum website.

Generally speaking, art is part of an uneven global system, one that underdevelops some parts of the world, while overdeveloping others—and the boundaries between both areas interlock and overlap.

Life and Autonomy

But beyond all this, art doesn't stop at occupying people, space, or time. It also occupies life as such.

Why should that be the case? Let's start with a small detour on artistic autonomy. Artistic autonomy was traditionally predicated not on occupation, but on separation—more precisely, on art's separation from life.[9] As artistic production became more specialized in an industrial world marked by an

increasing division of labor, it also grew increasingly divorced from direct functionality.[10] While it apparently evaded instrumentalization, it simultaneously lost social relevance. As a reaction, different avant-gardes set out to break the barriers of art and to recreate its relation to life.

Their hope was for art to dissolve within life, to be infused with a revolutionary jolt. What happened was rather the contrary. To push the point: life has been occupied by art, because art's initial forays back into life and daily practice gradually turned into routine incursions, and then into constant occupation. Nowadays, the invasion of life by art is not the exception, but the rule. Artistic autonomy was meant to separate art from the zone of daily routine—from mundane life, intentionality, utility, production, and instrumental reason—in order to distance it from rules of efficiency and social coercion. But this incompletely segregated area then incorporated all that it broke from in the first place, recasting the old order within its own aesthetic paradigms. The incorporation of art within life was once a political project (both for the Left and Right), but the incorporation of life within art is now an aesthetic project, and it coincides with an overall aestheticization of politics.

On all levels of everyday activity, art not only invades life, but occupies it. This doesn't mean that it's omnipresent. It just means that it has established a complex topology of both overbearing presence and gaping absence—both of which impact daily life.

Checklist

But, you may respond, apart from occasional exposure, I have nothing to do with art whatsoever! How can my life be occupied by it? Perhaps one of the following questions applies to you:

Does art possess you in the guise of endless self-performance?[11] Do you wake feeling like a multiple? Are you on constant auto-display?

Have you been beautified, improved, upgraded, or attempted to do this to anyone/thing else? Has your rent doubled because a few kids with brushes relocated into that dilapidated building next door? Have your feelings been designed, or do you feel designed by your iPhone?

Or, on the contrary, is access to art (and its production) being withdrawn, slashed, cut off, impoverished, and hidden behind insurmountable barriers? Is labor in this field unpaid? Do you live in a city that redirects a huge portion of its cultural budget to fund a one-off art exhibition? Is conceptual art from your region privatized by predatory banks?

All of these are symptoms of artistic occupation. While, on the one hand, artistic occupation completely invades life, it also cuts off much art from circulation.

Division of Labor

Of course, even if they had wanted to, the avant-gardes could never have achieved the dissolution of the border between art and life on their own. One of the reasons has to do with a rather paradoxical development at the root of artistic autonomy. According to Peter Bürger, art acquired a special status within the bourgeois capitalist system because artists somehow refused to follow the specialization required by other professions. While in its time this contributed to claims for artistic autonomy, more recent advances in neoliberal modes of production in many occupational fields started to reverse the division of labor.[12] The artist-as-dilettante and biopolitical designer was overtaken by the clerk-as-innovator, the technician-as-entrepreneur, the

laborer-as-engineer, the manager-as-genius, and (worst of all) the administrator-as-revolutionary. As a template for many forms of contemporary occupation, multitasking marks the reversal of the division of labor: the fusion of professions, or rather their confusion. The example of the artist as creative polymath now serves as a role model (or excuse) to legitimate the universalization of professional dilettantism and overexertion in order to save money on specialized labor.

If the origin of artistic autonomy lies in the refusal of the division of labor (and the alienation and subjection that accompany it), this refusal has now been reintegrated into neoliberal modes of production to set free dormant potentials for financial expansion. In this way, the logic of autonomy spread to the point where it tipped into new dominant ideologies of flexibility and self-entrepreneurship, acquiring new political meanings as well. Workers, feminists, and youth movements of the 1970s started claiming autonomy from labor and the regime of the factory.[13] Capital reacted to this flight by designing its own version of autonomy: the autonomy of capital from workers.[14] The rebellious, autonomous force of those various struggles became a catalyst for the capitalist reinvention of labor relations as such. Desire for self-determination was rearticulated as a self-entrepreneurial business model, the hope to overcome alienation was transformed into serial narcissism and overidentification with one's occupation. Only in this context can we understand why contemporary occupations that promise an unalienated lifestyle are somehow believed to contain their own gratification. But the relief from alienation they suggest takes on the form of a more pervasive self-oppression, which arguably could be much worse than traditional alienation.[15]

The struggles around autonomy, and above all capital's response to them are thus deeply ingrained into the transition from work to occupation. As we have seen, this transition is based on the role model of the artist as a person who refuses the division of labor and leads an unalienated lifestyle. This is one of the templates for new occupational forms of life that are all-encompassing, passionate, self-oppressive, and narcissistic to the bone.

To paraphrase Allan Kaprow: life in a gallery is like fucking in a cemetery.[16] We could add that things become even worse as the gallery spills back into life: as the gallery/cemetery invades life, one begins to feel unable to fuck anywhere else.[17]

Occupation, Again

This might be the time to start exploring the next meaning of occupation: the meaning it has taken on in countless squats and takeovers in recent years. As the occupiers of the New School in 2008 emphasized, this type of occupation tries to intervene into the governing forms of occupational time and space, instead of simply blocking and immobilizing a specific area:

> Occupation mandates the inversion of the standard dimensions of space. Space in an occupation is not merely the container of our bodies, it is a plane of potentiality that has been frozen by the logic of the commodity. In an occupation, one must engage with space topologically, as a strategist, asking: What are its holes, entrances, exits? How can one disalienate it, disidentify it, make it inoperative, communize it?[18]

To unfreeze the forces that lie dormant in the petrified space of occupation means to rearticulate their

functional uses, to make them non-efficient, non-instrumental, and non-intentional in their capacities as tools for social coercion. It also means to demilitarize it—at least in terms of hierarchy—and to then militarize it differently. Now, to free an art space from art-as-occupation seems a paradoxical task, especially when art spaces extend beyond the traditional gallery. On the other hand, it is also not difficult to imagine how any of these spaces might operate in a non-efficient, non-instrumental, and non-productive way.

But which is the space we should occupy? Of course, at this moment suggestions abound for museums, galleries, and other art spaces to be occupied. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that; all these spaces should be occupied, now, again, and forever. But again, none of these spaces is strictly coexistent with our own multiple spaces of occupation. The realms of art remain mostly adjacent to the incongruent territories that stitch up and articulate the incoherent accumulation of times and spaces by which we are occupied. At the end of the day, people might have to leave the site of occupation in order to go home to do the thing formerly called labor: wipe off the tear gas, go pick up their kids from child care, and otherwise get on with their lives.[19] Because these lives happen in the vast and unpredictable territory of occupation, and this is also where lives are being occupied. I am suggesting that we occupy this space. But where is it? And how can it be claimed?

The Territory of Occupation
The territory of occupation is not a single physical place, and is certainly not to be found within any existing occupied territory. It is a space of affect, materially supported by ripped reality. It can actualize anywhere, at any time. It exists as a possible experience. It may consist of a composite and montaged sequence of movements through sampled checkpoints, airport security checks, cash tills, aerial viewpoints, body scanners, scattered labor, revolving glass doors, duty-free stores. How do I know? Remember the beginning of this text? I asked you to record a few seconds each day on your cellphone. Well, this is the sequence that accumulated in my phone; walking the territory of occupation, for months on end.

Walking through cold winter sun and fading insurrections sustained and amplified by mobile phones. Sharing hope with crowds yearning for spring. A spring that feels necessary, vital, unavoidable. But spring didn't come this year. It didn't come in summer, nor in autumn. Winter came around again, yet spring wouldn't draw any closer. Occupations came and froze, were trampled under, drowned in gas, shot at. In that year people courageously, desperately, passionately fought to achieve spring. But it remained elusive. And while spring was violently kept at bay, this sequence accumulated in my cellphone. A sequence powered by tear gas, heartbreak, and permanent transition. Recording the pursuit of spring.

Jump cut to Cobra helicopters hovering over mass graves, zebra wipe to shopping malls, mosaic to spam filters, SIM cards, nomad weavers; spiral effect to border detention, child care, and digital exhaustion.[20] Gas clouds dissolving between high-rise buildings. Exasperation. The territory of occupation is a place of enclosure, extraction, hedging, and constant harassment, of getting pushed, patronized, surveilled, deadlined, detained, delayed, hurried—it encourages a condition that is always too late, too early, arrested, overwhelmed, lost, falling.

Colin Smith, *Poster for the Occupy Movement*, 2011.

Your phone is driving you through this journey, driving you mad, extracting value, whining like a baby, purring like a lover, bombarding you with deadening, maddening, embarrassing, outrageous claims for time, space, attention, credit card numbers. It copy-pastes your life to countless unintelligible pictures that have no meaning, no audience, no purpose, but do have impact, punch, and speed. It accumulates love letters, insults, invoices, drafts, endless communication. It is being tracked and scanned, turning you into transparent digits, into motion as a blur. A digital eye as your heart in hand. It is witness and informer. If it gives away your position, it means you'll retroactively have had one. If you film the sniper that shoots at you, the phone will have faced his aim. He will have been framed and fixed, a faceless pixel composition.[21] Your phone is your brain in corporate design, your heart as a product, the Apple of your eye.

Your life condenses into an object in the palm of your hand, ready to be slammed into a wall and still grinning at you, shattered, dictating deadlines, recording, interrupting.

The territory of occupation is a green-screened territory, madly assembled and conjectured by zapping, copy-paste operations, incongruously keyed in, ripped, ripping apart, breaking lives and heart. It is a space governed not only by 3-D sovereignty, but 4-D sovereignty because it occupies time, a 5-D sovereignty because it governs from the virtual, and an n-D sovereignty from above, beyond, across—in Dolby Surround. Time asynchronously crashes into space; accumulating by spasms of capital, despair, and desire running wild.

Here and elsewhere, now and then, delay and echo, past and future, day and night nest within each other like unrendered digital effects. Both temporal

and spatial occupation intersect to produce individualized timelines, intensified by fragmented circuits of production and augmented military realities. They can be recorded, objectified, and thus made tangible and real. A matter in motion, made of poor images, lending flow to material reality. It is important to emphasize that these are not just passive remnants of individual or subjective movements. Rather, they are sequences that create individuals by means of occupation. They also subject them to occupation. As material condensations of conflictive forces, they catalyze resistance, opportunism, resignation. They trigger full stops and passionate abandon. They steer, shock, and seduce.

I might have sent something to you from my phone. See it spreading. See it become invaded by other sequences, many sequences, see it being re-montaged, rearticulated, reedited. Let's merge and rip apart our scenarios of occupation. Break continuity. Juxtapose. Edit in parallel. Jump the axe. Build suspense. Pause. Countershoot. Keep chasing spring.

These are our territories of occupation, forcefully kept apart from each other, each in his and her own corporate enclosure. Let's reedit them. Rebuild. Rearrange. Wreck. Articulate. Alienate. Unfreeze. Accelerate. Inhabit. Occupy.

1
I am ripping these ideas from a brilliant observation by the Carrotworkers' Collective. See their "On Free Labour," http://carrotworkers.wordpress.com/on-free-labour/.

2
"The European Union language promoting 'occupation' rather than 'employment,' marking a subtle but interesting semantic shift towards keeping the active population 'busy' rather than trying to create jobs." Ibid.

3
Walter Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," in *Selected Writings*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 2: 694–711, esp. 696.

4
One could even say: the work of art is tied to the idea of a product (bound up in a complex system of valorization). Art-as-occupation bypasses the end result of production by immediately turning the making-of into commodity.

5
Lawrence Rothfield as quoted in John Hooper, "Arm museum guards to prevent looting, says professor," *Guardian*, July 10, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2011/jul/10/arm-museum-guards-looting-war. "Professor Lawrence Rothfield, faculty director of the University of Chicago's cultural policy center, told the *Guardian* that ministries, foundations and local authorities 'should not assume that the brutal policing job required to prevent looters and professional art thieves from carrying away items is just one for the national police or for other forces not under their direct control.' He was speaking in advance of the annual conference of the Association for Research into Crimes Against Art (ARCA), held over the weekend in the central Italian town of Amelia. Rothfield said he would also like to see museum attendants, site wardens and others given thorough training in crowd control. And not just in the developing world."

6
"The figure of the intern appears in this context paradigmatic as it negotiates the collapse of the boundaries between Education, Work and Life." Carrotworkers' Collective, "On Free Labour."

7
As critiqued recently by Walid Raad in the building of the Abu Dhabi Guggenheim franchise and related labor issues. See Ben Davis, "Interview with Walid Raad About the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi," *ARTINFO*, June 9, 2011, http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/37846/walid-raad-on-why-the-guggenheim-abu-dhabi-must-be-built-on-a-foundation-of-workers-rights/.

8
Central here is Martha Rosler's three-part essay, "Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism," *e-flux journal*, no. 21 (December 2010); no. 23 (March 2011); and no. 25 (May 2011).

9
These paragraphs are entirely due to the pervasive influence of Sven Lütticken's excellent text "Acting on the Omnipresent Frontiers of Autonomy," in *To The Arts, Citizens!*, eds. Óscar Faria and João Fernandes (Porto: Serralves, 2010), 146–67. Lütticken also commissioned the initial version of this text, to be published soon as a "Black Box" version in a special edition of *OPEN* magazine.

10
The emphasis here is on the word *obvious*, since art evidently retained a major function in developing a particular division of senses, class distinction, and bourgeois subjectivity even as it became more divorced from religious or overt representational function. Its autonomy presented itself as disinterested and dispassionate, while at the same time mimetically adapting the form and structure of capitalist commodities.

11
The Invisible Committee lay out the terms for occupational performativity: "Producing oneself is becoming the

dominant occupation of a society where production no longer has an object: like a carpenter who's been evicted from his shop and in desperation sets about hammering and sawing himself. All these young people smiling for their job interviews, who have their teeth whitened to give them an edge, who go to nightclubs to boost the company spirit, who learn English to advance their careers, who get divorced or married to move up the ladder, who take courses in leadership or practice 'self-improvement' in order to better 'manage conflicts'—'the most intimate "self-improvement,"' says one guru, 'will lead to increased emotional stability, to smoother and more open relationships, to sharper intellectual focus, and therefore to a better economic performance.'" The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 16.

12
   Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

13
   It is interesting to make a link at this point to classical key texts of autonomist thought as collected in Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, eds., *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007).

14
   Antonio Negri has detailed the restructuring of the northern Italian labor force after the 1970s, while Paolo Virno and Franco "Bifo" Berardi both emphasize that the autonomous tendencies expressed the refusal of labor and the rebellious feminist, youth, and workers' movements in the '70s was recaptured into new, flexibilized, and entrepreneurial forms of coercion. More recently Berardi has emphasized the new conditions of subjective identification with labor and its self-perpetuating narcissistic components. See, among others, Antonio Negri, "Reti produttive e territori: il caso del Nord-Est italiano," in *L'inverno è finito: Scritti sulla trasformazione negata (1989–1995)*, ed. Giovanni Caccia (Rome: Castelvecchi, 1996),

66–80; Paolo Virno, "Do You Remember Counterrevolution?," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e)), 2010.

15
   I have repeatedly argued that one should not seek to escape alienation but on the contrary embrace it as well as the status of objectivity and objecthood that goes along with it.

16
   In "What Is a Museum? Dialogue with Robert Smithson," *Museum World* no. 9 (1967), reprinted in Jack Flam, ed., *The Writings of Robert Smithson* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 43–51.

17
   Remember also the now unfortunately defunct meaning of occupation. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries "to occupy" was a euphemism for "have sexual intercourse with," which fell from usage almost completely during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

18
   Inoperative Committee, *Preoccupied: The Logic of Occupation* (2009), 11.

19
   In the sense of squatting, which in contrast to other types of occupation is limited spatially and temporally.

20
   I copied the form of my sequence from Imri Kahn's lovely video *Rebecca makes it!*, where it appears with different imagery.

21
   This description is directly inspired by Rabih Mroué's terrific lecture, "The Pixelated Revolution," on the use of cellphones in recent Syrian uprisings.

Freedom from Everything: Freelancers and Mercenaries

In 1990, George Michael released his song "Freedom '90." It was a time when everybody was deliriously singing along with Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" or the Scorpions's "Winds of Change," celebrating what people thought was the final victory of liberty and democracy after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Most abysmal of all these sing-along songs was David Hasselhoff's live rendition from on top of the Berlin Wall of "Looking for Freedom," a song describing the trials and tribulations of a rich man's son trying to make his own fortune.

But George Michael did something entirely different. For him, freedom was not some liberal paradise of opportunity. Instead,

It looks like the road to heaven
But it feels like the road to hell.[1]

What sort of freedom does George Michael's song describe? It is not the classic liberal freedom defined by an ability to do or say or believe something. It is rather a negative freedom. It is characterized by absence, the lack of property and equality in exchange, the absence even of the author and the destruction of all props suggesting his public persona. And this is why the song feels much more contemporary than all the odes to liberty from a bygone age of the end of history. It describes a very contemporary state of freedom: the freedom from everything.

We are accustomed to regarding freedom as primarily positive—the freedom to do or have something; thus there is the freedom of speech, the freedom to pursue happiness and opportunity, or the freedom of worship.[2] But now the situation is shifting. Especially in the current economic and political crisis, the flipside of liberal ideas of

freedom—namely, the freedom of corporations from any form of regulation, as well as the freedom to relentlessly pursue one's own interest at the expense of everyone else's—has become the only form of universal freedom that exists: the freedom from social bonds, freedom from solidarity, freedom from certainty or predictability, freedom from employment or labor, freedom from culture, public transport, education, or anything public at all.

These are the only freedoms that we share around the globe nowadays. They do not apply equally to everybody, but depend on one's economic and political situation. They are negative freedoms, and they apply across a carefully constructed and exaggerated cultural alterity that promotes: the freedom from social security, the freedom from the means of making a living, the freedom from accountability and sustainability, the freedom from free education, healthcare, pensions and public culture, the loss of standards of public responsibility, and in many places, the freedom from the rule of law.

As Janis Joplin sang, "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." This is the freedom that people in many places share today. Contemporary freedom is not primarily the enjoyment of civil liberties, as the traditional liberal view has it, but rather like the freedom of free fall, experienced by many who are thrown into an uncertain and unpredictable future.

These negative freedoms are also those that propel the very diverse protest movements that have emerged around the world—movements that have no positive focal point or clearly articulated demands, because they express the conditions of negative freedom. They articulate the loss of the common as such.
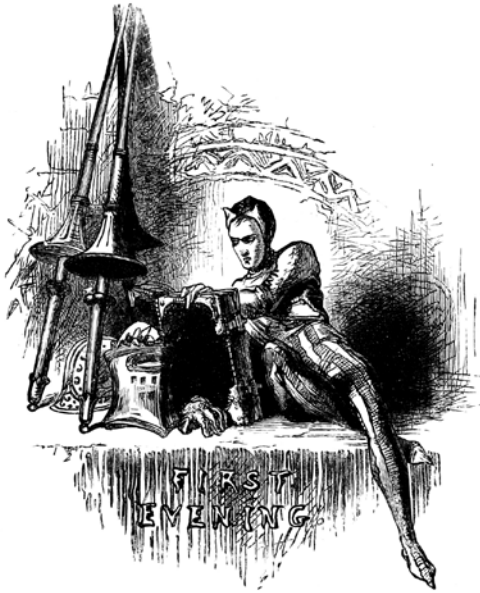
The romantic free lance as portrayed in the book *A Festival of Song:
A Series of Evenings with the Greatest Poets of the English Language*, 1876.

Negative Freedom as Common Ground

Now it's time for the good news. There is nothing wrong with this condition. It is of course devastating for those who are subject to it, but at the same time, it also reshapes the character of opposition in a very welcome way. It diverts discussions away from the freedom to do, buy, say, or wear this or that. These discussions usually end up constructing an Other, whether the Islamic fundamentalist, the communist-atheist, the feminist traitor to the nation or culture—whoever fits the bill will be the one who forbids you to buy, say, or wear certain things. However, to insist on speaking about negative freedom opens the possibility of claiming more negative freedoms: the freedom from exploitation, oppression, and cynicism. This means exploring new forms of relationships between people who have become free agents in a world of free trade and rampant deregulation.

One particularly pertinent aspect of the condition of negative freedom today: the condition of the freelancer.

What is a freelancer? Let's look at a very simple definition.

1. A person who sells services to employers without a long-term commitment to any of them.
2. An uncommitted independent, as in politics or social life.
3. A medieval mercenary.[3]

The word "freelance" derives from the medieval term for a mercenary soldier, a "free lance," that is, a soldier who is not attached to any particular master or government and can be hired for a specific task. The term was first used by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) in *Ivanhoe* to describe a "medieval mercenary

warrior" or "free-lance," indicating that the lance is not sworn to any lord's services. It changed to a figurative noun around the 1860s and was recognized as a verb in 1903 by authorities in etymology such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Only in modern times has the term morphed from a noun (a freelance) into an adjective (a freelance journalist), a verb (a journalist who freelances) and an adverb (she worked freelance), as well as the noun "freelancer."[4]

While today's lance-for-hire takes on many different forms—from stone crushers, shovels, baby bottles, and machine guns to any form of digital hardware—the conditions of employment do not appear to have changed as dramatically as the lance itself. Today, that lance—at least in the case of writers—has most likely been designed by Steve Jobs. But perhaps labor conditions have changed as well—the factory now seems to be dissolving into autonomous and subcontracted microunits that produce under conditions that are not far from indentured and day labor. And this widespread, though by no means universal, reversal to historical forms of feudalist labor could mean that, indeed, we are living in neo-feudal times.[5]

In Japanese cinema, there is a long tradition of portraying the figure of the itinerant freelance. This character is called the "ronin," a wandering samurai who knows no permanent master. He has lost the privileges of serving a single master and now faces a world characterized by the Hobbesian warfare of all against all. The only thing he has left are his fighting skills, which he rents out. He is a lumpensamurai, downsized, degraded, but with key skills nevertheless.

The classic freelancer film is Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961), which also became popular in the West because it was adapted as a so-called spaghetti western by Italian director Sergio Leone. *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) launched both Clint Eastwood and the superwide super-close-up, usually of sweaty males staring each other down before decisive shoot-outs. But the original Japanese version is much more interesting. In its opening sequence, we are faced with a surprisingly contemporary situation. While the freelancer walks through a windswept and barren landscape, he approaches a village and meets people in different degrees of anguish and destitution. The closing shot of the introduction is of a dog who strolls past with a human hand in his mouth.

In Kurosawa's film, the country is transitioning from a production-based economy to a consumption- and speculation-based one. The village is ruled by two rival warlord-capitalists. People are giving up their manufacturing businesses to become brokers and agents. At the same time, textile production— a profession deeply associated with the creation and development of capitalism—is being outsourced to housewives. Hookers abound, as do the security personnel to whom they cater. Sex and security are valuable commodities, as are coffins, which, apart from textile production, seem to be the main industry in town. In this situation, the freelancer appears on the scene. He manages to pit the warlords against each other and liberates the villagers.

The Mercenary
While the story of the ronin is a fitting allegory for the conditions of contemporary freelancers, the mercenary is not just an allegorical or historical figure—it is a very contemporary one. Indeed, we are living in an age in which the use of mercenary forces has made a surprising comeback, especially during the second Iraq War, which—as

The hollywood adaptation of Akira Kurosawa's 1961 film *Yojimbo* starred Clint Eastwood. Clint Eastwood's character, originally a freelance samurai, was adapted by Sergio Leone to be a cowboy in his spaghetti western Dollar Trilogy.

we may have already forgotten—started out as "Operation Iraqi Freedom."

The question of whether private security contractors can be called mercenaries under international law was hotly debated during the Iraq War. While US military contractors perhaps did not satisfy all the criteria for being called mercenaries according to the Geneva Convention, the use of about 20,000 such personnel during the occupation highlights the increasing privatization of warfare and the lack of state control over the actions of these private soldiers.

As many political scientists have noted, the privatization of warfare is a symptom of an overall weakening of the structure of the nation-state— a sign of a loss of control over military power, which undermines accountability and the rule of law. It calls into question the state's so-called monopoly on violence and undermines state sovereignty, replacing it with what has been called "subcon-tracted sovereignty." We thus have two figures, which complement each other and figure promi-nently in the scenario of negative freedom: the freelancer in an occupational sense and the mer-cenary or private security contractor in the military occupational sense.

Both freelancers and mercenaries lack alle-giance to traditional forms of political organization, like nation-states. They engage in free-floating loyalties that are subject to economic and military negotiation. Thus, democratic political representa-tion becomes an empty promise, since traditional political institutions only give negative freedoms to freelancers and mercenaries: the freedom from everything, the freedom to be outlaws or, as the beautiful expression goes: free game. Free game for the market; free game for the forces of deregulation

of states, and, in the last instance, also the deregulation of liberal democracy itself.

Arguably, both freelancers and mercenaries are related to the rise of what Saskia Sassen calls the "Global City." This concept was beautifully summarized in a recent lecture by Thomas Elsaesser. He says that Global Cities are places that,

> due to a number of distinct factors, have become important nodes in the global economic system. The idea of the Global City therefore implies thinking of the world in terms of networks that come together at certain points, in cities whose reach and reference go beyond a single nation, thus suggesting transnationality or post-nationality.[6]

Global Cities thus express a new geography of power that is intrinsically linked to economic globalization and its many consequences, which have substantially transformed the role of the nation-state and its political institutions, such as representative democracy. This means that traditional modes of democratic representation are deeply in crisis. This crisis was not brought about by the interference of some culturally alien Other. It was brought about by the system of political representation itself, which has, on the one hand, undermined the power of the nation-state by rolling back economic regulations, and, on the other hand, inflated the power of the nation-state through emergency legislation and digitized surveillance. The liberal idea of representative democracy has been deeply corrupted by the unrestrained forces of both economic liberalism and nationalism.

At this point a new negative freedom emerges: the freedom not to be represented by traditional institutions, which refuse any responsibility for you but still try to control and micromanage your life, perhaps by using private military contractors or other private security services.

So what is the freedom to be represented differently? How can we express a condition of complete freedom from anything, from attachment, subjectivity, property, loyalty, social bonds, and even oneself as a subject? And how could we even express it politically?

Maybe like this?

This layout for a do-it-yourself paper mask of *V for Vendetta*'s graphic novel character Guy Fawkes has been used by protesters since 2008 in reference to the Anonymous hacker movement. A cutout mask allows users to avoid paying copyrights for the mask, now property of Warner Brothers since the film studio's adaptation of the novel.

Lose the Face Now, I've Got to Live…

In 2008, the Guy Fawkes mask was appropriated by the hacker group Anonymous as its public face for a protest against Scientology. Since then it has spread as a viral visual symbol of contemporary dissent. But it is virtually unknown that this is an appropriation of the face of a mercenary.

Guy Fawkes was not only the person who got executed because he wanted to blow up the British Parliament. He was also a religious mercenary, fighting for the cause of Catholicism all over the European continent. While his historical persona is more than dubious and frankly unappealing, the reappropriation of his abstracted likeness by Anonymous shows an interesting if certainly unconscious reinterpretation of the role of the mercenary.

But the new mercenary—who is supposedly free from everything—is no longer a subject, but an object: a mask. It is a commercial object, licensed by a big corporation and pirated accordingly. The mask first appeared in *V for Vendetta*, a film about a masked rebel named V who fights a fascist British government of the future. This explains why the mask is licensed by Time Warner, which released *V for Vendetta*. So anticorporate demonstraters who buy the official version of the mask help enrich the kind of corporation they protest against. But this also triggers counteractions:

> [One] London protester said his brethren are trying to counter Warner Bros.' control of the imagery. He claims that Anonymous UK has imported 1,000 copies from China, and the distribution goes "straight into the pockets of the Anonymous beer fund rather than to Warner Brothers. Much better."[7]

This overdetermined object represents the freedom not to be represented. A disputed object of copyright provides a generic identity for people who feel they need not only anonymity to be represented, but can only be represented by objects and commodities, because, whether free lances or even mercenaries, they themselves are free-floating commodities.

But look at other uses of masks or artificial personas to see how the trope of the mercenary can be taken even further. The Russian punk bank Pussy Riot used neon-colored balaclavas to conceal their faces during highly publicized appearances on Red Square in Moscow, where they told president Putin in no uncertain terms to go packing. Apart from its use value in (at least temporarily) concealing faces, the balaclava also references one of the most famous icons of good-humored militancy of recent decades: the pipe-puffing subcomandante Marcos, unofficial spokesperson for the EZLN, also know as the Zapatista movement.

And this also shows us how to flip the figure of the mercenary into the figure of the guerrilla. Indeed, historically both are intimately linked. During the second half of the twentieth century, mercenaries were unleashed on insurgent groups throughout the world, particularly in postcolonial conflicts in Africa. But paramilitary "advisors" were also deployed against guerrilla movements in Latin America during the dirty proxy wars to maintain US hegemony in the region. In some sense guerrillas and mercenaries share similar spaces, except for the fact that guerrillas usually do not get paid for their efforts. Of course it is not possible to characterize all guerrilla movements along these lines—they are much too diverse. While in many cases their structure is similar to that of mercenaries and paramilitary groups deployed against them, in other cases they reorganize this

paradigm and reverse it by taking up negative freedom and trying to break free from dependency; from occupation in all its ambiguous meanings.

As figures of contemporary economic reality, mercenaries and free lancers are free to break free from their employers and reorganize as guerrillas—or to put it more modestly, as the gang of ronin portrayed in Kurosawa's masterpiece *Seven Samurai* (1954). Seven free lancers team up to protect a village from bandits. In situations of complete negative freedom, even this is possible.

The Mask

And now we can come back to George Michael. In the video for "Freedom '90," all the elements mentioned above are vividly expressed. With its unabashed and over-the-top veneration of heteronormative celebrities, the video looks as silly now as it did when it was first released.

George Michael never appears in the video. Instead, he is represented by supercommodities and supermodels, who lip-synch his song as if they were human mics. All the insignia of his stage persona—the leather jacket, the jukebox, and the guitar—are destroyed in explosions, as if they were the British Parliament blown apart. The set looks like a foreclosed house in which even the furniture has been pawned and nothing remains but a sound system. There is nothing left. No subject, no possession, no identity, no brand, with voice and face separated from each other. Only masks, anonymity, alienation, commodification, and freedom from almost everything remain. Freedom looks like the road to heaven—but it feels like the road to hell, and it creates the necessity to change, to refuse to be this subject who is always already framed, named, and surveilled.

So here is the final good news. Only when you accept that there is no way back into the David Hasselhoff paradigm of freedom, with its glorification of self-entrepreneurship and delusions of opportunity, will the new freedom open up to you. It may be terrifying like a new dawn over a terrain of hardship and catastrophe—but it doesn't exclude solidarity. It says clearly:

Freedom: I won't let you down.
Freedom: I will not give you up. You got to give what you take.

In our dystopia of negative freedom—in our atomized nightmares—nobody belongs to anybody (except banks). We don't even belong to ourselves. Not even in this situation will I give you up. Will I let you down. Have some faith in the sound. It's the only good thing we got.

Just like Kurosawa's free lancers and mercenaries, who form bonds of mutual support in situations of Hobbesian warfare, feudalism, and warlordism, there is something we are free to do, when we are free of everything.

The new freedom: you've got to give for what you take.

Hito Steyerl

Freedom from Everything: Freelancers and Mercenaries

1
George Michael, "Freedom '90":

I won't let you down
I will not give you up
Gotta have some faith in the sound
It's the one good thing that I've got
I won't let you down
So please don't give me up
Because I would really, really love to
stick around, oh yeah

Heaven knows I was just a young boy
Didn't know what I wanted to be
I was every little hungry schoolgirl's
pride and joy
And I guess it was enough for me
To win the race? A prettier face!
Brand new clothes and a big fat place
On your rock and roll TV
But today the way I play the game is not
the same
No way
Think I'm gonna get myself some happy

I think there's something you should
know
I think it's time I told you so
There's something deep inside of me
There's someone else I've got to be
Take back your picture in a frame
Take back your singing in the rain
I just hope you understand
Sometimes the clothes do not make
the man

All we have to do now
Is take these lies and make them true
somehow
All we have to see
Is that I don't belong to you
And you don't belong to me, yeah yeah
Freedom, freedom, freedom
You've gotta give for what you take
Freedom, freedom, freedom
You've gotta give for what you take

Heaven knows we sure had some fun
boy
What a kick just a buddy and me
We had every big-shot good time band
on the run boy
We were living in a fantasy

We won the race, got out of the place
I went back home got a brand new face
For the boys on MTV
But today the way I play the game has
got to change, oh yeah

Now I'm gonna get myself happy

I think there's something you should
know
I think it's time I stopped the show
There's something deep inside of me
There's someone I forgot to be
Take back your picture in a frame
Take back your singing in the rain
I just hope you understand
Sometimes the clothes do not make
the man

Freedom, freedom, freedom
You've gotta give for what you take
Freedom, freedom, freedom
You've gotta give for what you take

Well it looks like the road to heaven
But it feels like the road to hell
When I knew which side my bread was
buttered
I took the knife as well
Posing for another picture
Everybody's got to sell
But when you shake your ass, they
notice fast
And some mistakes were built to last

That's what you get, that's what you get
That's what you get, I say that's what
you get
I say that's what you get for changing
your mind

That's what you get, that's what you get
And after all this time
I just hope you understand
Sometimes the clothes do not make
the man

All we have to do now, is take these lies
And make them true somehow
All we have to see is that I don't belong
to you
And you don't belong to me, yeah, yeah

Freedom, freedom, freedom
You've gotta give for what you take
Freedom, freedom, freedom
You've gotta give for what you take,
yeah

May not be what you want from me
Just the way it's got to be
Lose the face now
I've got to live.

2
On the distinction between
positive and negative freedom,
see Isaiah Berlin's "Two Concepts of
Liberty" (1958). There is also a tradition
of debate around negative freedom
as defined by Charles Taylor, whose
concept is different than the one in
this essay.

3
See http://www.thefreedictionary.
com, s.v. "freelance."

4
See *Wikipedia*, s.v. "freelancer."

5
"In as abstract sense, the multifac-
eted political geography of the feudal
order resembles today's emerging over-
lapping jurisdictions of national states,
supranational institutions, and novel
private global regimes. This is, indeed,
one of the prevalent interpretations
in globalization scholarship." Saskia
Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights:
From Medieval to Global Assemblages*
(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University
Press, 2006), 27

6
Thomas Elsaesser, "Walter
Benjamin, Global Cities, and 'Living
with Asymmetries,'" unpublished paper
presented at the 3rd Athens Biennale,
December 2011.

7
Tamara Lush and Verena Dobnik,
"'Vendetta' mask becomes symbol of
Occupy protests," November 4, 2011,
Associated Press.

Missing People: Entanglement, Superposition, and Exhumation as Sites of Indeterminacy

1.

In 1935, Erwin Schrödinger devised an insidious thought experiment. He imagined a box with a cat inside, which could be killed at any moment by a deadly mixture of radiation and poison. Or it might not be killed at all. Both outcomes were equally probable.

But the consequence of thinking through this situation was much more shocking than the initial setup. According to quantum theory, there wasn't just one cat inside the box, dead or alive. There were actually two cats: one dead, one alive—both locked into a state of so-called superposition, that is, copresent and materially entangled with one another. This peculiar state lasted as long as the box remained closed.

Macrophysical reality is defined by either/or situations. Someone is either dead or alive. But Schrödinger's thought experiment boldly replaced mutual exclusivity with an impossible coexistence—a so-called state of indeterminacy.

But that's not all. The experiment becomes even more disorienting when the box is opened and the entanglement (*Verschränkung*) of the dead and the live cat abruptly ends. At this point, either a dead or a live cat decisively emerges, not because the cat then actually dies or comes to life, but *because we look at it*. The act of observation breaks the state of indeterminacy. In quantum physics, observation is an active procedure. By taking measure and identifying, it interferes and engages with its object. By looking at the cat, we fix it in one of two possible but mutually exclusive states. We end its existence as an indeterminate interlocking waveform and freeze it as an individual chunk of matter.

To acknowledge the role of the observer in actively shaping reality is one of the main achieve-

ments of quantum theory. It's not radiation or poison gas that ultimately decides the fate of the cat, but the fact that it is identified, seen, described, and assessed. Being subject to observation provokes the second death of the cat: the one that ends its state of limbo.

2.

According to common logic, a missing person is either dead or alive. But is she really? Doesn't this only apply at the moment when we find out what happened to her? When she turns up or when her remains are identified?

But what, then, is the state of missing itself? Does it take place inside Schrödinger's box, so to speak? Is it being both dead and alive? How can we understand its conflicting desires: to want and to dread the truth at the same time? The urge to both move on and keep hope alive? Perhaps the state of missing speaks of a paradoxical superposition that cannot be understood with the conceptual tools of Euclidian physics, human biology, or Aristotelian logic. Perhaps it reaches out to an impossible coexistence of life and death. Both are materially interlaced in limbo—as long as no observer opens the "box" of indeterminacy. Which is, in many cases, a grave.

3.

In 2010, Spanish prosecutor Baltasar Garzón brushed up against the state of superposition.[1] Two years prior, he had brought charges against leading officials of the Franco regime, including General Franco himself, for crimes against humanity. He opened investigations into the disappearance and suspected murder of around 113,000 people— mostly Republicans from the Civil War period—as

well as the forceful appropriation of 30,000 children. Many of the disappeared ended up in mass graves around the country, which at that time were being patiently dug up by relatives of the disappeared and volunteers. None of the thousands of kidnappings, disappearances, summary executions, and killings by starvation or exhaustion had ever been pros-ecuted legally in Spain. And total impunity had been made legal by a so-called amnesty law in 1977.

Garzón's case was the first to challenge this situation. Predictably, it ran into immediate con-troversy. One of the many points on which he was challenged was that many of the accused, including Franco himself, were dead. And, according to the law, if they were dead then Garzón had no jurisdic-tion. He found himself in a legal deadlock: he had to assert that the dead were still alive in order to investigate whether they were dead in the first place and guilty in the second.

This is where superposition comes into play, since a potential legal argument in this case can be derived from Schrödinger's paradigm. Garzón could have argued that one had to get to the point of being able to open Schrödinger's box. Only then could one determine whether the defendants were dead or alive, and until this happened, a state of superposi-tion between life and death had to be assumed. Franco, for instance, had to be proven dead. If not, it had to be assumed that he was in a state of super-position, until proper observation and measurement could take place. As long as Franco was at least potentially alive, investigations into the crimes of the Franco period could continue.

But the state of superposition not only affec-ted the accused perpetrators. It also determined the legal status of many of the disappeared. As law-yer Carlos Slepoy argued, any disappeared person,

regardless of the date of disappearance, had to be assumed to be alive. As long as he or she was in a state of having been kidnapped and not yet found, the crime was ongoing. It could not fall under any statute of limitations. As long the victims weren't proven dead—as long as they were still missing— they were in a state of superposition and indeterminacy. While the crime was lingering, Schrödinger's box remained closed and both a potentially dead missing person and a potentially living missing person were entangled in a paradoxical legal quantum state. This state of indeterminacy enabled the cases to remain open and investigations to proceed.
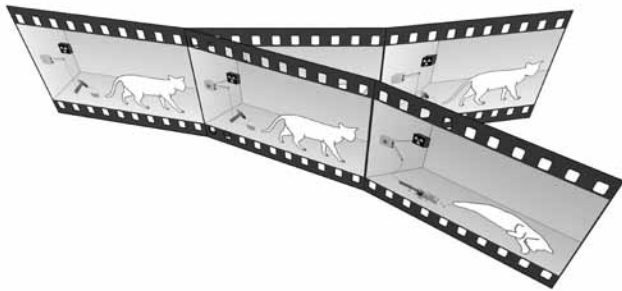
The metaphor of film can illustrate the two possible states of Schrödinger's cat in time.

4.
Schrödinger's mental exercise in indeterminacy echoes another famous thought image: the idea of the two bodies of the king. In 1957, historian Ernst Kantorowicz described how the bodies of medieval kings were split into a natural body and a body politic.[2] While the natural body was mortal, the body politic, which represented the mystical dignity and justice of the realm, was immortal. While the king was in power, both states were superimposed on his body. He incorporated the nation in a body politic that was immortal and immaterial.

In addition, the king also possessed a natural, material body that was subject to passion, foolishness, infancy, and death. The idea of the twin body of the king became one of the defining factors in developing the concept of sovereignty—ruling power incorporated within a body, in which death and eternal life are superposed.

Neither Schrödinger nor his numerous interpreters took into account the fact that in the twentieth century, his thought experiment was uncannily echoed by new experimental forms of asserting sovereignty. The result was a state that no quantum physicist could foresee.

In the twentieth century—the age of genocide, racism, and terror—the superposition of life and death became a standard feature of various forms of government.[3] In these experiments, Schrödinger's "box" became a site of lethal detention or mass extinction by radiation and poison gas—as in Schrödinger's original setup—or by explosives, which Albert Einstein eagerly added to the quantum list of WMDs.[4]

Schrödinger even went as far as to explicitly mention the name of the poison gas that threatened the cat's life in 1935: hydrocyanic acid. In 1939,

hydrocyanic acid was used in a Nazi gas chamber in Poznan to kill disabled people. Later on, it was produced industrially as Zyklon B by a company called Degesch and employed in the gas chambers of all the major extermination camps of the National Socialist empire.

5.

In 2011, I was in the Spanish town of Palencia, where a mass grave from the Civil War was being exhumed on the site of a children's playground. Volunteers rushed to recover as many remains as possible from the roughly 250 people suspected to be buried there, who were summarily shot by Francoist militias. Funding was going to be cut off within days, so every volunteer was given equipment to participate in the excavation. I was assigned a grave in which a baby's coffin sat on top of the bones of a person, who was most likely executed. The arm bone of this person revealed perimortem trauma— a wound sustained around the time of death and an indicator of a violent demise.

But why would a baby be buried on top of a murdered Republican? The archaeologist explained that babies who died unbaptized were (or even still are) believed to go to limbo. The limbo of infants has been a subject of discussion in the Roman Catholic Church since the days of Augustine. The question is whether unbaptized infants can be granted salvation, since their original sin isn't purged by baptism. On the one hand, unbaptized people are supposed to go to hell after they die. On the other, deceased babies haven't had time to commit many sins, so it was thought that their punishment should be rather mild. The solution was the limbo of infants.

The limbo of infants—an intermediary state between salvation and damnation, bliss and

torture—is thus not just a place of eternal boredom and hopelessness. In limbo the children might even ascend to a state of ultimate happiness by establishing a different vision of things—being unresolved things themselves, dumped onto the bodies of people shot as terrorists and insurgents. Things superposed onto other things in a cemetery superposed on a children's playground, as the first Spanish republic shines uncomfortably through the second.

The baby was gone. The crumbling coffin was empty. Its remains had possibly been taken along when the bones of the richer people in the cemetery were moved to a new location. Only a tiny finger bone remained, which mixed with the remains of the executed supporter of the Republic.

6.

In 2011, a plaster cast of a skull said to belong to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was put on display in Hannover. But many doubt whether the skull really belonged to the philosopher.

In 1714, Leibniz developed the idea of the monad. According to Leibniz, the world is made of monads, each of which encloses the whole structure of the universe. He calls them "perpetual living mirror(s) of the universe":

All is a plenum (and thus all matter is connected together) and in the plenum every motion has an effect upon distant bodies in proportion to their distance, so that each body not only is affected by those which are in contact with it and in some way feels the effect of everything that happens to them, but also is affected by bodies adjoining itself. This inter-communication of things extends to any distance, however great.

And consequently every body feels the effect of all that takes place in the universe, so that he who sees all might read in each what is happening everywhere, and even what has happened or shall happen, observing in the present that which is far off as well in time as in place.[5]

But monads also have different degrees of resolution. Some are more clear in storing information, some less. Like monads, bones, skulls, and other objects of evidence condense not only their own history, but—in an opaque and unresolved form—everything else as well. They are like hard disks that fossilize not only their own history, but the history of their relations to the world. According to Leibniz, only God is able to read all monads. They are transparent to his gaze alone and remain vague and blurry to ours. As the only being able to read them, God is in all things.

But humans are also able to decipher some layers of monads. The strata of crystallized time in each monad capture a specific relation to the universe and conserve it, as in a long exposure photograph. In this way, we can understand a bone as a monad—or more simply, as an image. But equally, these objects condense the forms of observation that produce them as durable and individual objects, and snap them back into one distinct state of materiality. This also applies to the plaster cast of Leibniz's skull, as well as to the story of its retrieval. Already at the time of its "recovery," many people doubted whether the skull triumphantly presented as Leibniz's was really his.

These doubts were exacerbated by the fact that the church documents relating to Leibniz's burial had been lost. Eventually, on Friday 4 July 1902,

the remains under the Leibnitian marker were exhumed. On Wednesday 9 July 1902, they were examined by one Professor Dr. W. Krause, by order of one Herr Waldeyer. Whatever casket had occupied the grave was by then entirely rotted away and thus left not a clue as to its original occupant. Nevertheless, Krause concluded that the skeletal remains were indeed those of Leibniz.[6]

While the origin of the skull is contested, the provenance of the cast seems better established:

According to records, the cast came from the estate of a former NS civil servant. His ninety-year-old widow offered it for sale fifteen to twenty years ago, along with 3,000 books about racial science. Indeed, there is a report from the Institute for Germanic Ethnology and Race Science of the [Third Reich] district capital of Hannover, which indicates that Leibniz's grave was opened between the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944.[7]

Leibniz, the coinventor of mathematical probability, might have computed the likelihood that the skull belonged to him. But could he have imagined that the skull was both his and not his?

7.
Probability became the crucial difference between the experiments in political sovereignty and Schrödinger's experiment. In Schrödinger's experiment, the probability that a live cat would emerge from the box was 50/50. But whenever the metaphorical box of political laboratories was opened, this probability would drop to extreme lows. And whatever emerged wouldn't be a cat, but

humans—more precisely, corpses upon corpses. The box became a site for the superposition of death upon death, and a factory for the breathtaking multiplication of victims. The twentieth century radically advanced the development of all kinds of weapons of mass destruction. It took the box and turned it inside out so it would spill all over the planet. Why stop at two dead creatures? Why not millions and millions?

Additionally, the twentieth century also perfected observation as a method of killing. Measurement and identification became tools of murder. Phrenology. Statistics. Medical experimentation. Economies of death. In his lectures about biopolitics, Michel Foucault described the stochastic calculus that determined life or death.[8] Counting and observing were radicalized to make sure that anything that entered the box died when the box was reopened.

This development also signified the death of the political idea of the two bodies of the king, one dead, one immortal. Now one had to imagine two dead bodies: not only the natural body, but also the body politic. Not only were natural bodies killed in and outside the insidious boxes of sovereignty. The body politic, which was supposed to be immortal, died as well. The idea of a state, nation, or race incorporated within a single body was radically denied by thousands of mass graves—the *fosses communes*, which were deemed necessary to violently manufacture a "perfect" and homogenous body politic.

The mass graves thus formed a negative image of the desired incorporation—and its only tangible reality. Any idea of a natural "organic body" of the nation (race, state) had to be painfully realized by extermination and genocide. The *fosse commune* was the body politic of fascism and other forms of dictatorship. It made perfectly clear that the "community"

Vasily Vereshchagin, *The Apotheosis of War*, 1871, oil on canvas, 127 × 197 cm.

that produced it was a "fausse commune," a complete and disastrous fake vying for legitimacy.

Schrödinger's innocent if eccentric quantum state of indeterminacy was echoed in political laboratories of sovereignty. Here, gaping political limbos were created in which law and exception blurred in deadly superposition, transforming certain death into a matter of probability. Schrödinger's thought experiment came to presence the mass graves that violently ended many possible superpositions and entanglements of humans and things. And the dream of parallel worlds in which incompossible realities coexisted was transformed into the proliferation of possible deaths and the impossibility of any world other than the one that miserably dragged on existing.

8.

As quantum theory predicts, the state of entanglement is transitional. It can even be exceptionally short—a window of opportunity made to be missed. And as mass graves were successively excavated, states of indeterminacy ended too, forcing decisions between the state of life and the state of death, which—the twentieth century being what it was—overwhelmingly fell on the side of death. Missing persons were identified and their remains were reburied or returned to relatives. And as the bones were retransformed into persons and reintroduced into language and history, the spell of the law over them ceased.

But many of the missing remain nameless. The remains of some of them are stored in the anthropology department at the Autonomous University of Madrid for lack of funding to proceed with DNA testing. This lack of funding is of course connected to the precarious political situation in

which this investigation finds itself in. The unidentified skulls and bones speak about anything but their names and identities. They show perimortem trauma and indicators of stature, gender, age, and nutrition, but this doesn't necessarily lead to identification.[9] More than anything, the unidentified remain generic, faceless, all mixed up with combs, bullets, watches, other people, animals, or the soles of shoes. Their indeterminacy is part of their silence, and their silence determines their indeterminacy. They maintain an obstinate opaque silence in the face of sympathetic scientists and waiting relatives. As if they chose not to answer to their last final interrogators either. Shoot me all over again, they seem to say. I'm not telling. I will not give it away. But what is the thing they refuse to betray?

Perhaps the bones refuse to reenter the world of relatives, family, and property, the world of name and measure, in which skulls are forced to speak of race and rank instead of love and decomposition. Why should they want to reenter an order that sustained and strengthened itself over their dead bodies? That had to execute them in the first place in order to keep the realm of belonging, faith, and knowledge intact? Why should they want to return from the world of naked matter in which they freely mix with the dust of the universe?

This is what the unidentified missing teach us: even as their bones are carefully handled by forensic anthropologists, they staunchly remain things, refusing to be identifiable in the register of human beings. They insist on being things that decline to be named and known—things that claim the state of potentially being both dead and alive. They thus transgress the realms of civil identity, property, the order of knowledge, and human rights alike.

9.

In 2011, Hüsnü Yıldız went on a hunger strike to force the exhumation of his brother, who disappeared in 1997 while fighting as a leftist guerrilla. His grave had been located in early 2011 among hundreds of other nondescript mass graves in the Kurdish region of Turkey. Thousands of bodies, most killed during the dirty war of the 1990s, are believed to have been dumped into shallow graves, waste dumps, and other places of disposal.[10] As more mass graves are discovered every day, Turkish authorities have for the most part refused to open investigations or even recover the remains of the dead. Sixty-four days into Yıldız's hunger strike, the grave where his brother was suspected to be buried was finally excavated. Fifteen sets of remains were recovered, but as authorities have not initiated DNA tests, Yıldız still doesn't know whether the remains of his brother are among them. In the meantime, Yıldız has declared that not only the fifteen people recovered, but also the thousands more missing are his brothers and sisters. The indeterminacy of remains universalizes family relations. They rip the order of family and belonging wide open.

10.

00:15:08:05
HS – I see one box which does not contain remains.
LR – Yes this is …
HS – Can you show it to us?
LR – This is a complex case because this came from the cemetery of Toledo, a city near Madrid, and then the relatives with an undertaker of the cemetery, they went to dig in the common grave where they thought their relatives were. So they

did that with a shovel and put all the bones in big plastic bags …
So we have a mess of bones and of these shoes, we don't know if they belong to the people killed or to other, like, normal mortality, and they also went to the common grave … But this, we found, it's very common to find, to find personal objects in the excavations.
HS – What sort of objects? Shoes?
LR – This is the heel of a shoe and that is for the shirts, the buttons, some other buttons and some coins … well, metal objects and … But we have found, this is the … for the belt? Yes, the buckle. So for example all this came from one, from skeleton sixty.[11]

11.

But in the twentieth century and beyond, we have almost always waited in vain to access the other quantum state involved in superposition, the state in which the missing would still be alive—not potentially, but actually. Paradoxically alive, as things in a state of entanglement. In which we could hear their voices, touch their breathing skin. In which they would be living things outside the registers of identity, pure language, and the utter overwhelming of senses; things superposing on ourselves as things.

They would form a state beyond any statehood—one in which they wouldn't be entangled with their own dead bodies, but with our living ones. And we would no longer be separate entities but things locked in indeterminate interaction—material extimacy, or matter in embrace.

They would drag us to this place, where we would become entangled matter, outside of any categories of identification and possession. We would be waveforms leaving behind individuality and
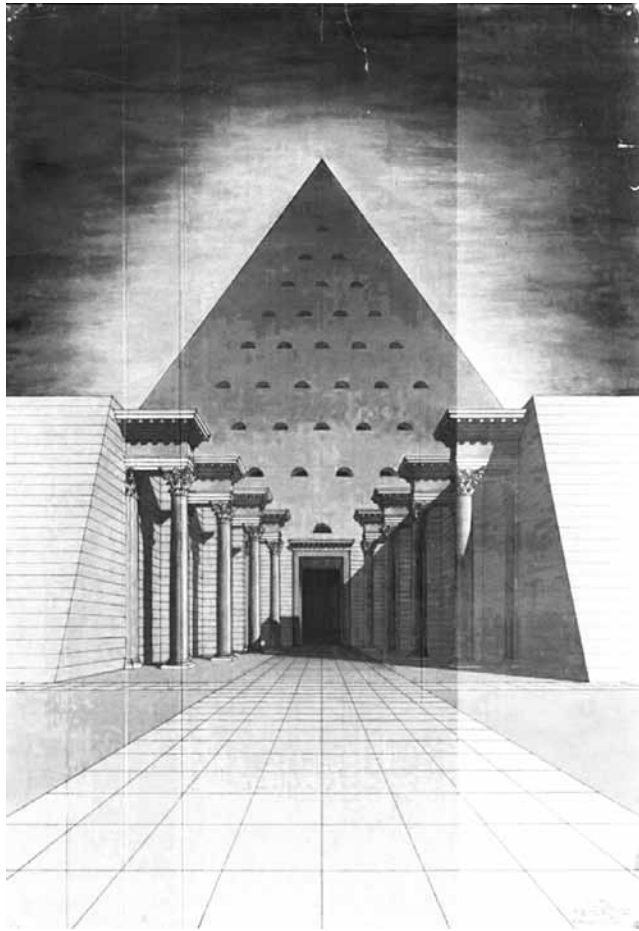
Luís Moya Blanco, *Architectonic Dream*, 1938. Proposal for a post-Spanish Civil War fascist monument.

subjectivity to become locked in the paradoxical objectivity of quantum realities.

12.

The mass grave that is supposed to contain the remains of my friend Andrea Wolf is located in the mountains south of Van, Turkey. The gravesite is littered with rags, debris, ammunition cases, and many fragments of human bone. A charred photo roll I found on site may be the only witness to what happened during the battle that took place there in late 1998.

Even though several witnesses have come forward stating that Andrea and some of her fellow fighters in the PKK were extrajudicially executed after having been taken prisoner, there have been no attempts to investigate this suspected war crime, nor to identify the roughly forty people supposedly buried in the mass grave. No official investigation ever took place. No experts went on site.

No authorized observer can break super-position, not because there were no observers, but because they have not been authorized. It is an incompossible place, incompatible with the existing rules of political realism, constructed by the suspension of the rule of law and aerial supremacy, beyond the realm of the speakable, the visible, the possible. On this site, even blatant evidence is far from being evident.[12] Its invisibility is politically constructed and maintained by epistemic violence. This is the main reason why the pictures on the charred photo roll remain unavailable for now, pushed into a zone of zero probability.[13] Technical means, expert knowledge, and political motivation to investigate and analyze them are unavailable.

But these illegible images can also be seen from a different perspective: as poor images, things

wrecked by violence and history. A poor image is an image that remains unresolved—puzzling and inconclusive because of neglect or political denial, because of a lack of technology or funding, or because of hasty and incomplete recordings captured under risky circumstances.[14] It cannot give a comprehensive account of the situation it is supposed to represent. But if whatever it tries to show is obscured, the conditions of its own visibility are plainly visible: it is a subaltern and indeterminate object, excluded from legitimate discourse, from becoming fact, subject to disavowal, indifference, and repression.

Poor images take on another dimension when they expand into fractional space.[15] They may be blurred 3-D scans, cakes of dirt compressing buttons, bones and bullets, burnt photo rolls, dispersed ashes, or lost and unintelligible pieces of evidence.[16] Just as commercial, political, and military interests define the resolution of satellite images of the earth's surface, so do these interests define the resolution of the objects buried beneath it. These indeterminate objects are low-resolution monads, in many cases literally materially compressed objects, fossilized diagrams of political and physical violence—poor images of the conditions that brought them into being. Even if they cannot show the extrajudicial executions, political murders, or shootings at demonstrations that they might have recorded, they bear the traces of their own marginalization. Their poverty is not a lack, but an additional layer of information, which is not about content but form. This form shows how the image is treated, how it is seen, passed on, or ignored, censored, and obliterated.

Even if its content is destroyed, the charred 35 mm roll shows what happened to itself as it went up in flames, doused with unknown chemicals, incinerated along with the photographers' dead bodies. It shows the violence of maintaining this particular state of indeterminacy.

Through their material composition, these poor images reach far beyond the sphere of representation and into a world where the order of things and humans, of life, death, and identity, is suspended, and "all is a plenum (and thus all matter is connected together) […] And consequently every body feels the effect of all that takes place in the universe, so that he who sees all might read in each what is happening everywhere, and even what has happened or shall happen, observing in the present that which is far off as well in time as in place."[17]

But who is the ominous reader in Leibniz's text? Is he the ultimate observer endowed with unlimited authority? Whoever he is, he is not up to the task.[18] We cannot leave the task of observation to some obscure monotheist idol, who supposedly reads and knows everything. And we do not need to. The zone of zero probability, the space in which image/objects are blurred, pixelated, and unavailable, is not a metaphysical condition. It is in many cases man-made, and maintained by epistemic and military violence, by the fog of war, by political twilight, by class privilege, nationalism, media monopolies, and persistent indifference. Its resolution is managed by legal, political, and technological paradigms. A bone that would be abject debris in some parts of the world, a poor image mixed with trash and dumped into landfills alongside broken TVs, could be overexposed in others, scanned in HD or 3-D, highly resolved, investigated, tested, and interpreted until its mysteries are solved.[19] The same bone can be seen in two different resolutions: once as an anonymous poor image, once as a crystal-clear piece of official evidence.

Positivism is thus another name for epistemic privilege, assumed by official observers who control hi-tech tools of measurement and are authorized to establish facts. But mistaking this privilege for a solution, when it is just proof of superior epistemic resolution, is sloppy and convenient thinking. It not only denies the existence of expanding pockets of zero probability and gaping limbos in the rule of law. It also shields itself from the unsettling thought that everything could be different and that probability cannot reign in contingency.

If Leibniz's omnivisionary male observer is impotent, then justice is blind to resolution. She carefully runs her fingers over the edges, gaps, and rifts of rugged and glossy images, of low-resolution monads left in fractional space, registering their tectonic profile, feeling their bruises, fully confident that the impossible can and indeed will happen.

1
Thank you to Jenny Gil Schmitz, Emilio Silva Barrera, Carlos Slepoy, Luis Ríos, Francisco Etxeberria, José Luis Posadas, Marcelo Esposito for all information relating to this issue and for their generous hospitality. This first part of the text owes very much to discussions with Eyal Weizman.

2
See Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

3
See Giorgio Agamben's *The State of Exception* and *Homo Sacer*. See also Foucault on biopower.

4
In a letter written in the 1950s.

5
G. W. Leibniz, *Monadology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1898), 251.

6
"Leibniz's Skull?," http://www.gwleibniz.com/leibniz_skull/leibniz_skull.html.

7
Michael Grau, "Universalgenie Leibniz im Visier der Nazis," *Berliner Morgenpost*, September 12, 2011 (my translation).

8
Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lecture at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008).

9
Luis Ríos, José Ignacio Casado Ovejero, and Jorge Puente Prieto, "Identification process in mass graves from the Spanish Civil War," *Forensic Science International* 199, no. 1 (June 2010).

10
See "Discovery of Kurdish Mass Graves Leads Turkey to Face Past," *Voice of America*, February 8, 2011, http://www.voanews.com/content/turkey-facing-past-with-discovery-of-kurdish-mass-graves-115640409/134797.html; and Howard Eissenstat, "Mass-graves and State Silence in Turkey," *Human Rights Now*, March 15, 2011.

11
Interview with Luis Ríos, September 12, 2011.

12
Thank you to Tina Leisch, Ali Can, Necati Sönmez, Şiyar, and many others whose names cannot be mentioned.

13
In the meantime, this text has been redeveloped into part of a joint performance with Rabih Mroué called "Probable Title: Zero Probability." I am deeply indebted to Rabih's contributions, especially in his brilliant text "The Pixelated Revolution," which gives other examples of low-resolution evidence.

14
I discussed some examples of documentary pictures, mainly from Georges Didi-Huberman's essay "Images malgré tout," in Hito Steyerl, "Documentarism as Politics of Truth," *Republic Art* (May 2003), http://republicart.net/disc/representations/steyerl03_en.htm.

15
See Jalal Toufic, "The Subtle Dancer," 24: "A space that is neither two-dimensional nor three-dimensional, but between the two." Available at http://d13.documenta.de/research/assets/Uploads/Toufic-The-Subtle-Dancer.pdf.

16
Ayça Söylemez, "Bones of the Disappeared Get Lost Again after Excavation," *Bianet*, March 2, 2011, http://bianet.org/english/english/128282-bones-of-the-disappeared-get-lost-again-after-excavation.

17
Leibniz, *Monadology*, 251.

18
For him, whatever is the case is necessarily the best of all possible worlds anyway.

19
This applies particularly to the bones of murdered Kurdish individuals, which get extremely different treatment according to whether they were killed during the Anfal operations ordered by Saddam Hussein in Iraq, or by Turkish armed forces and militias during the civil war of the 1990s. The Anfal mass murders were investigated by world-class military specialists and interdisciplinary teams, whereas the Turkish cases were barely investigated at all.

The Spam of the Earth:
Withdrawal from Representation

Dense clusters of radio waves leave our planet every second. Our letters and snapshots, intimate and official communications, TV broadcasts and text messages drift away from earth in rings, a tectonic architecture of the desires and fears of our times.[1] In a few hundred thousand years, extraterrestrial forms of intelligence may incredulously sift through our wireless communications. But imagine the perplexity of those creatures when they actually look at the material. Because a huge percentage of the pictures inadvertently sent off into deep space is actually spam. Any archaeologist, forensic, or historian—in this world or another—will look at it as our legacy and our likeness, a true portrait of our times and ourselves. Imagine a human reconstruction somehow made from this digital rubble. Chances are, it would look like image spam.

Image spam is one of the many dark matters of the digital world; spam tries to avoid detection by filters by presenting its message as an image file. An inordinate amount of these images floats around the globe, desperately vying for human attention.[2] They advertise pharmaceuticals, replica items, body enhancements, penny stocks, and degrees. According to the pictures dispersed via image spam, humanity consists of scantily dressed degree-holders with jolly smiles enhanced by orthodontic braces.

Image spam is our message to the future. Instead of a modernist space capsule showing a woman and man on the outside—a family of "man"— our contemporary dispatch to the universe is image spam showing enhanced advertisement mannequins.[3] And this is how the universe will see us; it is perhaps even how it sees us now.

In terms of sheer quantity, image spam outnumbers the human population by far. It's formed

Medical spam image retrieved from corporation Symantec Intelligence's blog.

a silent majority, indeed. But of what? Who are the people portrayed in this type of accelerated advertisement? And what could their images tell potential extraterrestrial recipients about contemporary humanity?

From the perspective of image spam, people are improvable, or, as Hegel put it, perfectible. They are imagined to be potentially "flawless," which in this context means horny, super skinny, armed with recession-proof college degrees, and always on time for their service jobs, courtesy of their replica watches. This is the contemporary family of men and women: a bunch of people on knockoff antidepressants, fitted with enhanced body parts. They are the dream team of hyper-capitalism.

But is this how we really look? Well, no. Image spam might tell us a lot about "ideal" humans, but not by showing actual humans—quite the contrary. The models in image spam are photochopped replicas, too improved to be true. A reserve army of digitally enhanced creatures who resemble the minor demons and angels of mystic speculation, luring, pushing, and blackmailing people into the profane rapture of consumption.

Image spam is addressed to people who do not look like those in the ads: they neither are skinny nor have recession-proof degrees. They are those whose organic substance is far from perfect from a neoliberal point of view. People who might open their in-boxes every day waiting for a miracle, or just a tiny sign, a rainbow at the other end of permanent crisis and hardship. Image spam is addressed to the vast majority of humankind, but it does not show them. It does not represent those who are considered expendable and superfluous—just like spam itself; it speaks to them.

Ed Ruscha, *PRODUCTS – SPAM*, 1961/2003, gelatin silver print, 33.02 x 25.4 cm.

The image of humanity articulated in image spam thus has actually nothing to do with it. On the contrary, it is an accurate portrayal of what humanity is actually not. It is a negative image.

Mimicry and Enchantment

Why is this? There is an obvious reason, which is too well known to elaborate on here: images trigger mimetic desires and make people want to become like the products represented in them. In this view, hegemony infiltrates everyday culture and spreads its values by way of mundane representation.[4] Image spam is thus interpreted as a tool for the production of bodies, and ultimately ends up creating a culture stretched between bulimia, steroid overdose, and personal bankruptcy. This perspective—one of more traditional Cultural Studies—views image spam as an instrument of coercive persuasion as well as of insidious seduction, and leads to the oblivious pleasures of surrendering to both.[5]

But what if image spam were actually much more than a tool of ideological and affective indoctrination? What if actual people—the imperfect and nonhorny ones—were not excluded from spam advertisements because of their assumed deficiencies but had actually chosen to desert this kind of portrayal? What if image spam thus became a record of a widespread refusal, a withdrawal of people from representation?

What do I mean by this? For a certain time already I have noted that many people have started actively avoiding photographic or moving-image representations, surreptitiously taking their distance from the lenses of cameras. Whether it's camera-free zones in gated communities or elitist techno clubs, someone declining interviews, Greek

anarchists smashing cameras, or looters destroying LCD TVs, people have started to actively, and passively, refuse constantly being monitored, recorded, identified, photographed, scanned, and taped. Within a fully immersive media landscape, pictorial representation—which was seen as a prerogative and a political privilege for a long time[6]—feels more like a threat.

There are many reasons for this. The numbing presence of trash talk and game shows has led to a situation in which TV has become a medium inextricably linked to the parading and ridiculing of lower classes. Protagonists are violently made over and subjected to countless invasive ordeals, confessions, inquiries, and assessments. Morning TV is the contemporary equivalent to a torture chamber—including the guilty pleasures of torturers, spectators, and, in many cases, also the tortured themselves.

Additionally, in mainstream media people are often caught in the act of vanishing, whether it be in life-threatening situations, extreme emergency and peril, warfare and disaster, or in the constant stream of live broadcasts from zones of conflict around the world. If people aren't trapped within natural or man-made disasters, they seem to physically vanish, as anorexic beauty standards imply. People are emaciated or made to shrink or downsize. Dieting is obviously the metonymic equivalent to an economic recession, which has become a permanent reality and caused substantial material losses. This recession is coupled with an intellectual regression, which has become a dogma within all but a very few mainstream media outlets. As intelligence doesn't simply melt away via starvation, derision and rancor largely manage to keep it away from the grounds of mainstream representation.[7]

Thus the zone of corporate representation is largely one of exception, which seems dangerous to enter: you may be derided, tested, stressed, or even starved or killed. Rather than representing people it exemplifies the vanishing of the people: it's gradual disappearance. And why wouldn't the people be vanishing, given the countless acts of aggression and invasion performed against them in mainstream media, but also in reality?[8] Who could actually withstand such an onslaught without the desire to escape this visual territory of threat and constant exposure?

Additionally, social media and cellphone cameras have created a zone of mutual mass surveillance, which adds to the ubiquitous urban networks of control, such as CCTV, cellphone GPS tracking and face-recognition software. On top of institutional surveillance, people are now also routinely surveilling each other by taking countless pictures and publishing them in almost real time. The social control associated with these practices of horizontal representation has become quite influential. Employers google reputations of job candidates; social media and blogs become halls of shame and malevolent gossip. The top-down cultural hegemony exercised by advertisement and corporate media is supplemented by a down-down regime of (mutual) self-control and visual self-disciplining, which is even harder to dislocate than earlier regimes of representation. This goes along with substantial shifts in modes of self-production. Hegemony is increasingly internalized, along with the pressure to conform and perform, as is the pressure to represent and be represented.

Warhol's prediction that everybody would be world-famous for fifteen minutes had become true long ago. Now many people want the contrary: to

be invisible, if only for fifteen minutes. Even fifteen seconds would be great. We entered an era of mass paparazzi, of the peak-o-sphere and exhibitionist voyeurism. The flare of photographic flashlights turns people into victims, celebrities, or both. As we register at cash tills, ATMs, and other checkpoints— as our cellphones reveal our slightest movements and our snapshots are tagged with GPS coordi- nates—we end up not exactly amused to death but represented to pieces.[9]

Walkout

This is why many people by now walk away from visual representation. Their instincts (and their intelligence) tell them that photographic or moving images are dangerous devices of capture: of time, affect, productive forces, and subjectivity. They can jail you or shame you forever; they can trap you in hardware monopolies and conversion conundrums, and, moreover, once these images are online they will never be deleted again. Ever been photographed naked? Congratulations—you're immortal. This image will survive you and your offspring, prove more resilient than even the sturdiest of mummies, and is already traveling into deep space, waiting to greet the aliens.

The old magic fear of cameras is thus rein- carnated in the world of digital natives. But in this environment, cameras do not take away your soul (digital natives replaced this with iPhones) but drain away your life. They actively make you disap- pear, shrink, and render you naked, in desperate need of orthodontic surgery. In fact, it is a misun- derstanding that cameras are tools of representa- tion; they are at present tools of disappearance.[10] The more people are represented the less is left of them in reality.

To return to the example of image spam I used before—it is a negative image of its constitu- ency, but how? It is not—as a traditional Cultural Studies approach would argue—because ideology tries to impose a forced mimicry on people, thus making them invest in their own oppression and correction in trying to reach unattainable standards of efficiency, attractiveness, and fitness. No. Let's boldly assume that image spam is a negative image of its constituency because people are *also* actively walking away from this kind of representation, leaving behind only enhanced crash-test dummies. Thus image spam becomes an involuntary record of a subtle strike, a walkout of the people from pho- tographic and moving-image representation. It is a document of an almost imperceptible exodus from a field of power relations that are too extreme to be survived without major reduction and downsizing. Rather than a document of domination, image spam is the people's monument of resistance to being represented *like this*. They are leaving the *given* frame of representation.

Political and Cultural Representation

This shatters many dogmas about the rela- tion between political and pictorial representation. For a long time my generation has been trained to think that representation was the primary site of contestation for both politics and aesthetics. The site of culture became a popular field of investiga- tion into the "soft" politics inherent in everyday environments. It was hoped that changes in the field of culture would hark back to the field of politics. A more nuanced realm of representation was seen to lead to more political and economical equality.

But gradually it became clear that both were less linked than originally anticipated, and that the

partition of goods and rights and the partition of the senses were not necessarily running parallel to each other. Ariella Azoulay's concept of photography as a form of civil contract provides a rich background to think through these ideas. If photography was a civil contract between the people who participated in it, then the current withdrawal from representation is the breaking of a social contract, having promised participation but delivered gossip, surveillance, evidence, serial narcissism, as well as occasional uprisings.[11]

While visual representation shifted into overdrive and was popularized through digital technologies, political representation of the people slipped into a deep crisis and was overshadowed by economic interest. While every possible minority was acknowledged as a potential consumer and visually represented (to a certain extent), people's participation in the political and economic realms became more uneven. The social contract of contemporary visual representation thus somewhat resembles the Ponzi schemes of the early twenty-first century, or, more precisely, participation in a game show with unpredictable consequences.

And if there ever was a link between the two, it has become very unstable in an era in which relations between signs and their referents have been further destabilized by systemic speculation and deregulation.

Both terms do not only apply to financialization and privatization; they also refer to loosened standards of public information. Professional standards of truth production in journalism have been overwhelmed by mass media production, by the cloning of rumor and its amplification on *Wikipedia* discussion boards. Speculation is not only a financial operation but also a process that takes place in

between a sign and its referent, a sudden miraculous enhancement, or spin, that snaps apart any remaining indexical relation.

Visual representation matters, indeed, but not exactly in unison with other forms of representation. There is a serious imbalance between both. On the one hand, there is a huge number of images without referents; on the other, many people without representation. To phrase it more dramatically: a growing number of unmoored and floating images corresponds to a growing number of disenfranchized, invisible, or even disappeared and missing people.[12]

Crisis of Representation

This creates a situation that is very different from how we used to look at images: as more or less accurate representations of something or someone in public. In an age of unrepresentable people and an overpopulation of images, this relation is irrevocably altered.

Image spam is an interesting symptom of the current situation because it is a representation that remains, for the most part, invisible.

Image spam circulates endlessly without ever being seen by a human eye. It is made by machines, sent by bots, and caught by spam filters, which are slowly becoming as potent as anti-immigration walls, barriers, and fences. The plastic people shown in it thus remain, to a large extent, unseen. They are treated like digital scum, and thus paradoxically end up on a similar level to that of the low-res people they appeal to. This is how it is different from any other kind of representational dummies, which inhabit the world of visibility and high-end representation. Creatures of image spam get treated as lumpen-data, avatars of the conmen who are indeed behind their creation. If Jean Genet

were still alive, he would have sung praise to the gorgeous hoodlums, tricksters, prostitutes, and fake dentists of image spam.

They are still not a representation of the people, because, in any case, the people are not a representation. They are an event, which might happen one day, or maybe later, in that sudden blink of an eye that is not covered by anything.

By now, however, people might have learned this, and accepted that any people can only be represented visually in negative form. This negative cannot be developed under any circumstance, since a magical process will ensure that all you are ever going to see in the positive is a bunch of populist substitutes and impostors, enhanced crash-test dummies trying to claim legitimacy. The image of the people as a nation, or culture, is precisely that: a compressed stereotype for ideological gain. Image spam is the true avatar of the people. A negative image with absolutely no pretense to originality? An image of what the people are not as their only possible representation?

And as people are increasingly makers of images—and not their objects or subjects— they are perhaps also increasingly aware that the people might happen by jointly making an image and not by being represented in one. Any image is a shared ground for action and passion, a zone of traffic between things and intensities. As their production has become mass production, images are now increasingly res publicae, or public things. Or even pubic things, as the languages of spam fabulously romance.[13]

This doesn't mean that who or what is being shown in images doesn't matter. This relation is far from being one-dimensional. Image spam's generic cast is not the people, and the better for it.

Rather, the subjects of image spam stand in for the people as negative substitutes and absorb the flak of the limelight on their behalf. On the one hand, they embody all the vices and virtues (or, more precisely, vices-as-virtues) of the present economic paradigm. On the other, they remain more often than not invisible, because hardly anybody actually looks at them.

Who knows what the people in image spam are up to, if nobody is actually looking? Their public appearance may be just a silly face they put on to make sure we continue to not pay attention. They might carry important messages for the aliens in the meantime, about those who we stopped caring for, those excluded from shambolic "social contracts," or any form of participation other than morning TV; that is, the spam of the earth, the stars of CCTV and aerial infrared surveillance. Or they might temporarily share in the realm of the disappeared and invisible, made up of those who, more often than not, inhabit a shameful silence and whose relatives have to lower their eyes to their killers every day.

The image-spam people are double agents. They inhabit both the realms of over- and invisibility. This may be the reason why they are continuously smiling but not saying anything. They know that their frozen poses and vanishing features are actually providing cover for the people to go off the record in the meantime. To perhaps take a break and slowly regroup. "Go off screen," they seem to whisper. "We'll substitute for you. Let them tag and scan us in the meantime. You go off the radar and do what you have to." Whatever this is, they will not give us away, ever. And for this, they deserve our love and admiration.

Rendition of iSee Manhattan, a web-based application charting the locations of CCTV surveillance cameras in urban environments. Users are able to locate routes that avoid being filmed by unregulated security monitors.

1
Douglas Phillips, "Can Desire Go On Without a Body?" in *The Spam Book: On Viruses, Porn, and Other Anomolies from the Dark Side of Digital Culture*, eds. Jussi Parikka and Tony D. Sampson (Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2009), 199–200.

2
The number of spam e-mails sent per day is at roughly 250 billion (as per 2010). The total amount of image spam has varied considerably over the years, but in 2007, image spam accounted for 35 percent of all spam messages and took up 70 percent of bandwidth bulge. "Image spam could bring the internet to a

standstill," *London Evening Standard,* October 1, 2007, see http://http//www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-23381164-image-spam-could-bring-the-internet-to-a-standstill.do.
All the pictures of image spam accompanying this text have been borrowed from the invaluable source "Image Spam," by Mathew Nisbet, see http://www.symantec.com/connect/blogs/image-spam. To avoid misunderstandings, most image spam shows text, not pictures.

3
This is similar to the golden plaques on the *Pioneer* space capsules launched in 1972 and 1973, which depicted a white woman and a white man, with the woman's genitals omitted. Because of the criticism directed at the relative nudity of the human figures, subsequent plaques showed only the human silhouettes. It will be at least 40,000 years until the capsule could potentially deliver this message.

4
This is a sloppy, fast-forward rehash of a classical Gramscian perspective from early Cultural Studies.

5
Or it may more likely be analyzed as partially self-defeating and contradictory.

6
I have discussed the failed promise of cultural representation in "The Institution of Critique," in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, eds. Alex Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). 486–87.

7
This applies unevenly around the world.

8
In the 1990s, people from former Yugoslavia would say that the former antifascist slogan of the Second World War had be turned upside down: "Death to fascism, freedom to the people" had been transformed by nationalists from all sides into, "Death to the people, freedom to fascism."

9
See Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

10
I remember my former teacher Wim Wenders elaborating on the photographing of things that will disappear. It is more likely, though, that things will disappear if (or even because) they are photographed.

11
I cannot expand on this appropriately here. It might be necessary to think through recent Facebook riots from the perspective of breaking intolerable social contracts, and not from entering or sustaining them.

12
The era of the digital revolution corresponds to that of enforced mass disappearance and murder in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Algeria, Iraq, Turkey, and parts of Guatemala, to list just a few. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which saw roughly 2.5 million war casualties between 1998 and 2008, it is agreed on by researchers that demand for raw materials for the IT industries (such as coltane) played a direct role in the country's conflict. The number of migrants who died while trying to reach Europe since 1990 is estimated to be 18,000.

13
This derives from a pirated DVD cover of the movie *In the Line of Fire* (1993), which states, in no uncertain terms, that pubic performance of the disc is strictly prohibited.

Cut! Reproduction and Recombination

A cut is a cinematic term.[1] It separates two shots. It also joins two shots. It is a device that constructs cinematic space and time and articulates different elements into a new form.

A cut is obviously also an economic term. It refers to a reduction. In the context of the current economic crisis, cuts mostly concern government spending on welfare, culture, pensions, and other social services. It can refer to any reduction in resources or allocations.

How do both of these types of cuts affect bodies? And which bodies? Do they affect the bodies of artificial or natural persons, corpses or corporations? And what can we learn from cinema and its techniques of reproduction that might help us deal with the effects of post-continuity cutting in the economic realm?

Cuts in Economic Discourse

In current economic discourse, cuts are often described using metaphors of the human body. In the language of austerity and debt, states and economies are often compared to individuals, which need to lose (or are losing) body parts. Suggested interventions into the body politic range from dieting (cutting fat) to amputations (to keep so-called contagion from spreading) to trimming down weight, tightening belts, getting lean and fit, and eliminating superfluous parts.

Interestingly enough, a tradition of cutting into the body is at the heart of the creation of the notion of the subject itself, which is strongly connected to the idea of debt. In his new book, Maurizio Lazzarato discusses Nietzsche's description of the making of the subject as a historical form.[2] In order to remember debt and guilt, people need memory, and both debt and guilt are inscribed into the body very

literally in the form of cuts. Nietzsche mentions a whole range of methods used to enforce debt, memory, and guilt: human sacrifice as well as mutilations such as castration. He brims with enthusiasm as he details a full catalog of torture, pointing out with delight that Germans are especially creative when it comes to the design of cuts into the body: quartering, cutting off pieces of flesh from the breast, cutting off strips of skin, and so on.

The clearest connection between debt and cutting the body is expressed by Roman law. The so-called Twelve Tables mention explicitly that the body of a debtor can rightfully be split among creditors, which means that the latter are entitled to cut off parts of the debtor's body. And whether they cut a little more or less shouldn't really matter, according to this view of law.

Where a party is delivered up to several persons, on account of a debt, after he has been exposed in the Forum on three market days, they shall be permitted to divide their debtor into different parts, if they desire to do so; and if anyone of them should, by the division, obtain more or less than he is entitled to, he shall not be responsible.[3]

This brings us to the question of whose body we are talking about. There are always several bodies implied in this traffic of metaphors: a literal body, which is really or metaphorically cut, as well as a metaphorical body, which represents a national economy, a country, or indeed a corporation. There is a natural body as well as a body politic involved in the equation, and the body being cut is a node of exchange, or rather an edit in between both kinds of bodies. If we follow the famous definitions by Ernst Kantorowicz, who analyzed the trope of the

body politic and its emergence in the legal sphere, the body politic is immortal and ideal, whereas the body natural is fallible, foolish, and mortal.[4] And in fact both are undergoing cuts, both literally and metaphorically.

Bodies in Postproduction

While cuts have moved center stage in economic discourse, cutting or editing is also a traditional tool of cinema. While editing is usually understood as a modification in the temporal dimension, cinema also cuts bodies in space by framing them, retaining only what's useful to the narration.[5] The body is disarticulated and rearticulated in a different form. As Jean-Louis Comolli dramatically states, the frame cuts into the body as "sharp, crisp, and clean as a razor's edge."[6]

While a long or full shot will mostly leave the bodies represented intact, medium shots or close-ups will chop off large parts of the bodies. The most extreme of these incisions is the so-called Italian shot, named after Sergio Leone's Dollar Trilogy, which focuses on vigilante guns-for-hire in an imaginary Wild West.

But the economy of editing is also crucially tied to more general economic narratives: editing was introduced into the world of cinema in 1903 with the film *The Great Train Robbery*, which deals with questions of private property, privatization, appropriation, the frontier, expansion, and other common topics of Western movies. To underscore its message, it introduced cross cutting and narration across several locations.

Other groundbreaking advances in editing equally deploy economic narratives. One of the first films to use parallel montage—D. W. Griffith's *A Corner in Wheat* (1908)—is about futures trading

on the Chicago stock exchange and the ruin of wheat farmers through speculation.[7] While it widely refrains from using close-ups or medium shots, the film dramatically shows a shot of a single hand—that of a suffocating wheat speculator—to perhaps convey the idea of the invisible hand of the market severed from any actual body.

Partes Secando

Griffiths's form of montage not only deals with advanced and extremely contemporary economic mechanisms, like robbery and speculation. It also derives from economic necessities. Parallel montage—the narration of two strands of the story in parallel—is cheaper and more efficient in terms of production because one doesn't need to shoot chronologically. Tom Gunning has shown it to be an extremely efficient method of adapting cinema to a Fordist system of production.[8] By 1909 this type of editing became universal.

At this stage, editing or postproduction becomes a crucial device to tell the story, to dismember and rearticulate individual and collective bodies, to separate and rearrange them according to economic efficiency. Even though *A Corner in Wheat* is—on the level of its narration—a romantic and essentialist call to return to subsistence farming, its own form is perfectly consistent with capitalist rationalization and pushes it ahead.[9]

But one can also reverse this logic, specifically by affirming the fragmentation of the subject—but without capitalism. The potential of recombinant bodies is emphasized in a text written by Siegfried Kracauer in 1927 called "The Mass Ornament." He analyzes a group of showgirls named the Tiller Girls. At the beginning of the century they became extremely popular because of their invention of

what was called "precision dance"—a formation dance in which female bodies, or rather body parts, as Kracauer emphasized, moved synchronously and in unison. Kracauer analyzes precision dance as a symptom of a Fordist regime of production, comparing the articulation of the Tiller Girls on stage to the composition of a conveyor belt. Of course, they first had to be disarticulated in order to be rearticulated, and this was done by cutting time and activity into fragments and assigning them to separate elements of the body.

Kracauer doesn't denounce this arrangement, though. He doesn't call for a return to a more natural body, whatever that could mean. He even thinks it's no longer possible to restore the Tiller Girls to human beings. Instead, he faces this constellation in order to see how one could, so to speak, break through to its other side, radicalize fragmentation, to reverse it as one would in a reverse shot. In fact, he even thinks that the cutting of the body—and its reediting—are not radical enough.

The industrial body of the Tiller Girls is abstract, artificial, alienated. Precisely because of this, it breaks with the traditional and, at that time, racially imbued ideologies of origin, belonging, as well as with the idea of a natural, collective body created by genetics, race, or common culture. In the artificial bodies and the artificially articulated body parts of the Tiller Girls, Kracauer saw an anticipation of another body, which would be freed from the burden of race, genealogy, and origin—and we can add, free of memory, guilt, and debt—precisely by being artificial and composite. The recombination of the cut-off parts produces a body without subject or subjection. In fact, this is what has been cut: the individual, as well as its identity and its unalienable rights to guilt and debt bondage. This body fully

affirms its artificial composition while opening itself up to inorganic flows of matter and energy.

But Kracauer's views at the time of debt crisis and economic depression were not shared. On the contrary, a hyperinflation of metaphors of pure national-social and racial bodies set in, which were realized using all possible means of violence. Bodies were cut, exploded, and violated—and their dispersed remains constitute the grounds we walk on today.

Postproduction

This is how editing is historically embedded into an economic context. It came to define an area called cinematic postproduction. And even though the name "postproduction" made it appear to be a supplement to production proper, its logic flipped back to influence and structure production itself.

With digital technologies, these processes have accelerated substantially. Traditionally, post-production meant synching, mixing, editing, color correction, and other procedures performed after shooting a movie. But in recent years, postproduc-tion has begun to take over production wholesale. In newer mainstream productions, especially in 3-D or animation, postproduction is more or less equivalent to the production of the film itself. Compositing, animation, and modeling now belong to postproduction. Fewer and fewer components actually need to be shot, because they are partially or wholly created in postproduction. Paradoxically, production increasingly starts to take place within postproduction. Production transforms into an aftereffect.[10]

A few years ago, Nicolas Bourriaud pointed to a few aspects of this shift in his essay "Post-production."[11] But now in times of crisis we have to

dramatically revise his fragmentary hints, which were mostly referring to processes of digital repro-duction within art and its repercussions for the art object. The impact of postproduction goes way beyond the world of art or media, even far beyond the world of digital technology, to become one of the main capitalist modes of production today.

The things that people used to do after work—for example, the so-called reproduction of their labor power—are now integrated into produc-tion. Reproduction concerns both so-called repro-ductive labor, which includes affective and social activities, and processes of digital and semiotic reproduction.[12] Postproduction in a very literal sense *is* production today.

This also shifts the temporality inherent in the term postproduction. The prefix "post-," which denotes an immobile state past history, is replaced by the prefix "re-," which points at repetition or response. We are not after production. Rather, we are in a state in which production is endlessly recycled, repeated, copied, and multiplied, but potentially also displaced, humbled, and renewed. Production is not only transformed but funda-mentally displaced to locations that used to form its outside: to mobile devices, scattered screens, sweatshops and catwalks, nurseries, virtual reality, offshore production lines. It is endlessly edited and recombined.

With the loss of the idea of production all goes the loss of the figure of the heroic male worker, replaced by Foxconn employees wearing Spiderman outfits to ward off the temptation to jump out the window. By kids living off the scrap metal of indus-trialism, scavenging for the bones of imperial or socialist factories. By picture people reproducing themselves via enhancements, anorexia, and digital

exhibitionism. By invisible women who keep the world going. In the age of reproduction, Vertov's famous man with the movie camera has been replaced by a woman at an editing table, baby on her lap, a twenty-four-hour shift ahead of her.

But as production is cut and dismembered, so can it be recombined and renewed within reproduction. Today's reproducers are updates of Kracauer's Tiller Girls, artificially remodeled online, slapped together from resurrected debris, spammed by offers for penny stock, flat rates, and civil warfare, sleepless with fear and yearning.

The Angel of History
We can find an example of a space of reproduction in the image of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920) inflated and replicated on a giant balloon inside an artificial entertainment world called Tropical Islands close to Berlin. This structure used to be a factory space for huge zeppelins, when it was still believed that this specific post-socialist region in the former GDR could be economically defillibrated and somehow industrially reanimated. When the enterprise went bust, a Malaysian investor transformed it into a multiexotic spa landscape, complete with replicas of rainforests, jacuzzi look-a-likes of Mayan sacrificial pits, as well as giant photoshopped infinity-horizon wallpapers. It is cut-and-paste territory, jumbled, airbrushed, dragged and dropped in 3-D—quintessential bubble architecture with a stunning number of inflatable elements.

Why does this site embody the basic tensions of the age of reproduction? It literally transformed from a space of industrial production to a space of postproduction, showing the aftereffects of production, so to speak. This space is not produced, but reproduced. There is no final cut but ever-morphing

Reproduction of Paul Klee's etching *Angelus Novus* painting at the Tropical Islands theme park near Berlin. The image found in this artificial paradise setting inadvertely evokes Walter Benjamin's citation of the same painting in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.

edits, hard cuts, and blurred transitions between different chunks of contained exoticas.

And Klee's *Angelus Novus* is no longer dragged away toward a future horizon as it surveys historical catastrophe. The lateral movement is gone, and with it a movement toward a future. Gone are horizon and linear perspective. Instead, the angel shuttles up and down like an elevator on patrol. It looks down on a paradise without sin and without history, in which the future has been replaced by the promise of temporary upward mobility. The horizon loops. An angel becomes drone; divine violence divested into killing time.

Reverse Shot

But what is the reproduced angel looking at now? What can we edit to its gaze? Who are we, its spectators, and what form will our bodies assume under the angel's gaze?

In a fantastic work from 2009, Natalie Bookchin made a pertinent suggestion. She updated Kracauer's "Mass Ornament" essay as a multichannel video installation. By recombining videos of lonely teenagers dancing in their bedrooms to the gaze of their webcams, Bookchin catapulted precision dance into the age of mediated disconnection. Instead of body parts severed by the stroke of the conveyor belt, atomized bodies relegated to domestic spheres move in unison. Just as the Tiller Girls were equally separated and recombined into mass ornaments by precision dance, so are the teenage protagonists postproduced by the combined forces of social media and enforced occupation synchronized to Lady Gaga soundtracks.

On the one hand, these are the ripped and cut bodies the economy wants to see—isolated in their homes, producing themselves as subjects beset by

mortgages and the perpetual guilt of not being fit and lean enough. But on the other hand, it is equally important that the moves are nevertheless fabulous, because energy and grace cannot be cut, ever.

As Kracauer rightly emphasized, we should not shy away from the ornament of multitude and lament some natural state that never existed. Instead, we should embrace it and firmly break through it. One example of how to do this is given by the fact that the version of the video I am describing here is not necessarily Bookchin's at all.[13] A user (who may or may not be the author) uploaded it, removed parts of the music because of YouTube copyright concerns, and replaced it with the sound of laptop keys. In fact, this is the only conceivable soundtrack for this piece. Collective postproduction thus generates not only composite bodies but composite works.

And we have a new important tool in order to do so, namely parallel screens. If a part of the body is cut, we can add a substitute for it on the next screen. We can reedit the cut-off parts of the body to create a body that doesn't exist in reality, only in editing, a body composed of limbs cut from other bodies, limbs deemed superfluous and inconvenient or excessive. We can recompose a new body with these cut-off pieces, a body that combines the bones of the dead and the folly of the natural bodies of the living. A form of life that exists in editing and by editing.

We can reedit the parts that were cut— whole countries, populations, even whole parts of the world, of films and videos that have been cut and censored because they do not conform to ideas of economic viability and efficiency. We can edit them into incoherent, artificial, and alternative political bodies.

A Kiss

But there is an alternative interpretation. Let's take a look at a differently postproduced image of cut and censored bodies. In the film *Cinema Paradiso* (1988), a man watches a film roll made from the parts that a projectionist had to censor from fiction films. The result is a reel made of kisses that were too provocative to be shown in public, as they jeopardize ideas of family, property, race, and nation sustained by sexual norms and restrictions.[14]

A reel of ousted kisses. Or is it the same kiss passed on from take to take across different protagonists? A kiss that replicates, travels, spreads uncontrollably; a kiss that creates vectors of passion and affect, of labor, and, potentially, violence?[15] A kiss is an event that is shared and consists precisely of sharing, exchanging, and happening in between bodies. It is an edit articulating affect in ever-different combinations. It creates new junctions and forms between and across bodies, a form that is ever shifting and changing. A kiss is a moving surface, a ripple in time-space. Endless reproductions of the same kiss: each one unique.

A kiss is a wager, a territory of risk, a mess. The idea of reproduction condensed into a fleeting moment. Let's think of reproduction as this kiss, which moves across cuts, from shot to shot, from frame to frame: linking and juxtaposing. Across lips and digital devices. It moves by way of editing, exquisitely flipping around the idea of the cut, redistributing affects and desire, creating bodies joined by movement, love, pain.

1
Many of the ideas in this text are based on discussions around a seminar called "Crisis" (given in 2009), on the ideas of Alex Fletcher about cinematic cuts, and on my response to Maija Timonen's PhD presentation, which dealt with the idea of the body cut by austerity. Other ideas in the text derive from discussions around a seminar called "junkspace," especially dicussions with Boaz Levin around postproduction. This text is dedicated to Bifo and Helmut Färber.

2
Maurizio Lazzarato, *La fabrique de l'homme endetté: Essai sur la condition néolibérale* (Paris: Éditons Amsterdam, 2011).

3
Samuel Parsons Scott, ed., *The Civil Law: Including the Twelve Tables, the Institutes of Gaius, the Rules of Ulpian, the Opinions of Paulus, the Enactments of Justinian, and the Constitutions*, vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 64.

4
Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

5
In French, the word for "frame" is *cadre*. This implies that the body framed is disciplined and managed, as Jean-Louis Comolli has emphasized. Thank you to Charles Heller for mentioning this work to me.

6
"Coupant, tranchant, et net, comme peut l'être le fil d'un rasoir." Jean-Louis Comolli, *Cadre et corps* (Paris: Éditions Verdier, 2012), 538.

7
See Helmut Färber's invaluable analysis, "*A Corner in Wheat" von D. W. Griffith 1909: Eine Kritik* (Paris: Helmut Färber, 1992).

8
Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

9
This applies more to its editing than its framing.

10
There is also another important component in the relation of cinematic postproduction to production: its relation to reality. While the cinema of production had—even in the case of completely fictional stories—an indexical link to reality by virtue of, for example, being filmed with analog 35 mm film cameras, digital postproduction completely renegotiates that indexical link to the scene in front of the camera. Contemporary post is the area of the making over of images, not the making of. In postproduction, the indexical link to reality is loosened by including composited backgrounds, animated protagonists, and generally modeling reality. Of course, the indexical link was always rather fictional, but newer technologies permit doing away with it to an unprecedented degree, creating perspectives with the liberty of painting.

11
See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay; How Art Reprograms the World*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005).

12
For feminist perspectives on reproductive labor, see the works of Silvia Federici, Arlie Hochschild, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, and Precarias a la Deriva.

13
See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAIjpUATAWg.

14
Thank you to Rabih Mroué for mentioning this film to me.

15
These ideas refer to the kiss men-
tioned by Boris Buden in the introduc-
tion of his book *Zone des Übergangs —
Vom Ende des Postkommunismus*: a
kiss received by an anonymous black
man from the militia man who abducted
and probably killed him in the Bosnian
War. A kiss which is still out there,
being passed on via rape camps and
teenage parties, in children's hospitals
and bordellos — with love or conde-
scension, ennui or elation, gentle,
duplicitous, incisive.

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Hito Steyerl
The Wretched of the Screen