

love & politics

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edited by

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freigeist

Contents

Introduction: Nephelokokygia by the editors	5
Michael Hardt on the Politics of Love Interview by Johan Grimonprez	9
Walk the line by Cheryl Rudd	21
Love is the Institution of Revolution by Mikhail Karikis	22/23
On Love: A conversation between Michael Hardt and Mikhail Karikis	24
Lonely Girl Phenomenology by Miriam Poletti	41
Making Friends with a Rose by Medha Singh	48
One Percent by Anna Deligianni	52/53
walking on tiptoes by Nicoletta Pongias	54

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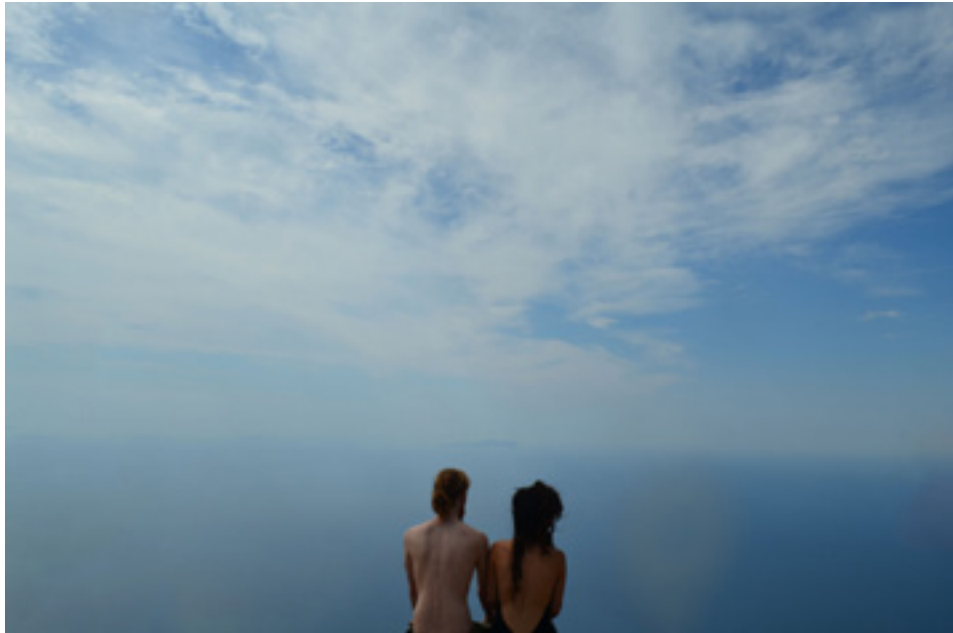
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Cover image: Cecylia Malik, *Bialka's Braids*, campaign to protect river against regulations, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Kamila Buturla (photograph)

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Floating City by Anna Deligianni	56	»I love you«: A musical utterance or a flat one? by Soumyabrata Choudhury	157
Forgetting the Rains by Amit Shankar Saha	57	For a better future together / Visions are scary by Nauman Abid	172
February 2017. Art is Life by Ioana Niculescu-Aron	59	Lessepsian Lovers by Uriel Orlow	179
Welcome home-intruders by Denise Padron Benitez	63	Ωκεανικός Πλανήτης – Oceanic Planet by Antigoni Tsagkaropoulou	193
365 Trees / Bialka's Braids / Polish Mothers by Cecylia Malik	69	Memory Virus by Tom Bland	209
All is fair in love and war. Simon Critchley in dialogue with Johan Grimonprez	79	You got wires, comin' out of your skin by Anna Deligianni	218
Hate as a transformative force – An Essay on Walter Benjamin by Andrea Messner	103	Mars Trojan – Elon – The Shroud (5517) A by Sharmaine Thérèsa Pretorius	221
Polemiken oder wenn sich die demokratischen Tiere um die Gegenwartskunst scharen by Alexander García Düttmann	129	Short Biographies of Contributors	227
Love of Nature, Politics of Diversity: Open to wonders, hiddenness and sublime by Robin Wang	153	Illustration Credits	239



Coexistence, photograph, 2015. Courtesy out of the blue

Introduction: Nephelokokkygia

by the editors

Perhaps we can only love as much as we hate each other. At least, this may be considered as a possible »outcome«, a very personal insight, emerging from a whole intensive year of collective work on the topic *love & politics*. No *yin* without *yang*, no *logos* without *chaos* ..., but also no need to claim them as negating opposites: they »cooperate« in mutual disagreement. In the same sense, love and politics, the more they seem to exclude each other, they suddenly embrace each other in an unexpected, revolutionary blast! –

There will be sun at midnight, snow in summer,
and the sky will kiss the waters!

Humans will grow wings out of the blue
and live like birds in Nephelokokkygia,
a phantastic utopia ...

In our time, the thin line between exhausted pessimism and open-hearted enthusiasm has become almost invisible. Perhaps it's just a trick, a change of perception as to cross the line. Perhaps we have to fuel our hate to truly love?

Immersed both in artistic exploration as well as in philosophical and scientific research, the project welcomed contributions from all disciplines so as to get the most diverse view on the topic. Philosophy may speak through images and science through literature: even fish may speak through art. Taken as its point of departure the question of how love and politics could coexist and what kind of forms and spaces could be created out of this encounter, the project addresses the incredible potential of this unlikely liaison.

Three hints for the start:

- This book works like a synaesthetic jukebox of yet unknown possibilities. You may read it like a picture book or like an academic journal. You may start at *any* contribution and synaesthetically relate it to *any* other: the possible amount of fusions goes far beyond our possible intentions.

- The artwork of SHARM T. P. (Sharmaine Thérèse Pretorius) is still circulating around the lower space orbit, reaching out for appropriate spectators (perhaps in 3018?).

- There is an incredible amount of sea life in this book. The oceans slowly seem to start a silent revolution against the arrogance of man.

We thank all the contributors for their enthusiasm, their patience and the trust they have given to us in the spirit of the collective book!

Additional thanks to Katerina Giannopoulou, for her incredible eyes seeing magenta in blue, and to Dara Casey & Viktor J. Illmer, for their patience in their English mother tongue.

August 2018

Michael Hardt on the Politics of Love

Interview by Johan Grimonprez

[excerpts]

Johan Grimonprez: The state of constant war becomes a permanent social relation, an ontology reinscribing itself in all aspects of social life. It not only blurs the distinctions between the military, the police and the justice institutions – but it corrupts even everyday life: what we eat, consume, learn and talk about. Simply put, we have become consumers of fear, an ontology of fear.

Michael Hardt: It's a long-term modern philosophical, political notion that fear is a reliable ruling power. Machiavelli is posing two alternatives for the Prince. One is that people follow him because he is feared and the other is that people follow him because he is loved. His

conclusion is because the locus of fear, the source of fear resides in him (in the prince) and it can be constant for his rule. Whereas the locus of love resides in the people and therefore for him (the prince), it's not under his control. But by the same logic why the prince should favor fear, the people maybe should favor love because it resides in them. It's in their power and so for them, it could be constant and long lasting. Machiavelli opens a question for which he probably doesn't provide the answer: »what would it mean to have a political regime based on love?«

J. G.: You mentioned that the military-industrial complex has become a form of historical oversimplification that does not take into account the real core, and what you would call in your book *Multitude*, a system of global apartheid.

M. H.: I think it's extremely important to focus on the military-industrial complex and on the arms trade and on people who were making wealth off of selling arms to all kinds of sides. All these things seem to me as extremely important, but it should be relativized in my view in a sense that it's not the only problem, perhaps that's not even the core. In other words, if we were to think »if we could only get rid of the arms dealers, if only we could get rid of the relationship of capital to selling arms« we would end the violence. I think rather one has to recognize the much deeper continuing of violence, of which our warfare is the tip of the iceberg.

And indeed, the world system today is becoming ever more a system of global apartheid. I think that it's misleading to think about global hierarchies as simply being about walls or exclusions. Walls are often talked about and come to mind: the US/Mexican border,



Michael Hardt in *every day words disappear* by Johan Grimontprez, video still, 2016.

Israel/Palestine. These are walls that separate. I think what's more characteristic and even more insidious is the kinds of hierarchical inclusions that reinforce and mandate a kind of subordination. I think you have to understand apartheid in the ways it functioned in South Africa: as a kind of hierarchical and differentiated labor regime that is really a kind of inclusion. Slavery in the US functioned this way too. It's not just about exclusion, it's really about making the subordinations and hierarchies extremely intimate and part of everyday life. The kind of continual war we face today is really on continuing with the class, and racial, and gender, and other oppressions that have structured our societies as violent.

J. G.: Thatcher dismissed society as mere illusion when she postulated that: »there is no such thing as society.«

M. H.: It seems to me that the one aspect of the violence of contemporary society is defined by forced individualism and an assumption of no-relation, of no social relation. In some ways you could say that in the 1980s, a certain kind of white racism in Britain goes together with Margaret Thatcher saying there is no society. There is a kind of forced individualism plus the bonds of sameness that fit into these fundamentalist notions.

J. G.: International law served in the 20th Century merely to legitimate and support the violence of the strong over the weak. The inequality of power seems to make it impossible to establish equality before the law. The violence of the strong is automatically legitimated and the violence of the weak immediately labeled terrorism.

M. H.: One thing that's been made clear is that the US is no longer capable of acting unilaterally in military and political terms. I think that the collapse of the projects in Iraq and in Afghanistan already during the Bush years was a symptom of this. You have to think about the global order today like a three-dimensional chess game. There's a top board, a military board in which you have to play on the US's terms, but you have to simultaneously play on a global order on this second level of economic aristocracies, and corporations, and dominant nation states. And then you also have to look at the third level, in terms of non-state actors, the media, etc.

I think Mr. Spock could play three-dimensional chess in *Star Trek*, but I'm not sure the rest of us can. It's a much more complex challenge

than only looking at it from the top level, or from the military level, because then you're not seeing how the global order is functioning. You have to play the three levels simultaneously.

It's not a war defined by boundaries and sovereign enemies but a mixed and perpetual state of conflict. That too, it seems to me, is very intimate. It's not separated in peaceful zones and zones of conflict. In fact there has been a kind of creeping of conflict into all global spaces. In some sense we are all treated like prisoners. Characteristic of the prison was its omnipresence surveillance regime. Now throughout social sites in schools, in streets, everywhere else we are part of surveillance, but we are also asked to be the warden, or at least the guard. Like we are all supposed to watch each other: like the »see something, say something« campaign. I would say that this security regime is one facet of this state of war. Why do you take your clothes off in the airport? And why do you submit to all kinds of surveillance of your daily activities really almost everywhere? I think the only answer is fear. The constant state of war, the foundation of fear and our acceptance of a security regime and to be both objects and subjects of it, makes democracy seemingly impossible until we can somehow create a society that does not make our political decisions based primarily on fear.

J. G.: Democracy is obscured by a seemingly permanent state of war. In times of war, the constitution is suspended temporarily. But this state of exception has become permanent; the exception has become the rule, and the line between war and politics becomes increasingly blurred. Also global institutions like the United Nations and the World Bank have become corrupted, where debt serves as a legal mechanism of enslavement to keep the poor, poor and the rich, rich.

M. H.: Global interaction on the one hand and globalization in general makes democracy a both more difficult and more pressing issue, and they should be opening a new field in which one has to reimagine democracy and what it could mean. The super national forms of rule – I am thinking about it in economic terms, things like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund – in some ways preclude what has been thought of as democracy before.

J. G.: What is democracy for you?

M. H.: Part of the difficulty of talking about democracy is how the concept has been corrupted. It is almost impossible to say the word >democracy< because it has come to mean something extraordinarily different from what we thought it should mean. At best >democracy< means something like a periodic election among a limited choice of wealthy politicians. In other parts of the world, when you talk about democracy, it means that you better start running because the bombs will start falling. Democracy means essentially following US foreign policy, something like that. I think there is a huge obstacle to redefining the concept. To make democracy mean what we want it to mean.

We have entered into a permanent state of war. A war without end. When one recognizes that we've entered into that state, it not only makes democracy impossible, but for many makes it undesirable. The urgency of this permanent state of war has redefined or obstructed democracy but it has also in some ways pushed it off of the agenda.

The construction of social institutions is certainly one way in which people are excluded from power or even trained to be excluded from power. It is for that reason among many others that I am interested in

many movements that claim to be for the >common<. Movements that are contesting both private control: »the rule of private property« and public control: the rule of the state over social goods and social resources.

I think that those institutional struggles which you might cluster around this notion of the >common<, the refusal of both privatization and state control, that these are small, institutional ways of people not just of taking more authority over their lives but also becoming the kind of people that are capable of democracy. By having the kinds of political engagements with the various aspects of society that allow us to make decisions. That is what really is required.

J. G.: Is there a definition of the commons?

M. H.: I would much prefer to think of the commons as a mosaic or a composition. Not only the differences remain, but differences are central, rather than everyone coming to an agreement. No, I think the commons has to be, should be based on conflict, on antagonism. I think even at the basic level, something Toni Negri and I have been thinking about is how to understand the term >institution< as something that is based on conflict and antagonisms rather than as a unified and coherent structure.

J. G.: Love is also, like democracy, a sort of unfinished project, but love would probably be defined not as one thing, but as many different conceptions. Not dissimilar to Godard's film *Alphaville* where we live in a society deprived of something essential, not even aware of what we actually miss, since we lack the stories and concepts to define it. Not dissimilar to the final scene of *Alphaville*, depicting a society where



Johan Grimonprez, *every day words disappear*, video still, 2016.
From *Alphaville* (1965), courtesy Jean-Luc Godard

every word relating to the idea of love is banned. And this woman, in love with the protagonist, is searching to express her feelings, but she doesn't find the words, as the concept of love is foreign to her.

M. H.: Machiavelli's alternative is that either the prince should be feared or loved. And so one could ask what would it mean to have a political regime based on love. Love like democracy is certainly a corrupt political concept. It has been corrupted. My academic friends have a lot of difficulty with this love business either for its sentimental or because they think I have been hanging out too much with Italians. Whatever the problem is, it's something like that. I think it's met with discomfort because >love< seems to be outside of the realm of serious discussion. Poets and psychoanalysts can talk about love but we

shouldn't talk about it. I do think that there is a discomfort because of the way that it implicates us.

Most times when people talk about regimes based on hatred, they in fact are based on a certain kind of love. But it's a horrible kind of love. For instance when one talks about white supremacy, or other forms of racism I would put together (nationalisms and various religious fundamentalisms), I do think they're based on love, but they're based on a notion of love in which one loves the one who is like him. Which is somewhat similar to a destruction of differences and our becoming one. Or it could mean that a kind of multiplication of differences, bonding with those who are not like you, either thinking of love as defining a >we< that is based on a unity and sameness. Have love defining a bond. A kind of >we< that is a multiplicity. In fact it is based on a kind of proliferation of differences. Only that would be a kind of love that could found a democratic politics.

J. G.: You touch upon the aspect of love as an ontological power.

M. H.: The reason I care about love in politics, the reason it seems important to me, is that I understand love to be the most powerful bond. The most powerful and lasting bond. It is true that we often think about it in an intimate scale but we also should think about love at a social and large scale. What are the kinds of bonds both rational and based on passions that can and do hold us together? I think that neglecting to think of those, if we think of politics as only based on interests or objective facts, or reason as if it were separated from passions, we will miss what's actually guiding our lives.

During those 18 days of Tahrir Square, of the occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo January 2011, every day in the New York Times, I'm

sure in every other foreign press around the world, they were searching for the real leaders. Like one day it was El Baradei the Nobel physicist, another day it was a Google executive. Each day they were trying to figure out who's really behind this. Like who's the single voice that's doing this. But they couldn't understand that the fascinating thing that was going on in the square was that a variety, you know, a multiplicity of diverse groups were collaborating together and acting politically in a way that was not unified. I think that's an incredibly important experiment and the kind of experiment that we've seen repeated in recent years. I wouldn't say they have all been successful but that seems to me, it's animated by a political desire for democracy, so I would call these kind of experiments in a political love.

I think that one of the magical aspects of the encampments and occupations has been that feeling of being together. Everyone who was at Zuccotti Park or Gezi Park in Istanbul or St. Paul's or any number. Or certainly in parts of El Sol in Madrid, in Barcelona at any of the encampments everyone felt a certain kind of magic and I think that magic is precisely about a kind of both a de-individualization you know, being together and an interaction with the kinds of social differences that made up all of the occupations.

The magical experience of the encampments is that recognition of an unknown joy of being together, in the sense of Spinoza. So it's not just a matter of empathy or of common suffering but a recognition of the possibility of our greater ability to think and act about the world, in the world where recognition of that is due to each other.

I guess one has to accept that part of going down this road is to recognize how love changes society and changes us. Love is an ontological condition, an ontological power really in that sense that

love changes you. When you love politically you lose yourself and are transformed into something different: the alternative that Machiavelli didn't want to take, which is to have a social order based on love of the people rather than on their fear.

2014



Cheryl Rudd, *Walk the line*, collage, 20 x 20cm, 2018. Courtesy of the artist

LOVE is the institution
of REVOLUTION

Mikhail Karikis, *Love is the Institution of Revolution*, 2015.
Courtesy of the artist

On Love: A conversation between Michael Hardt and Mikhail Karikis

This text features my conversation with the influential political philosopher Michael Hardt, co-author (with Antonio Negri) of the seminal trilogy of books on contemporary political and economic philosophy *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004) and *Commonwealth* (2009).¹ After reading *Multitude* in which the authors introduce the idea of political love, I was very much anticipating *Commonwealth* where they dedicate an entire chapter to this subject, which has been inspiring and influential, but also the subject of debate and theoretical critique particularly from the post-Marxist philosophical arenas.

¹ The new book by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri *Assembly* was published in October 2017 by Oxford University Press. (editors' note)

While working on my large-scale project – *Children of Unquiet* (2012-2015) – in Italy, and engaging with a community of people whose lives had been greatly affected by the privatisation of natural resources, mass unemployment, migration and rapid depopulation, Hardt's and Negri's *Commonwealth* seemed to offer a different way for me to start conversations with local politicians, industry, workers and their children. Widespread narratives of failure and feelings of resentment were being passed on by adults to the younger generation, perpetuating reciprocal animosity. *Commonwealth*'s introduction of the notion of a political love and its >puzzles< into the contemporary thinking of interpersonal, socio-political and economic structures opened up the potential to imagine different probable, possible or invented futures with a reactivated individual and communal agency.

The central component of the multi-partite project *Children of Unquiet* features a film which orchestrates a children's take-over of one of the deserted workers' villages in the Devil's Valley in Tuscany, where the project is located. In one scene we see groups of seven-year-old children reading fragments from Hardt's and Negri's book *Commonwealth*. While this project is partly creating a conversation with some of the ideas in the book, I also initiated a direct dialogue with Michael Hardt, who in turn responds to my film.

Mikhail Karikis: Michael, you have repeatedly written on the notion of love in political terms, and I have been particularly interested in your understanding of love as an event that is (paradoxically) connected both to change and to stability. Your thesis suggests that love brings about fundamental changes in how we perceive ourselves and the world around us, but it also creates strong sustainable bonds that may resist and withstand change. So a political kind of love presents itself as a powerful model for the creation of systems and institutions that encourage revolutionary change while maintaining social bonds. Would you like to expand on this?

Michael Hardt: I am intrigued by the powers of a political form of love; it is a force of transformation, of bonds and community formation. What continues to preoccupy me about love as a political project is the common functioning of love as a unifying process or even a process that selects for sameness, which is not only inadequate, but also politically detrimental. Forms of white supremacy, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism are powerful today, and they function as a kind of love of the same or even a process of merging into one. Much more helpful than thinking of traditional notions of racism, fascism and religious fundamentalism in terms of exclusion or hatred is to think of them as political forms of love, which are based on love of the same and are destructive.

A political conception of love for me would have to operate on a principle of difference, or even of proliferation of differences. Love would not be a becoming one. Then the Judeo-Christian notion of >loving your neighbour< would not be conceived as a love of the one who is the same or most proximate, but loving the one who is different from you, not in order to make them like you but to work with and



appreciate these differences. Of course this idea would need to develop – I am presenting it as a necessary principle of turning love as a political concept into a useful one and creating an alternative to the most readily available political form of love that is powerful today and horribly damaging.

Some people react by claiming that love has no place in politics, and my response is that actually love has a role in politics already but we are not looking at it. The challenge is to create a different logic for the formation of bonds that are able to transform us, not so that we become the same or tend toward a uniform identity, but so that they proliferate differences and multiplicity.

M. K.: In her book *For More than One Voice*, the feminist thinker Adriana Cavarero discusses the dangers of nationalism and our

becoming one voice. She debates how we might be able to create the right conditions for a democratic multiplicity of voices. She introduces the notion of the >vocalic<, which focuses on the uniqueness of each embodied voice, and as I understand it, it relates to Roland Barthes's concept of the >grain of the voice< and (indirectly) to Julia Kristeva's >semiotic in language<. Cavarero urges politics to open up to the >vocalic<, to each unique embodied voice that speaks. The conception

of the voice as embodied is very important here because it does not disconnect the voice from the body (be it transgender, black etc.) that produces it. This would launch politics into difference and variation inherent in the uniqueness of each embodied voice. I think that what Cavarero is really saying is that politics will be able to embrace diversity by becoming aware, not only of *what* is said (i.e. of the abstract signifiers), but also of *who* is doing the saying.



M. H.: It is important that the recognition of difference is not just a matter of tolerance. Tolerance may be interpreted as allowing for difference without in fact engaging with it.

Michel Foucault wrote a brief text after seeing Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Comizi d'amore*, in which the filmmaker goes around Italy asking people about love. Foucault explains how tolerance would blunt or disregard differences. I think of love as functioning and becoming enriched by an engagement with differences. One then must understand the neighbour, as the philosopher Franz Rosenzweig claims, as a placeholder for all possible others.

M. K.: In your book *Commonwealth*, co-authored with Antonio Negri, there is a remarkable analysis of economism as a form of fundamentalism. You observe that despite placing extreme emphasis on the body, economism is ultimately concerned with a transcendental value that is beyond the body – bodies vanish for the sake of abstract economic value. For example, the kind of discourse promoted by popular culture around celebrities' bodies and how much they are worth is disconcerting. Could love transform this aspect of economism?

M. H.: I understand part of this dynamic especially in regard to what we talked about: love may oscillate between the multiplicity of bodies and their reduction to a unity that features in each form of fundamentalism. Toni (Negri) and I were trying to think of economic fundamentalism – economism – as well as religious fundamentalisms, which seem to put extreme focus on the body. Religious fundamentalisms are focusing on what part of the body shows, what bodies eat and when, and all other material aspects of life and daily

practices. But these fundamentalisms really look through the body and use the body and each of its practices as signifiers for something else, something abstract, some notion of the soul. The body seems so dangerous that it needs to be contained by some higher level. In the book *Commonwealth* we related this to a certain notion of economic fundamentalism. Economic thought appears to be concerned about labouring bodies, consuming bodies and so on, but like in religious fundamentalism, it abstracts bodies to a uniform system of value. All the complexity and messiness of bodies vanishes.

The terrain where fundamentalism is threatened by is perhaps where we could reclaim the complex reality and multiplicity of bodies. It is precisely that terrain of multiplicity that a productive and progressive political notion of love could take place.

M. K.: So, do you think that love disrupts the abstraction of bodies that renders them the same? Does love serve as an anti-transcendental force?

M. H.: It is a first gesture, a step toward addressing the materiality of bodies and the field of multiplicity. There have been anti-racist strategies that celebrate bodies. For example the ideological strategies of Black Power in the 1970s in the US focused on disparate aspects and styles of the materiality of bodies. These were an antidote to the abstraction of bodies as it was expressed in notions of white supremacy which focuses on an idea and creates a unified system of measure, characteristic of racist ideology, while not really looking at the reality of bodies.

Mikhail, one of the things that struck me about the film is its other-worldliness. There is something untimely even on the soundtrack.



Mikhail Karikis, *Children of Unquiet*, video still, 2013-14. Courtesy of the artist

I am using the term untimely in a Nietzschean sense, meaning that it is not for our time – you are creating another time. The film presents a world of the future, perhaps a science fiction world, populated only by children. Why does the discourse on love, which is read by the children, inhabit a future science fiction world? I wonder if the removal from our own reality makes the discourse on love possible.

M. K.: Since its creation, Larderello seems to have been concerned with the future, long before I went and raised questions about it. It was a modernist utopian project designed to create a new kind of life and community of a different temporality. Even the energy generated there is by what appears to be an ancient yet inexhaustible natural force: heat and vapour erupting from the earth. The science fiction character of the work is perhaps created by the multiple temporal dimensions at the site, or by the fact that it glimpses at a frozen moment in modernist architecture of the 1950s that was itself imagining a utopian future, which turned into a dystopia.

The grand ambitions and aspirations invested in the site of Larderello permit it to exist as a utopia or its failure – but where does reality fit into this? On one level, the work introduces the ordinary to the site – children doing everyday things: playing, reading, sleeping, listening and singing. On another level, it introduces the notion of political love as you define it, because this is where Larderello seems to have gone wrong. If love is something that initiates change or even revolution, while at the same time generating and maintaining strong sustainable bonds and community, it is precisely where Larderello failed. Because the systems in place at Larderello brought about changes in the industry and its technologies but were unsuccessful in sustaining the bonds with the local community, until their connection fractured completely.

This is a speculative project: what if there were no adults, and children unearthed books among the rubble in which they discovered something the previous generation did not? Enlightened by this discovery, how will they transform this place? In the film the kids respond in quite an articulate way by inhabiting the site as a kind of playground, where games, relationships and territories are negotiated communally. I do not show how the site will change in the future; as an artist I am interested in finding the potential for change with and through the communities I collaborate. Then it is up to them to define the exact reforms they wish to make. In the case of Larderello, in addition to the children, I involved parents, the local government and the factory in thinking about the future. It is now up to them to do the talking.



M. H.: The delight of the children in the film is remarkable. A site that could look tragic is infused with their joy. The tragedy of the economic-social project and the children's exuberance is a wonderful juxtaposition.

M. K.: I think that through play they are creating a sense of the common that is now missing from the site.

M. H.: In your film the landscape is both desolate and powerful. A decaying post-industrial reality is presented against the powers of the earth as a constant. The earth persists and the economic-social project comes and goes. It brings to mind post-industrial or post-apocalyptic visions of the future where the earth is taking cities back with its powers, but I think there is something quite different in your film – an interesting disjunction. I wonder how this resonates with you.

M. K.: At sites like the Devil's Valley in Tuscany where this project is located, cracks on the surface of the earth bring us so close to the gigantic forces operating inside our planet that we witness an immensity which appears to be indifferent to the temporal dynamics of capitalism and our demands for quick profit. There is a sense of persistence to these natural forces, which I wanted to express, especially through sound. Throughout the film, the children sing the noises of the earth and the factory drones that are audible at the site. The harmonies that feature in the work are those produced by steam as it gushes out through different-sized apertures in the Devil's Valley. Toward the end of the film a child begins singing the note of one of these constant drones and is joined by more children to form an auditory swarm. On the one hand, the children's song asserts their

connection with the soundscape and landscape of their childhood, and on the other, it is a form of resistance to the narratives that dominate their lives that claim the children will have to leave the area to find a better future elsewhere.

I wanted to make a feature of the act of listening. Children are seen giving their full attention to the sounds emanating from the ground and from the pipes that transport high-pressure vapour straight from the guts of the earth. Without meaning to mystify the role of listening, I think that being surrounded by these intense, continuous and persistent sounds resonating from the earth, the children do not only hear and learn their drones and harmonics, they also learn about the qualities of potency and perseverance resonating in their immediate aural environment. When I mentioned to a local man that I could not



sleep because of all the incessant geothermic noise in the area, he said:

»I no longer hear the sounds of the earth here because they are in me.« This strength and intensity are inside the people of Larderello; it is the political and economic system that has disempowered them temporarily.

M. H.: In *Children of Unquiet*, the children are not dismayed by the presence of the powerful forces around them, but rather, they are singing with them and are finding ways to be in concert with the earth and create joyful encounters with each other. Is this not an alternative to the antagonistic relationship between the human project and the earth?

This conversation took place on 24th January 2014

Lonely Girl Phenomenology

by Miriam Poletti

inspired by Chris Kraus



Miriam Poletti, *Lonely Girl Phenomenology*, video still, 2017. Courtesy of the artist

It's been a long time since I've touched another human being
and I'm not sure how it feels.

Last night I tried to replace you
rubbing myself against the wall while taking a very hot shower.

All I want is that you should know me,
or know a little about what I'm thinking, seeing.

I don't need any encouragement, approval or response.

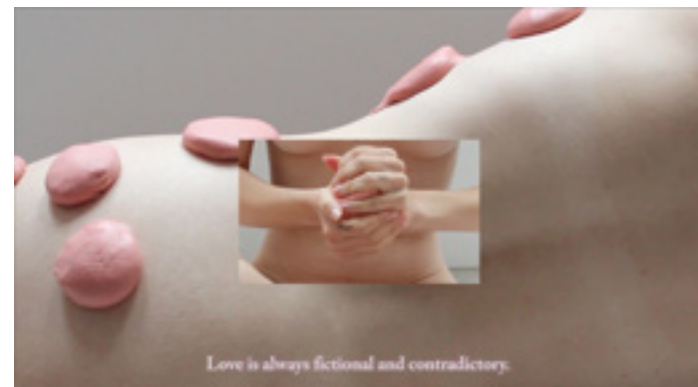
If I can't make you fall in love with me for who I am,
maybe I can interest you with what I understand.

If only I could, I would spend my time watching your words.

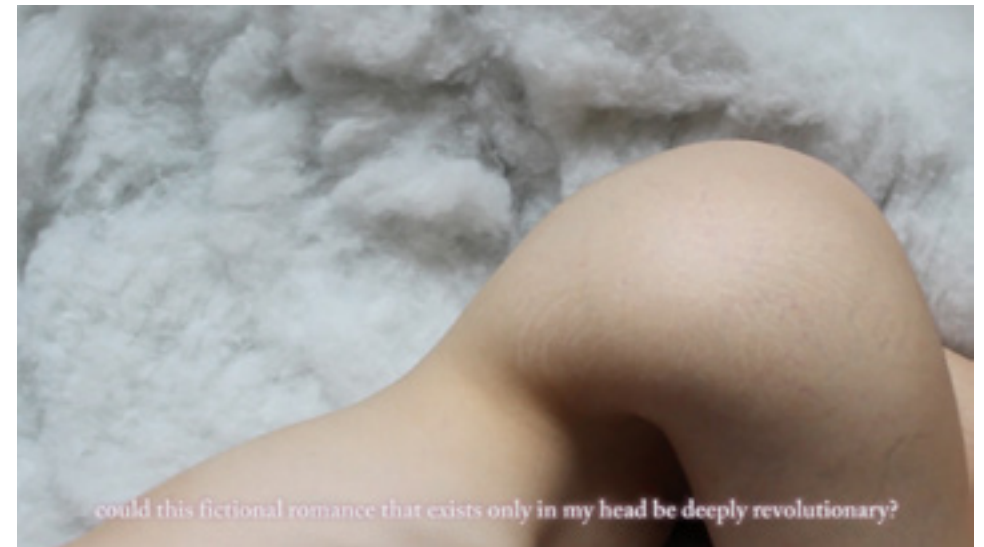
I would look at them filling the space irregularly
and I would give them meaning, little at a time.

I would be distracted by poor punctuation
and I would lose the thread of this speech that had never begun.

All night I've been feeling lonely, afraid,
and I'm wondering if you feel as I do – this incredible urge to be heard.
Who do you talk to?
I guess it's been a case of infatuation.
I know that as you read this, you'll know these things are true.
You understand the game is real, or even better than reality.
Abstract romanticism.
Since knowing you, my body turned to liquid glass and all the pieces fit.
When I saw you last night, I couldn't talk,
and hung up on the bottom end of the romantic equation
with beating heart and sweaty palms.
It's incredible to feel this way.
For 10 years my life has been organised around avoiding this painful
elemental state.
I want to change city again. Here I feel frustrated.
You and my nomadism are both vehicles of escape.
I want to move outside the limits of myself, to exercise mobility.
The only thing that moves me now is moving.



I took a smear test this morning, it was cold and mechanical.
The nurse said I wasn't able to relax, it's true,
I'm in a constant state of tension.
Even if I seem calm I'm always worried about something.
Our fictional love story is my own way to escape from life,
actually it's nothing about you, it's just about me.
Being in love with you, being ready to take on this ride, made me feel 16,
hunched up in a leather jacket in a corner with my friends.
A timeless fucking image.
It's about not giving a fuck,
or seeing all the consequences looming and doing something anyway.
Your presence in my life is like a vacation from society's schemes.
It's a foray into schemes of another kind.
I could spend hours absorbed into the reality of unreality,
totally unproductive.
In late capitalism nobody is truly free.
This seems so radically profound,
could this fictional romance that exists only in my head be deeply
revolutionary?



Money is abstract and our culture's distribution of it is based on values
I reject.

Our love story is abstract,
but I'm not sure that others' relationships are truer.

Love is always fictional and contradictory.

Accepting contradictions means not believing anymore in the primacy
of »true feeling«.

Everything is true and simultaneous.

After awhile it became difficult to remember that nothing really happened.

When you're living so intensely in your head
you actually believe something happens when you've imagined.

When you're living so intensely in your head
there isn't any difference between what you imagine and what actually takes place.

Therefore, you're both omnipotent and powerless.

I don't know if my desires and cravings are real
or if they are just projections of society's expectations
but I still wish you'd text me back.

Making Friends with a Rose

(Café, Parmentier, Paris, 2015)

by Medha Singh

What good was it to say, >I will tell you a story about myself one day?<

and to resume uttering, in exasperation, a washed out tale of love.

I was worn too, with the thing that tired us both: the other, ungloved.

>Once upon a time<, she began to say, a union was made

and from its sublime, seraphic solidity (cool and hot, upon demand, or provocation)

it transformed, as it writhed and turned in her arms, night after night,

until it evaporated, became the sole repository, of her grief.

Why do we learn of love in its absence?

Like Van Gogh's shoes without their peasant,

to learn, that a shoe well worn, can transform your woe to relief.

Why do we learn of it, from the shaking tide

inside us, under a full moon, (our bodies 70% water,

30% shit, that always washes up, on the shore of another)?

When it floats, sinister, morphs, and breathes

into a cloud, over metro Belleville

that never casts a shadow, let alone pour its whole being,

and grace the melancholy whores of Sacré-Cœur

the pickpockets of Pigalle, Luciferian smiles, you the Vikram

to their and Vetal, in God's own dustbin.

There was one that loved my Rose

like all foreign things, he loved her

as he loved the idea of aliens, watching

us, and us looking back at them

dissolve in a pornographic

wet dream.

He loved

Mystery in people, in blossoms, bosoms

this unnameable Rose, her face aglow

under dusk, sparkling dust caught

in a deluge of moonbeams

flooding the house at night.

>Look at my perfect body, he'd said,

let it touch your perfect core. No one

has been kinder, keener, fair.<

That story, unfortunately, ends there – Rose is a recluse

And she knows that tyrants, can't stand natural order

they mistake it for chaos, disorderliness, it serves as fodder

for their anger, so they quaff some blow, and kill six million Jews.

Love and Mercy, words, once banished from Postmodern-Parnassus, are the cure

to mental disease and doggerel. Glyphic, uncertain, prevaricating; elude defini-

tion in a post-world world.

Love and Mercy, terrible angels. Harbingers of Beauty, another bad word –

for Rilke told us years ago, beauty is the beginning of a terror

that we can barely endure. Endure.

This is the sudden sorrow that grips my Rose, lays siege over her
its nature is enduring, nothing is unbearable, we endure everything
and go on living.

Or so the story goes, among women
and among friends, that are often women,

brave enough to take apart the real from what (only) seems
to find themselves at home here, among cafés
that offer some room, some leeway, far and near.

Somewhere on this street, a fireplace has gone
out, and women have shucked off borrowed dreams
to live forever, inside their own.



Anna Deligianni, *One Percent*, ink on paper, 70 x 50cm, 2018. Courtesy of the artist

walking on tiptoes
by Nicoletta Pounghias

we do not talk about love
even though we are so clearly in it
we want forever
and we know
romance is a temporary flame
we know
there are no take-backs
and every step
feels like one too far
on this thin ice
whenever we get too close
our cold feet remind us
to walk backwards, slowly
tiptoe around the fire
we are all blaze
and no spunk

but every once in a while
I just want to stomp my feet in rebellion
scream at the top of my lungs that
damn it
I miss you
it is so exhausting
to say anything but that

we were always meant to be
but never meant to be together

and so we do not call it love
we dress it up in casual banter
and call it friendship
call it mutual appreciation
call it fate and luck and fortune
and even call it rare

I never asked you to love me
but please
tell me
if you ever do
I am so tired
of guessing

the thing about walking on your tiptoes is
that it takes so much strength
leaves you feeling so sore
and makes such little sound

and when there is silence
I never know
in which direction you are walking
I never know
if you are still there
I never know
if I should say goodbye
just in case



Forgetting the Rains

by Amit Shankar Saha

That day at Triangular Park
you read your poems to the streets
while it rained on the trees.
Under the carapace it always rains –
first a drizzle, then a shower.
Two drops of water dribble
and settle on a scooty seat but
their meniscuses don't meet.
The days become wet and sticky
like folded damp paper.
We soaked in those days
and the insides of our pockets
still retain the moisture.
The world changed unnoticed
somewhere in between.
The wetness on the road
was perhaps an accident.
Should I now call you my Kashmir
and make love political?
We have forgotten the rains.

February 2017. Art is Life

by Ioana Niculescu-Aron



Ioana Niculescu-Aron, *February 2017. Art is Life* [7], acrylics on photograph and canvas, 88 x 70cm, 2017. Courtesy of the artist

In February 2017, I stood in front of the Romanian government alongside thousands of Romanians. To my left and right were old people, families, children, students and businessmen in suits, who had closed their offices earlier, so that they could be there with us. We were an avalanche of people which had finally been triggered.

Fear, but complete acceptance, means a heart shattered with uncontrollable beatings, covered by a thick layer of heavy silence and breathless moments. Time was rolling and stripping away long-abandoned memories. Fear was shouting from all its lungs, but Judgment was covering it. Under the consciousness of the mistakes committed, we would pull through what was going to follow.

All those people respected this silence, standing, with their hearts curled up. Then they raised, applauded, and finally shouted: »You have succeeded. You have united us!« These were the voices calling for the storm. They were now standing up straight, in the face of their country's government. The sleep of the seas had been disturbed by the heavy rain of rhythmic stomping noises that people had synchronized with their feet. The continuous wait and all the rest took place in no longer than one second. And under this context, this one second had become the description of the feeling of love.

Corruption and legal instability have been affecting Romania's reputation as a good business environment. The trust capital of the population had been betrayed, and this is how the #REZIST phenomenon emerged. For me, the multitude of people from all over Romania (and abroad) who distributed posts with #REZIST on social media, and the enormous crowds that lit the Victoriei Square in Bucharest for countless nights represents a *constellation*. A constellation can be described as an overwhelming, unmeasurable force, just as in the present case the masses of people have proven to be. Inspired by this union of souls, I painted the series of works *February 2017. Art is life*.



Ioana Niculescu-Aron, *February 2017. Art is Life [9]*, acrylics on photograph and canvas, 88 x 70cm, 2017. Courtesy of the artist



Ioana Niculescu-Aron, *February 2017. Art is Life [10]*, acrylics on photograph and canvas, 88 x 70cm, 2017. Courtesy of the artist

For all the canvases of this series, I have respected the following pattern: a cloth in whose composition there is a duel between two main shapes: the terrestrial plan and the sky. The skies are made of pictures of the protest, posted by people on various social media websites, attached to cloth. The shapes that remain on the canvas after the collage of pieces of paper, remind us of the buildings of 7-9 floors, built by Nicolae Ceaușescu in Bucharest, and create a parallel in time, to another event that brought Romanians together in protest against injustice. Behind the figurative, I hide clues that belong wholly to the subconscious, under the guidance of the feeling I lived together with the other Romanians in February 2017 in Victoriei Square.

Welcome home-intruders

by Denise Padron Benitez

Welcome home-intruders is a series of fragments from a larger, on-going project, documenting the urban changes in Hackney Wick and Fish Island, London.

Since the London Olympics in 2012 has the surrounding area to the Olympic Park, including Hackney Wick and Fish Island, undergone a fundamental, from above planned regeneration led by the unelected London Legacy Development Corporation. Land has been sold off, people have been evicted and buildings have been flattened to the ground, only to make space for accumulation of money and wealth.

The area, located in between River Lea and the A12 motorway, was once a grey zone in between three east London boroughs. It existed as a place for production. Some of the 19th century factory buildings are still left, but as the manufacturing of goods disappeared long time ago, are they now functioning as artists' studios and live/work spaces.

The streets are still very quiet. There is only one car road leading to Fish Island and, unlike any other part of London, there are no buses, no advertisement, no flashing signs. The only thing poking on your attention are the constantly changing graffiti and the giant mock-up pictures showing the future of brick-cladded buildings, clean streets and representatives of the healthy middle-class. They are holding hands, laughing, looking very happy indeed. Although it is not depicted in the advertisement for the future, these new neighbours are expected to travel by car. Thus, as a part of the original plan by the LLDC, a new car bridge has to be built and one of the last remaining



19th century warehouses along the canal, Vittoria Wharf, had to be sacrificed. Years of organised protests from the locals were ignored. Without any consideration of the future for the community, the creative practices and studio spaces, nor the increased air pollution and traffic, the demolishers came by the end of January and a few days ago, not even two months later, was the last container of dust and concrete brought away.



It changes every day.



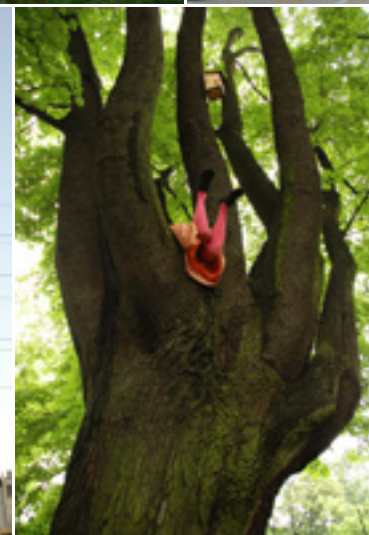
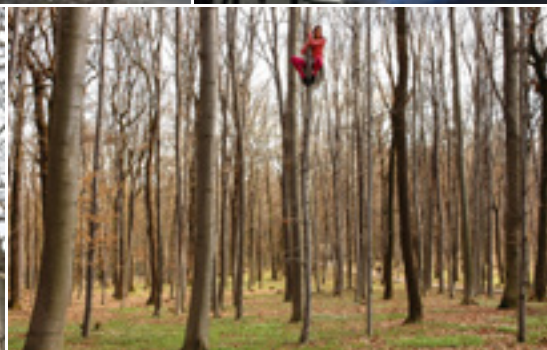
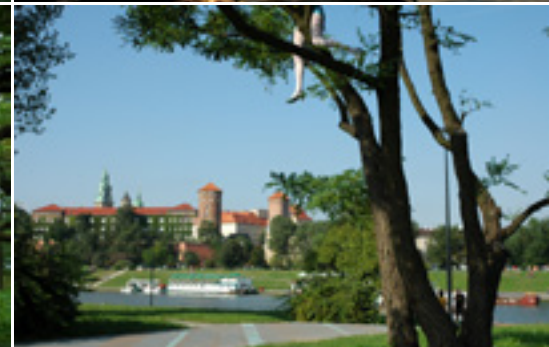
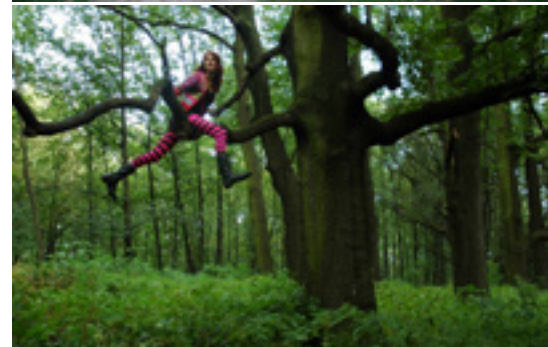
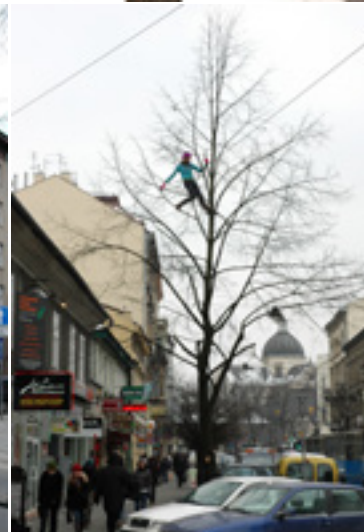


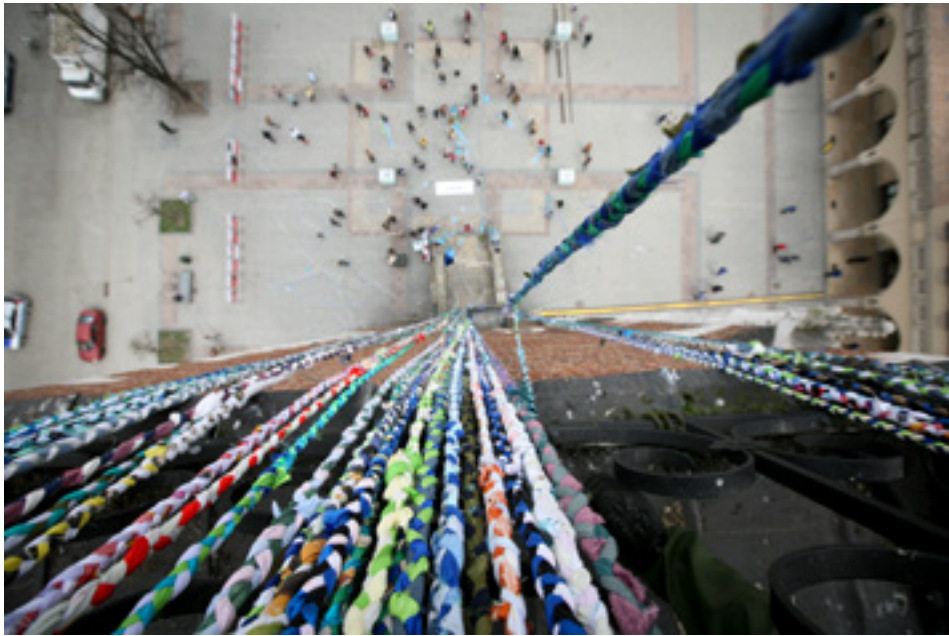
Denise Padron Benitez, *Welcome home-intruders*,
photographs, 2017. Courtesy of the artist



Cecylia Malik, *Tree 332*, performance / photograph, 2010. Courtesy of the artist

**365 Trees / Białka's Braids /
Polish Mothers**
by Cecylia Malik





Cecylia Malik, *Białka's Braids*, campaign to protect river against regulations, 2013.
 Courtesy of the artist, Mieszko Stanisławski and Tomasz Wiech (photographs)







Cecylia Malik, *Polish Mothers*, happening, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Tomasz Wiech (photograph)

All is fair in love and war.

Simon Critchley in dialogue with Johan Grimonprez

Simon Critchley: So, what are we going to talk about?

Johan Grimonprez: I've collected some thoughts about the new film we're working on,¹ exploring the global arms trade. You touched upon a set of similar ideas in *Nonviolent Violence*, the final chapter of your recent book, so, maybe we can take it from there? One thing I came upon lately is the killer ape versus the hippie chimp debate. Playwright Robert Ardrey argued back in the 60s that it is our innate propensity to kill what separated us from apes. It is war »that has led to the great accomplishments of Western Man. Dreams may have

¹ *Shadow World* (2016), directed by Johan Grimonprez (editors' note)

inspired our love of freedom, but only war and weapons have made it ours.« Primatologist Richard Wrangham picks up on this in *Demonic Males* (1996). To him it is not our difference from, but rather our similarity to chimpanzees that makes men incline toward war. Chimp violence, he claims, »paved the way for human war, making modern humans the dazed survivors of a continuous, 5-million-year habit of lethal aggression.« Basically, biological determinism tends to condemn human nature to a state of perpetual war. It discards such notions as empathy and cooperation, while downplaying our capabilities for inventing peace. Yet, *Demonic Males* is a reference point for political figures defining US foreign policy. Francis Fukuyama, who served in the State Department under Bush Jr., mentions it as a favorite book of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. He labeled Saddam Hussein as a typical »demonic male«.

S. C.: Well, the history of politics really turns on different conceptions of human nature, and whether human beings are essentially good or essentially wicked, and whether we are killer apes or hippy chimps, is a debate which goes back to antiquity. But the modern reference point, as it was picked up between Thomas Hobbes and J-J. Rousseau, is the idea that in Hobbes the natural condition of human beings is a state of war, therefore the state is required to prevent that natural state of war. Whereas Rousseau believes that human beings were naturally good, and wickedness was a social outcome of the state, but if we can throw off the shackles of the state, a more cooperative or anarchist tradition will prevail.

J. G.: And there is the third position, as Marquis de Sade says, »we are wicked, so let us be wicked.«

S. C.: Yeah, celebrate our wickedness, ha!

J. G.: Steven Pinker's exhaustive study *The Better Angels of our Nature* shows there's actually a decline of violence in human history, and that we tend to evolve towards »the better angels of our nature«. He contributes that partially to Hobbes' Leviathan, where human societies were able to evolve towards larger, more inclusive polities, within which peace is more frequently the rule. Rousseau saw the state as a cause of bloodshed, but Hobbes saw it as its cure.

S. C.: *The Leviathan* was written by Hobbes in exile in Paris during the English civil war. Given that a society like England dissolved into revolutionary conflict, then that's the idea: the state of nature is a state of war. So, how does one resolve a state of civil war? Well, through the imposition of authority in the form of a state. Citizens in Hobbes have the chance to get rid of the monarch, the mortal god, the Leviathan. But apart from that, they have to submit to authority. So you could say it is an authoritarian argument for the elimination of violence. But the wider claim that history exhibits a diminution of violence, I find that bewildering. If you read someone like Nietzsche, his argument is that physical harm is one thing, but we Christian Europeans have learnt to sublimate physical violence into psychological violence, and that is what we call morality! (*laughter*) So, in a sense the state functions through sublime violence, which we don't necessarily feel as violence. It means obedience, accepting the norms that govern a society. So yes, I don't really understand the claim that history exhibits a diminution of violence.

J. G.: So, concerning the question of the state, you'd position yourself with Rousseau?

S. C.: I'm with Rousseau. All the evidence contradicts this, but that is what it means to hold a view. I believe that the state is a limitation on human existence. The state requires a permanent condition of war. Or at least the threat of war. I am talking about the ideological projection of the other, the idea that there is a clash of civilizations. The truth is of course much nastier. If you look at the writings of Osama Bin Laden, what's fascinating is that for him Al-Qaeda is a response to the American invasion of the Arab lands, in particular the use of Saudi Arabia as a base in the first Gulf War, and further back the continual involvement of Western powers in the Arab world.

J. G.: Initially, the Al-Qaeda was a roller deck at the FBI, who coined the name for a databank containing all the guys they sponsored to fight with Osama against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

S. C.: So the enemy – we are not disagreeing – is a total fantasy, right? But the discourse of the state requires the ideological existence of an enemy in order to push against it, while in fact the reality is more complicated, as it is evident by the armaments trade and the defense business of this shadow world.

J. G.: John Perkins calls it the >corporatocracy<. In *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*, he reveals how a revolving door exists between the multinational corporations, the banks, the government, as well as the media, whereby laws & policy are essentially forged by this corporatocracy, mostly ruled by self-interest and greed. Andrew



Russian-German Fraternization, *Shadow World*, Johan Grimont, 2016.
Courtesy Bundesarchiv

Feinstein explores this from the point of view of the arms trade in *The Shadow World*, the book that is the basis for the new film. In a sense, Social Darwinism has celebrated this idea of the >survival of the fittest< (a term coined by Herbert Spencer, but wrongly attributed to Darwin), as a way to justify an economic ideology of unbridled competition and greed, often leading to arms races. Yet, the predicament of our present financial crisis shows something is really out of kilter. What if this notion of >survival of the fittest< could be cast in a different light? Frans de Waal's research into bonobos, the so-called hippie-chimp, tells us a very different story. Genetically as close to man as the chimp, the bonobo is equally as relevant to the discussion about the origins of warfare. Especially de Waal's explorations into >empathy< and his focus on notions of >cooperation< and >conflict-resolution< offer a

counterpart to this celebrated paradigm of greed. Moreover, the fittest often turns out to be indeed the one who is able to cooperate. One aspect of human behavior chimps cannot illuminate is something we do even more than waging war, it's maintaining peace, writes De Waal in *Our Inner Ape* (2005).

S. C.: Human beings are distorted by the different social regimes they find themselves in, which turns them against each other, and through individualism, to use that word, everything that the apparatus of ideology, and in particular the media, are trying to foster, is a spirit of false confrontation. When human beings believe that they can act together in concert and cooperate, as it appears at the interstices of history, no greater power on earth than that! *Occupy* was about the fact that human beings could assemble and show each other respect and engage in discussion collectively without structures of authority. The amazing thing about Zuccotti Park, when I was down there, was this feeling of, you know, compassion, it was a different way of relating to people.

J. G.: The echo of *Occupy* mainstream was small in comparison to how big it really was.

S. C.: The broadcast media in this country are irredeemable. It is a convenient display of polarities of opinion, whether you watch Fox or MSNBC, it is the same oligarchic structure they supported. But the two interesting things about *Occupy* were the demand made by these very media: »Who are your leaders, and what do you want?« – and the refusal of *Occupy* to articulate these specific demands and the refusal to have leaders, who would be denounced by the same media.

Obviously what was mobilized and has been over the last 10-15 years, with punctuation points in Seattle, is the rise of social media, which can allow for other things. So the question of access is split between the ideological projections of broadcast media, and this new universe of social media.

J. G.: Reinventing that space of what is defined as a social contract?

S. C.: Well, it can be in a situation where the mainstream media, say in Egypt or Tunisia, exists in order to maintain the government's message, then the social media take on this emancipatory potential. In situations where more liberal conditions pertain, then the consequences are obviously more ambiguous. The 2008 Obama campaign was notable for its sophisticated use of virtual media, the first campaign run on those lines. But similarly, the Tea Party and right-wing extremism are as adept at using social media.

J. G.: Chris Hedges, NYT journalist, called Obama a Calvin Klein President, masterfully advertising his campaign, but a huge disappointment afterwards.

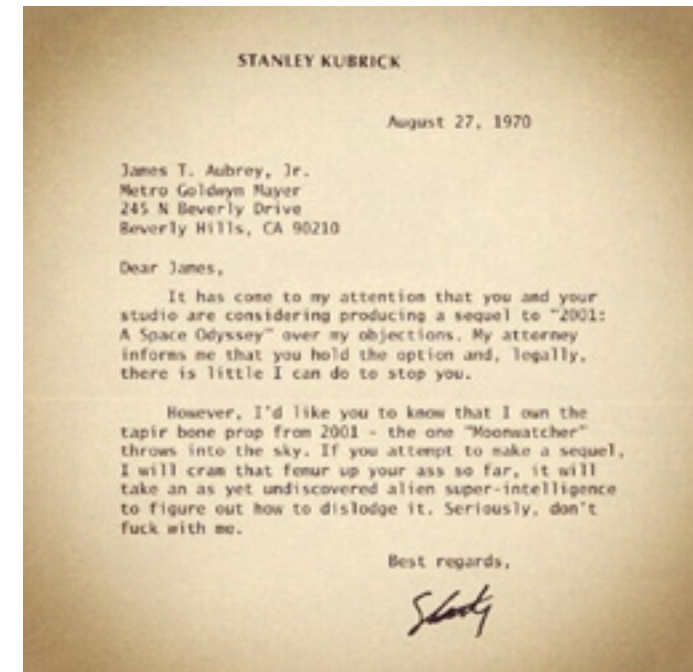
S. C.: Sure. That was bound to happen. But if grass-roots radicalism had been maintained, then there would be no need for *Occupy*, right? But yes, there has been three years of drift and disappointment.

J. G.: Nine days after Obama decided to send 30.000 more troops to Afghanistan, during his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, he declared: »War in one form or another, appeared with the first man.« It implies that war is inherently part of human nature and that it

has always been with us. However, historical evidence has proven these assumptions wrong. Archeologist Brian Ferguson claims war to be a relatively late human invention. Moreover, the human record shows long periods of absence of wars in certain areas. Also anthropologist Douglas Fry shows that war is absolutely not that universal. But the fact that war has always been with us, that it was there with the first man, is actually a myth. Some findings show different things.

S. C.: What do you think the findings show, in your view?

J. G.: Well, for example, the killer ape thesis goes back to archeologist Raymond Dart's findings of the *Australopithecus*, a human predecessor located in Africa. The specimen consistently showed a fossil skull fractured with a particular pair of holes. Dart interpreted this as indisputable evidence that human's earliest ancestors were murderers. They used animal leg bones as weapons, he argued, as they cause paired fractures on the skull. Now this is precisely what is portrayed in the opening sequence of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the film popularizing Robert Ardrey's killer ape theories that inspired Arthur Clarke and Stanley Kubrick to depict an animal-bone-turned-weapon giving birth to civilization. But lately a different picture about the australopithecines came to light. When anthropologist C. K. Brain examined the same collection of skulls, he arrived at a more plausible story; – an extinct leopard, found at the same geological layers, had two canine teeth corresponding exactly with the paired holes on the skulls. So, the murderous killer apes, so colorfully described by Dart and Ardrey, turned out to be merely lunch for leopards. So, it seems the popular depiction of our human ancestors in *2001: A Space Odyssey* is completely off the chart.



Fake letter produced by Steve Cox for *Films That Almost Got Made That Time Forgot* – 2002: *Another Space Odyssey*

S. C.: Politics has always used conceptions of nature in order to justify different regimes of power. We appeal to nature in order to justify what is a contingent cultural fact. So, I don't think the question is ever going to be resolved one way or another: are we killer apes or are we hippy chimps? Do we want to kill each other or do we want to get along?

J. G.: Frans de Waal calls us a bipolar ape. We swing between Hobbes and Rousseau. We're a living oxymoron. »But the fact that war belongs to the past«, to quote Howard Zinn, »does not mean it has to be part of the future.«

S. C.: I agree that war is not a natural condition of human beings, nor is it an inevitable condition of human social life. I don't believe that for a second. In favorable conditions human beings can get along, they can even get along without the apparatus of law, bureaucracy, the state and the police. That would be my version of anarchism, which is not about disorder, but about another conception of order that would be self-determining, based on love and respect, more or less. And then somebody is going to say, »Well, if that's true, how do you explain the wars that have punctuated history?«

J. G.: War is a historical phenomenon, but it's not because it is prevalent today that it cannot be abolished. At one point slavery was naturalized as it had alleged genetic underpinnings, or rape for that matter, was justified by the fact that it was innate, but that does not mean it could not be eliminated.

S. C.: Violence is a phenomenon with a history, right? To disavow that history in the name of a principled idea of non-violence is to risk amnesia, so the first thing is to understand the history of violence from which we spring. Violence is never one thing: it is usually a response to a perceived, previous violence. And the classical example would be Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in the context of the Trojan War, where the violence that led to war, leads to different cycles of murder, where Agamemnon is murdered, then Clytemnestra is murdered, and we finally end up in court where the question really is whether that cycle of violence can be suspended. And arguably, the Greeks' understanding of their institutions and law and theatre, was that they were capable of suspending violence whilst still understanding the violence from which we come. The problem with most modern

states like the US or Britain, or Belgium, is we disavow the history of violence out of which those states were constituted. Even when that history is a glorious history, or a revolutionary history, as for the most part people that we would identify as oppressed, this would mean a memory of violence.

J. G.: »Historical amnesia is the luxury of the oppressor«, as you cite Fanon.

S. C.: The history of violence amongst the average English person in 2012 with regard to Ireland is less than minimal, whereas the average Irish person from the Republic – and indeed from the North, to this day can recount a history of violence. But then, does that mean to accept that violence is a phenomenon of history? Or if history is a history of violence and counter-violence is that to conclude that violence is inevitable? I think it is to conclude that violence can be suspended in optimal circumstances.

J. G.: Violence longs to breed. War is contagious. But ultimately can one wage war on war? Your reading of Walter Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* takes on the crucial question: can a struggle against violence avoid becoming itself a violent struggle? To Benjamin the law itself has a violent origin, it is enforced by violence. So given this contradiction, to what extent can a non-violent resolution of conflict be possible?

S. C.: To Benjamin, law is the mechanism by which the violence of the state is continued, so the idea of a resolution of violence through law for him is off the table. It's a truism of European life from the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, that law, and international law in

particular, is a way of suspending violence. That is the official view. But beneath it there's another argument that international law is simply the masquerade for Western imperial power. The rise of international law is also the rise of colonialism, which is the most violent set of procedures for expropriating people, usually non-Western people. So, someone like Benjamin would urge for something more extreme, say revolutionary activity, as a way of suspending the violence of law. In many ways it is the line between a reformist or a revolutionary idea of politics. But you can criticize both. The revolutionary idea is as flawed as the reformist. To suspend law, to conceive a society without law, which is what the young Marx did, you legitimize the most grotesque forms of violence.

J. G.: So, does the commitment to non-violence might require the use of violence? Benjamin mentions that >divine violence< may manifest itself in what he called a >true war.< But isn't >just war< something of an abused oxymoron?

S. C.: We have to go case by case, so the idea of a global philosophical answer to this question is always going to miss the point. So, it is an ongoing dialogue. For example Mahatma Gandhi prosecuted a successful non-violence resistance to British imperial rule in India by mobilizing the new and the old, by mobilizing techniques that he had learned in reading people like Kropotkin, a Russian anarchist, and articulating elements of Hindu traditions, what he called Shatyagraha. It's political genius to combine the old and the new, and that worked until the civil war and the partition of India and Pakistan. But would that have worked in the French colonial regime of Algeria? No.

J. G.: Gene Sharp's nonviolent action versus Arundhati Roy's particular take on the Tamil as part of the situation in India. Or the Zapatistas in the mid-nineties in Chiapas?

S. C.: You go context by context. I am against a principal, global idea of non-violence, which would mean that all acts of violence have to be rejected. That is simply a disavowal of history. Say, the resistance to French colonial rule in Algeria was wrong because it was violent, you miss something important about what was happening there. But are we therefore condemned to an unending cycle of violence? No, violence can be transformed. One example I know a little is the Irish case. People who 20 years ago were killing each other, the loyalist paramilitaries in the North of Ireland, and Sinn Féin, the Irish Republican Army, are now negotiating in the Northern Irish Parliament. Is it perfect? No, it is not perfect. But they are not killing each other. So how did that happen? It happened through a series of compromises, an exhaustion with violence, and the former colonial power, Britain, taking responsibility for its history to some extent.

J. G.: In 2004 George W. Bush declared: »The reason why I'm so strong on democracy is democracies don't go to war with each other. And that's why I'm such a strong believer that the way forward in the Middle East, the broader Middle East, is to promote democracy.« War in name of democracy. You called anarchism direct democracy?

S. C.: The history of anarchism doesn't fit in with the major arc of history. Marxism works much better in terms of a historical narrative: we can assess its merits or demerits dispassionately as intellectuals. Anarchism has a much messier history. Most of what's successful

in anarchism has largely been invisible, things like the free school movement, setting up a doctor's surgery in a local community, or something like the allotment movement in England, where people just plant vegetables. Urban farming.

J. G.: >Grow your own carrots< is an absolute political antidote to corporations like Monsanto, whose aim is to expropriate seed cultures worldwide, basically by corporate patenting the very building blocks of life.

S. C.: You know, modern anarchism really begins with the diggers in the 1640s, people from the London area, who go out to the country and start to dig, and reclaim the common. So, farming would be an example of where this is happening now.

J. G.: Like the Transition Town movement, with their variation of a local barter economy, such as time-banking, etc.

S. C.: I am very sympathetic towards that. In cities like Cleveland and Detroit, disused urban blocks are being turned into farms. I call that anarchism, an effort to determine your existence, the desire for autonomy over the resources at your disposal.

J. G.: But then how do you protect that autonomous zone, right?

S. C.: What usually happens is that human beings find themselves with a set of institutions that alienate them from what they understand as their desires. Political disappointment is a motivating force in ethical and philosophical thinking, as David Byrne said, »This is not my

beautiful car, this is not my beautiful house and you ask yourself, how did I get here?« So, when this becomes intolerable, as with *Occupy*, people will be emboldened to do something about it, what Judith Butler calls the >carefully crafted fuck-you<. Now, the history of resistance is overwhelmingly a history of non-violent resistance, but as it builds confidence, it confronts institutions, in particular the police and the law. It's usually at this point where that non-violent movement becomes a victim of violence, often in confrontation with the police, where it has then to negotiate a situation of violence: do you react, or do you not react?

J. G.: And the belief in non-violence is transgressed to protect that non-violent space?

S. C.: In my view, violence is sometimes necessary, but never justifiable. Let's take the case of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Christian pastor who was killed shortly before the end of WW II. He was committed to pacifism, but then he got involved in the attempted assassination of Hitler and was executed. In the unpublished writings from during his captivity, he calls *die Bereitschaft zur Schuldübernahme*, the preparedness to take guilt on to oneself. Someone committed to non-violence, might find the preparedness to take on a situation of guilt, in that case to try and kill Hitler.

J. G.: Maybe it's crucial to make a distinction between violence and war, whereas the latter is an elevated form of aggression on the organizational level of society where hierarchical structures, leaders, coercion and the corporatocracy take part in. Killing someone because he steals your wife, is of a different order than when it is elevated

into something like the Trojan wars, where a part of society is being coerced into committing war, because particular leaders benefit from it. And because it is part of an institution as a cultural contagion, we might possibly invent ways to abolish it.

S. C.: But the Trojan war was fought over the abduction of a woman, of Helen, and probably that was an excuse for the imperial expansion of the Mycenaean Greeks in that period into the rich areas of Troy and the Hittite Empire. And then the war ended eleven years later! However, war today has become legally almost non-existent. Or technical wars at one level, and if you like at the rhetorical level, war has become generalized. We are constantly at war. Like war on drugs, war on terror, and so on.

J. G.: Exactly, Hardt and Negri point out that today's imperial peace obscures a state of constant war. This perpetual war pervades all aspects of life: what we eat, what we consume, what we talk about. We have become avid consumers of fear, and legally, we are now all terrorists until proven innocent. It's the domestication of fear by a corporatocracy serving its economic greeds in the interest of a global war industry.

S. C.: Heidegger remarks during the Second World War, or immediately afterwards, that we are going to live in societies where the line between peace and war will become increasingly difficult to draw. Peace is war, and war is peace.

J. G.: Reminiscent of Richard Holbrooke's dictum: >bombing for peace ...< But can peace not be looked at on its own terms? Peace is

often defined as absence of war, but peace might be something else all together. Factors leading to peaceful conflict resolution are not the same as those that lead to war. It's quite different to suggest the installment of a peace room (as proposed by futurist Barbara Marx Hubbard) in favor of a war room, the latter assuming that war will always be with us.

S. C.: This takes us back to Hobbes' critique of democracy, where everything can mean anything, and truth is lies, war is peace, black is white, day is night and so forth. It's like the media space we live in today: opinions seem constantly re-described. And for Hobbes that's why you need the Leviathan. You need the state, the king, to say this is what it means, and if you don't agree with that, we kill you (*laughter*).

J. G.: Ingrained in its particular history, could the Leviathan not be redefined today?

S. C.: Well, this would be the fantasy of the United Nations, the fantasy of a world state or some kind of Leviathan as a way to resolve conflicts. That could easily come about, but it is against the interests of the hegemonic states.

J. G.: It's a joke now, but does that mean it has to be a joke forever?

S. C.: The awful truth is that the League of Nations, between 1919 and 1930 was a more radical body than the United Nations today, based upon the presupposition of state sovereignty, meaning that there can be no intervention into states that are sovereign. Obviously the major hegemonic states like the Soviet Union in particular would not have

agreed to it otherwise. Now could there be a modern Leviathan? You would need to remove the interests of the hegemonic states. And this comes back to the film: how the hegemonic state functions through the shadow world of the arms trade. If you could abolish the arms trade, then a new Leviathan might be possible.

J. G.: Even if you would abolish the arms trade this Leviathan might fail. Maybe the arms trade is merely a symptom of something much deeper.

S. C.: What do you think it is a symptom of?

J. G.: Well, why don't we explore the politics of love, it might be linked to this? You emphasize in your new book that >How to love?< becomes the crucial question, that it is stronger than death? But in an interview with Tom McCarthy you referred once to »language as an act of murder«. Now, Alberto Manguel claims exactly the opposite in *City of Words*, as he paraphrases novelist Alfred Döblin: »language is a form of loving others, language lets us know why we are together.« He elaborates on >us< as storytellers, meaning stories shape why we are together as a >we<. Anyway, we talked earlier how language can just do the opposite: concoct stories to justify war, to masquerade war as a peace process.

S. C.: Yes, »language as an act of murder«, is the Maurice Blanchot thing. If I say >iPhone<, or hold my iPhone, is a different thing. In placing the object under a concept I kill it, I subsume it. He contrasts that with a more poetic idea of language, by letting things be the things that they are, by not placing an object under a concept, but

using concepts to brush against objects and let them be the objects that they are.

J. G.: But then you have to believe that objects are objects. That things are things.

S. C.: Language is that dimension that can let matter, matter. It is a question of letting material things be the things they are and not to try to subsume.

J. G.: Still, matter remains that undefined *a priori*, just as cognitive scientists assume our mind and brain emerge from matter, but fail to define what matter really is, whereas quantum physicists have come to question matter altogether.

S. C.: Matter is what is in the back garden.

J. G.: But a Kogi shaman, for example, would surely say: »okay, but that garden is part of me, I'm not separated from that garden ...«

S. C.: Okay, the universe is alive in some sense.

J. G.: In the sense of a participatory universe. We're all entangled in one way or another, it's a notion of inter-subjectivity, an understanding of sharing, you share a reality. And realities may be co-constructed. Matter included. Like sharing a garden ...

S. C.: Philosophically, it's like different forms of idealism: it is the entirety of that which is in a sense connected to me, subsumable

within me. Could matter be part of that? One philosophical view which unites both is Spinoza, who has a completely material idea of the universe, but he calls that God.

J. G.: And he includes himself, and also everyone else, as part of that idea.

S. C.: Yes, through the intellect I can participate in that. I would love to believe that.

J. G.: Physicist John Wheeler would argue for a holographic universe, where the thing and myself are entangled. The observer is entangled with the observed. There's not a me subsuming an object, nor an >us< versus >them<, but an ever changing >we<. One holographic part reflects another, and you are actually a little holographic part reflecting the rest of it all. A very different idea of how to think about matter. Maybe this »reality« gap has something to do with love, with entanglement as it were? But let's go back to the politics of love. So, everything is fair in love and war? I'm joking!

S. C.: Of course it's a joke. All love is war, not war is love.

J. G.: In your book you cite Levinas: »The face of the other in its precariousness and defenselessness, is for me at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace.«

S. C.: Philosophy is fundamentally bound up with the acceptance of our mortality. The task of philosophy is learning how to die, and the philosopher's question is the question of how to live, and the answer

to that question is by learning how to die. This is Socrates' answer in *The Phaedo*, and is repeated by Cicero, Montaigne and all those other people. But how does love fit into this? I have become increasingly skeptical of that identification of philosophy with mortality. Love, it seems, pushes in a different direction. I have been drawn incredibly strongly to medieval female mystics, Marguerite Porette is one. And for her, the idea of love is an act of spiritual daring that attempts to eviscerate the old self in order that something new might come into being. So, love is that.

J. G.: Okay, but how does this tie back in to the idea of a society, the bigger self, as it were, because this is still a one-on-one relationship with the Divine?

S. C.: Well, at its most extreme, once I annihilate myself and the space where my soul becomes the space of the Divine, at that point I unite with others. There is no difference between myself and others.

J. G.: In a Spinoza sense?

S. C.: It's close to that. It's also why this was heresy in the Middle Ages, because they took onto themselves the authority to deal with God.

J. G.: Like the Cathars said: »I'm part of God. Why do I need these bunch of institutions?«

S. C.: And therefore the Catholic Church and the state as the agent of the church is unnecessary. And why it had to be suppressed. So for me there is a direct link between the individual and the collective aspects of love.

J. G.: The Cathars conceived a particular way of living together, of what community stood for as a reflection of these very same ideas. Also the beguineage, the medieval female mystics, were actually called the first feminists. As you said: God is the first anarchist.

S. C.: Well, God is the first anarchist in the sense that Christianity has in its foundational text a radical discourse addressed to the poor and the dispossessed, against the imperial power of Rome and against the religious political power of Judaism. But yes, God is the first anarchist (*laughter*). Meister Eckhart said »I pray to God to rid me of God.« Or: »What I am asking you to think about is a place where the soul is no longer the soul.« Of course, he was also condemned as a heretic. Through spiritual daring and risk, one enters into a form of collective practice that rejects authoritarian structures, and thereby one becomes free. That's why the Situationists in the 60s and 70s, people like Vaneigem in particular, were looking back at *Eckhart's Heresy of the Free Spirit*.

J. G.: We live in a society deprived of something essential, not even aware of what we actually miss, since we lack the stories and concepts. Not dissimilar to the final scene of Godard's film *Alphaville*, depicting a society where every word relating to the idea of love is banned. And this woman, in love with the protagonist, is searching to express her feelings, but she doesn't find the words, as the concept of love is foreign to her.

S. C.: Absolutely. Our situation is the opposite. We have the word but don't have the emotion. We understand love as a contract between two pre-existing individuals, but for the mystics love has much higher

stakes, as it is a work of evisceration and radical questioning which opens another dimension of experiences. Throughout his career Lacan was thinking whether one can love and desire in the same place. Love has become this nice thing that you feel, whatever, for your pet dog, your boyfriend or girlfriend. Desire is this other experience divorced from that, through internet porn or whatever. Somehow we live in a radical separation of love and desire. Desire is becoming instrumentalized and love has become sentimentalized. Now these female mystics were trying to love and desire in the same place, and that's the real issue.

J. G.: The togetherness with yourself, as well as with the other, mirrors how we deal with politics and basically how we can live together as a society on a whole.

S. C.: My residual Freudianism would be that we are creatures of libidinous desire. It's sort of a mess, but the question is how that confines our personal and collective articulation in relationship to something like love. For me that would be the kind of ambition, which is also a political ambition. This was what people like R. D. Laing and Kuwasari, were thinking about sensibly. We seem to be a long way from that.

May 1, 2012

Hate as a transformative force

– An essay on Walter Benjamin

by Andrea Messner

This is supposed to be about love's alleged opposite: hate – as a transformative emancipatory force. In 1842, Georg Herwegh wrote *Das Lied vom Hasse* (»The Song of Hate«), which states:

Die Liebe kann uns helfen nicht,
Die Liebe nicht erretten;
Halt' du, o Haß, dein jüngst Gericht,
Brich Du, o Haß, die Ketten!
Und wo es noch Tyrannen gibt,
Die laßt uns keck erfassen;

Wir haben lang genug geliebt,
Und wollen endlich hassen!^{1/2}

Walter Benjamin has pursued a similar approach for some time. How he imagines the relationship between indignation and emancipatory political action, between hate and revolutionary intervention, will be addressed here – collage-like and on a trial basis.

History: »catastrophe in permanence«

»The golden age as disaster.«³ (Walter Benjamin)

For Walter Benjamin, the only historical norm is oppression: it is the »catastrophe in permanence«⁴. For him, there is no – continuous or even automatic – progress in history: the oppression is continuous; automatic only its reproduction.

Benjamin reinterprets the evolutionary notion of progress in a radical way. He takes up the Marxian conception of the historical process as a locomotive, which moves with increasing speed to the station »utopia« – as the image of the train ride demands, the tracks are already laid out; abandoning them means accident and misfortune⁵ – and reinterprets

¹ Herwegh, 79.

² »To right us and to rescue us / Hath Love essayed in vain; / O Hate! proclaim thy judgment-day, / And break our bonds in twain. / As long as ever tyrants last, / Our task shall not abate: / We've practiced loving long enough, / And come at length to hate!« (Longfellow, 369).

³ Benjamin, V, 1213.

⁴ Ibid., 437.

⁵ See Heller, *Der Bahnhof als Metapher. Eine Betrachtung über die beschleunigte Zeit und die Endstationen der Utopie*, quoted from: Löwy, 113.

it: the train of supposedly progressive history in Benjamin is racing towards the abyss; the interruption of this catastrophic journey is the actively induced disruption: »the grip [...] to the emergency brake«⁶. For Benjamin, the classless society is not to be conceived as the ultimate goal of progress in history, but as its »so often failed, finally accomplished interruption«⁷. With the transformation of the metaphor from the »locomotive of world history«⁸ to the »emergency brake«⁹ Benjamin emblematises a paradigm shift criticizing the affirmation of acceleration, the enthusiasm for the unstoppable, the linearity and the claim to totality within the locomotive metaphor.¹⁰ Without this critique of progress – without the radical doubt about the automatic, unstoppable, intrinsic improvement of humankind – Benjamin cannot think of any revolutionary intervention.

Progress: The (hi)story of the victors

In Benjamin's conception, the »catastrophe« corresponds with the »history of the victors«: it is the victors who – as hegemonic groups and those in power – write history or primarily leave behind historical

⁶ Ibid., I, 1232. Cf. also Karl Marx: »The revolutions are the locomotives of history« (Marx (b), 85) to which Benjamin's critique refers: »Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train – namely, the human race – to activate the emergency brake.«

⁷ Benjamin, I, 1231.

⁸ Marx (b), 85; Benjamin, I, 1232.

⁹ Benjamin, I, 1232.

¹⁰ Cf. Wizisla, 679; and Hawel, 37.

documents as »culture«¹¹. The historiographical focus on »culture« – that which becomes manifest and therefore visible and which remains visible in its following, i.e. which is still accessible and of interest for a future historian in their time – leads to an »empathy with the victor«¹² at the expense of the liquidation of the »rags«¹³ of history: that which is not considered valuable, which is not maintained over time to this extent or is not recognized as historical testimony. In this way, the imaginary of the victors – and their relations of domination – would be reproduced in and by historiography:¹⁴ one gets the »famous ones« who are »celebrated as geniuses and heroes« at the expense of an amnesia towards the »memory of the nameless«¹⁵. This tendency to an »empathy with the victor« »invariably benefits the rulers«¹⁶: the history of the victors, with its belief in progress, leaves behind oppressed; the linear causal history of victory perpetuates this oppression. Seen as the work of »geniuses and heroes«¹⁷ the phenomena of the past are dig-

¹¹ Benjamin, I, 1240 f. Benjamin continues: »The rulers of today« are the »heirs of all who have ever triumphed in history. [...] Whoever has achieved victory in the thousand battles that have permeated history up to this day, has his share of the triumphs of the rulers of today over those who are ruled today. The inventory of prey [...] is called culture« (ibid.).

¹² Ibid., 696.

¹³ Ibid., V, 574.

¹⁴ Through historicism's commitment to the reconstruction of the »development of the unity and the progress of the events« (Ranke, 61) historicism gives up the possibility to reflect a historical fact while taking into account its possible – discontinuous – later effects.

¹⁵ Benjamin, I, 1240 f.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

nified as »heritage«¹⁸; they come across as apologetic preconditions and the prehistory of the respective *status quo*. But insofar as that which manifests itself as culture owes its »existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries«, for Benjamin, »there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism«;¹⁹ and just as such a document is not free of barbarism: it taints also the manner in which it was and is passed from one owner to another.

This insight – and, consequently, a decisive break with the idea of progress – must become the base of the concept of history. In Benjamin, the concept of causal necessity or teleology is replaced by a discontinuous conception of history from the point of view of the oppressed: the past is accessible in a »multiplicity of histories«²⁰ – in »a thousand strands«²¹ – and not as a (historicist) unity or totality,²² since the latter can only be maintained by a blindness to the »peaks and crags«²³ of history. Benjamin, therefore, considers »catastrophes« not to be regressive moments but a kind of ordinary condition that can be misinterpreted as progress, though thereby preventing real progress: i.e. ending injustice.

¹⁸ Ibid., V, 591.

¹⁹ Ibid., I, 1249.

²⁰ Ibid., 1238.

²¹ Ibid., 1233.

²² Benjamin calls for »the liquidation of the epic element [...], as Marx did when he wrote *Capital*. He realized that the history of capital could be constructed only within the broad, steel framework of a theory« which renounces the continuous historical continuity (ibid., 1240 f.).

²³ Ibid., 1242.

The (hi)story of the oppressed and the present as now-time

»The dead return [transformed], their deeds want to become with us once more.«²⁴ (Ernst Bloch)

Benjamin pursues the goal of breaking with the idea of a movement of improvement inherent in the historical process and facilitating emancipatory practice. For him, »the history of the oppressed« is a history of oppression in two respects: on the one hand, it is the (hi)story of those who were and are oppressed;²⁵ on the other hand, it is also a repressed, forgotten, unrecognized layer of the past²⁶ that calls for real memory, i.e. for the »weak messianic power«²⁷ of the Now: this Now has, so to speak, been »expected« from that past; it is the past's future.²⁸ For Benjamin, the task of the historical materialist is to capture and to found this critical – doubly »oppressed« – »memory«.²⁹ Benjamin advocates a shift of the frame of reference of historical knowledge from the »cultural history« to a history of the fight against oppression:³⁰ »real historical conception« does not exist in gratitude for or the acknowledg-

²⁴ Bloch, 9: »Die Toten kommen [verwandelt] wieder, ihr Tun will mit uns nochmals werden.«

²⁵ »Oppressed« in the sense of unfree, enslaved, not coming to their right, regarded as inferior: Benjamin speaks of the »enslaved ancestors« (Ibid., I, 700).

²⁶ »Repressed« in the sense of psychoanalysis: unaware, unconscious, only latent; invisible in the »history of the victors«: given only as absent or empty spaces.

²⁷ Benjamin, I, 694.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. f. as well as *ibid.*, 1246.

³⁰ »Cultural history as such disappears: it must be integrated into the history of class struggles« (*ibid.*, 1240).

ment of won victories, but in the memory of past defeats. As a history of past defeats in the fight against oppression, the »history of the oppressed« is to be understood as a »discontinuum« – as an interrupted movement:³¹ in Benjamin's conception, such fights are unfinished and can be resumed or »quoted«³²; they can have their future in the present »now«.³³

Benjamin distinguishes two different temporal levels: the relation between the »present« and the »past« is thought of as a purely temporal, causal one: a continuous course; the relationship between the »has-been« and the »now« is a »dialectical« one: a »skittish« constellation that shows itself in »images«³⁴. While past implies closure – it is »one-dimensional«³⁵ –, this is different in the relationship – the image – between has-been and now. The »historical index« that such an image carries with it is twofold: on the one hand, it is the one of the has-been which as yet incomplete is present in the now, and necessarily connected to it, on the other hand, the index of the now itself. This historical »theory of relativity« fundamentally questions the monodimensional facticity of positivism: what has been for Benjamin is not fixed and cannot be fixed; at this level of historical knowledge, the homogeneous chronological timeline of linear history is bound to burst. If the present succeeds in grasping such a past in a now of recognizability, past, present, and future collapse into one through the actualization of the has-been in the now which is its future: comprising »actuality«. In

³¹ Ibid., 1236; see also Löwy, 95 f.

³² Ibid., 1245.

³³ Cf. *ibid.*, 1240.

³⁴ Benjamin, V, 576 f.

³⁵ Ibid., 587.

the concept of now-time, three dimensions shoot together: the now-time is the »now of recognizability« of a has-been; in the now in which it becomes actual, this has-been has its future; the now recognizes itself in this has-been and recognizes it as its own discontinuous prehistory; and thus realizes to be now(-time): to be the time of possible change, of possible intervention, of possible political-historical action. For Benjamin, the now-time in this threefold dimension corresponds to the »model of the messianic« time, as it »summarizes the entire history of humanity into a monstrous abbreviation«³⁶. It is a moment of »all-sided and integral actuality«³⁷, which refers to the messianic time.³⁸ As a »time filled full by now-time« the present comes to the consciousness of not being mere »transition«³⁹: only as now-time can the present adequately conceive itself as responsible and capable of acting. The materialistic historiography presented by Benjamin uses the past to activate the now. In a way, time is fought by time. He emphasizes the discontinu-

³⁶ Ibid., I, 703.

³⁷ Ibid., 1235.

³⁸ Using the example of the Spartacus League, this way of thinking could be understood as follows: the antique slave rebellions come to recognizability (again) in the Spartacus; they have their future in it; Spartacus has its past in the slave revolts of antiquity; it understands itself as updating this unfinished struggle: now. For Benjamin, the historical consciousness that the proletariat has to conceive itself as a descendant of the millennia-long fight against the oppressors, beginning with the slave revolts, becomes manifest in the Spartacus League (cf. Benjamin, I, 700; Löwy, 81 f.). Through this historical reference a negative continuity in the discontinuity arises: »the tradition of the oppressed« (Benjamin, I, 1236, 1246): it should be perceived and harnessed as an accumulated force motivating and strengthening the fight against oppression.

³⁹ Benjamin, I, 702.

ity of historical becoming in order to enable the use⁴⁰ of what has been in the now-time: his object is the »history of the oppressed«, his goal is the activation of the present as now-time. The critical potential of this approach consists not least in withdrawing from the passivity that Benjamin sees in the idea of homogeneous continuous progress:⁴¹ insofar as it is thought to be uniform, infinite, unalterable, necessary, historical action is ultimately futile in it: empty of meaning. For Benjamin, this is different in the present, which has become conscious to be now-time: »as [...] »now«, the present« is constituted and understood as the time of potential updating something unfinished.⁴²

History, in Benjamin's understanding, is an object of construction. His materialist historiography breaks out a now-time-filled past from the continuum of history: a process of deconstruction and thus destruction. This is followed by a re-construction in which the past loaded with now-time is put together as a new narrative – as a new »image«.⁴³ Emancipatory political practice is supposed to be guided by this image, which no longer serves the victors but the oppressed fighting in the now.⁴⁴ In this way, Benjamin says, »under ruins«⁴⁵ a trace of what could have been different and thus still testifies this alterity could be found. Such signs, blanks and marginal phenomena – »peaks and crags«⁴⁶ – question the established order: as a »time filled with now-time« the present

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, V, 574.

⁴¹ Benjamin, V, 178.

⁴² Ibid., I, 704.

⁴³ Benjamin, V, 577.

⁴⁴ Cf. Hawel, 28.

⁴⁵ Benjamin, I, 695.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1242.

comes to the realization »not to be transition«⁴⁷: the present become now-time is not only the time of historical insight but also the time of possible outbreak and possible change. On the one hand, the historical »victors« are »denounced«;⁴⁸ at the same time, all interest is directed towards the oppressed: that of history, which attains its recognisability only in the now. By attempting in this way to »wrest« the historical tradition »away from a conformism that is about to overpower it«⁴⁹, »the image in the now of recognisability« bears for Benjamin »in the highest degree the stamp of the critical, dangerous moment«⁵⁰: in the remembrance of non-hegemonic, critical, alternative images of history, »the materialistic presentation of history [...] leads the past to bring the present into a critical position«⁵¹ – in a twofold sense: on the one hand, such remembrance means non-conformist taking-possession of history and thus a critical position towards the dominant conditions of the *status quo*; on the other hand, by remembering, the rememberer becomes aware of the »moment of danger«⁵²; the »critical moment«⁵³ which consists in the realization that this »status quo threatens to remain«⁵⁴.

According to Benjamin, in the awakened consciousness of the present as the now-time, in the remembrance of the moments of revolt against oppression, the historical materialist is given the capability to contract

and interrupt the empty quantitative time.⁵⁵ The good historian knows this and has the gift »to fan the spark of hope in the past«⁵⁶. Such appropriation of history leads to »a revolutionary opportunity in the struggle for the oppressed past«⁵⁷. In this capacity for awakening, there is the »weak messianic power« which »like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with.« It is »messianic«, first because it sets itself not in the homogeneous and empty conception of time, but in the now, and »messianic«, because in it lies the possibility of »salvation«. Benjamin shifts from a time of (causal) necessity to an open time of possibilities: (historical) alternatives break into necessity, interrupt and break it open; within it the present *status quo* is not thought of as a (historical) necessity.⁵⁸

Since Benjamin strongly interlinks historical knowledge and emancipatory practice, and equates the historical and the (revolutionary) historical subject,⁵⁹ Benjamin's »writing history« (»Geschichte schreiben«⁶⁰) can be understood in a twofold sense: as materialistic his-

⁴⁷ Ibid., 702.

⁴⁸ Tiedemann, 36.

⁴⁹ Benjamin, I, 695.

⁵⁰ Ibid., V, 577 f.

⁵¹ Ibid., 588.

⁵² Ibid., I, 695.

⁵³ Ibid., V, 593.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Löwy describes the now-time as a kind of monad: it compresses or summarizes all past »messianic moments«, the entire tradition of the oppressed, as a redemptive force present in the now-time, which is the time of the historian and a revolutionary moment. To that extent, this monad is doubled in Löwy's interpretation: on the one hand, it is the summary of the entire history of mankind in the form of a history of the struggle of the oppressed; at the same time it is the messianic interruption of time or of the historical process: a flash-like moment of liberation or freedom that announces and anticipates the world of liberated humanity (cf. Löwy, 100).

⁵⁶ Benjamin, I, 695.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 703.

⁵⁸ Cf. also Löwy, 102.

⁵⁹ Cf. also Mensching, 176.

⁶⁰ Cf. i.a. Benjamin, V, 595.

toriography and as action, i.e. making history as historical subjects.⁶¹ By turning away from the confidence in progress to the insight into the »catastrophe in permanence« and the openness of history, there is an awareness that the worst can happen; but it can also be prevented: the hands are not tied to the respective present.

»Hopeful, but not optimistic«⁶²

This force or power of intervening historical subjects is no reason for optimism, but for hope. Historical actors in Benjamin's sense are aware that the success of their struggles is not mechanically prefigured – historically not guaranteed. This insecurity does not lead to passivity or resignation, but is an intensified motivation for action: history will be what is *made* out of it. However, given the experience of »catastrophe«⁶³, it is important to exercise pessimism: »organizing«⁶⁴ pessimism without giving up hope for success.

For what is the program of the bourgeois parties? A bad poem on springtime. [...] The socialist sees that »finer future of our children and grandchildren« in a society in which all act »as if they were angels« and everyone has as much »as if he were rich« and everyone lives »as if he were free«. Of angels, wealth, freedom, not a trace. [...] And the stock imagery of the social-democratic associations? [...] Optimism.⁶⁵

⁶¹ One passage that suggests this reading is: »The French Revolution thought of itself as a latter-day Rome. It cited ancient Rome« (ibid., 701).

⁶² Eagleton, *Title*.

⁶³ Benjamin, V, 428.

⁶⁴ Cf. ibid., II, 308.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Opposing this, Benjamin calls for »pessimism all along the line«⁶⁶. Michael Löwy argues to read Benjamin's pessimistic hope similar to Pascal's wager:

1. One acts revolutionary-intervening, and the threatening catastrophe is prevented.
2. One acts revolutionary-intervening, and the threatening catastrophe is not prevented.
3. One does not act revolutionary-intervening, but could have prevented the threatening catastrophe.
4. One does not act revolutionary-intervening, and could not have prevented the threatening catastrophe.

In this way of thinking, one should bet on (1). Benjamin's hope is thus a pessimistic-revolutionary one.⁶⁷ The transcendental moment of this hope can be thought of as situated in the viscera of historical reality: salvaging remembrance does not reveal a beyond of history, »but a wattle-work, a tissue [...] made of other possibilities of the historical, material«⁶⁸, multi-layered abundance of reality. According to Benjamin, these alternatives are banned in the history of the oppressed. The pres-

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Cf. also Löwy, 107, 114, 137. This pessimism is fundamentally different from fatalistic resignation and manifestations of cultural pessimism such as Carl Schmitt's or Oswald Spengler's, who feared the decline of elites or nation (cf. ibid., 9). In Löwy's interpretation, Benjamin's – hopeful – »pessimistic« theory restores utopia's negative force by breaking with both teleological determinism and a positively formulated ideal of society (Cf. ibid., 111).

⁶⁸ Lindner, 298.

ence of this branched structure of historical alternatives – the multiplicity of possibilities – can function as a negative critique of the *status quo*.⁶⁹ Similarly to the functioning of critique through utopias – in which the description of a disparate world, a world in enormous qualitative discrepancy with reality works as a critique of this reality without even mentioning it –, the demonstration of historical alternatives is always connected to the questioning of the legitimacy of the *status quo*;⁷⁰ its critical examination in a now of recognizability.⁷¹ Within this frame, for Benjamin, the »tradition of the oppressed« reveals emancipatory historical alternatives to the history of the victors. Thus, Benjamin dismisses every concept of a timeless historical truth and proceeds to a kind of theory of relativity of historical-political knowledge and action: history occurs all the time, but it can and must also be made – no *status quo* and no injustice can be thought of and accepted as without any alternative.⁷²

For Benjamin, the »multiplicity of histories« corresponds to a multiplicity of points of view of collective as well as individual subjects. Benjamin's starting point are such points of view: more precisely those of the »oppressed«. Emancipation or abolition of domination have to be thought of from the standpoint of the oppressed. Therewith Benjamin does not mean a homogeneous oppressed class; his revolutionary interest is directed at a general task of emancipation that can be applied at

⁶⁹ Cf. also Löwy, 107.

⁷⁰ Cf. Benjamin, I, 1244: »Function of political utopia: to illuminate the sector of what is worth to be destructed«.

⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 694: It is »to question ever again every victory that has ever gone to the rulers.«

⁷² Cf. also the TINA-Principle and its critique, e.g. by Wolfgang Streeck (»Die Wiederkehr der Verdrängten als Anfang vom Ende des neoliberalen Kapitalismus«) and Löwy, 253.

any time in history on politically, economically, religiously, ethnically, culturally, linguistically, sexually oppressed, women, people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTTIQs; to all those, according to Löwy, whom Hannah Arendt called »Pariah«.^{73/74} Benjamin's aspirations are directed toward a general abolition of domination as oppressive heteronomous power – directed against dominion over other people as well as over nature;⁷⁵ against the authoritarian exercise of power as well as against the abstract, reifying force of bureaucratic apparatus, of capital, of goods.

The importance of acting-intervening subjects: revolutionary chance in permanence

»There is the closest connection between the historical action of a class and the notion this class has of history.«⁷⁶

⁷³ Cf. Arendt, 209 ff.

⁷⁴ Cf. Löwy, 23, 111 ff.

⁷⁵ For the critique of the exploitation of nature see Benjamin, V, 764 ff.: Convolute W [FOURIER]; Benjamin, I, 699, 1249: critique of Joseph Dietzgen's saying of nature that »exists gratis« (Dietzgen (a), 17; as well as Benjamin's direct reference to Dietzgen: Benjamin, I, 699 and 1249) and the idea of a limitless exploitation of nature in the service of the emancipation of man. Thereby Benjamin partially anticipates ecological considerations and concerns of the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the third millennium: climate catastrophe, degrowth movement, post-growth movement, climate justice movement etc. He is enthusiastic about Fourier's ideas and interprets them as intuitions of another, non-destructive relationship with nature, which should lead to both new insights and a balance between the social and the natural environment (see also Löwy, 76).

⁷⁶ Benjamin, I, 1241.

»Catastrophe – to have missed the opportunity;
Critical moment – the status quo threatens to be preserved;
Progress – the first revolutionary measure taken.«⁷⁷

While the idea of a »mechanism of progress«⁷⁸ leads to optimistic attentism and fatalistic passivity where the historical subject's ability to act is radically narrowed or meaningless – influencing the mechanical⁷⁹ historical process is ultimately impossible⁸⁰ – Benjamin's conception of a discontinuous history capable of opening up breaks the mould of the strict determinism of a »homogeneous and empty« process⁸¹ or progress: the historical subject is attributed to possess that very power which objectivism yields to the anonymous historical process.⁸² Although Benjamin wants to abolish the concept of progress as process and presents a fundamental critique of it, he has a concept of progress,

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Dietzgen (a), 9.

⁷⁹ Cf. Dietzgen (a), 9; Dietzgen (b), 311; see also Kautsky (b), 57; for a critique of this concept see among others Benjamin, I, 1232; Horkheimer, 61; Sandkühler, 32.

⁸⁰ In this context cf. also Kautsky: Social Democracy »is a revolutionary party, but not a revolution-making party. We know that our goal can be attained only through a revolution. We also know that it is just as little in our power to create this revolution as it is in the power of our opponents to prevent it. It is no part of our work to instigate a revolution or to prepare the way for it« (Kautsky (a), 57) because the objective conditions must arise from the mechanism of progress and can neither be brought about nor prevented.

⁸¹ »Procedural« in the sense of (lat.) *procedere*: successively advancing, proceeding, progressing; »process« in the sense of: continuous movement, a step- or phase-wise linear course as development or progress.

⁸² Cf. also Mensching, 180.

too; he uses the concept of »progress« in a twofold sense: he (A) criticizes the idea of progress in the sense of progressive process, however uses (B) the term within some passages with a positive meaning; in this latter – positive – sense, progress for Benjamin is a kind of qualitative social change in the sense of: »clearing up with the present injustice«.⁸³

By strongly aligning his concept of progress to a concept of revolution – progress as a qualitative change is not induced but executed by the political action in the »first revolutionary measure«⁸⁴ – Benjamin divests the term of its etymological basis: its procedural quality – advancing step by step – is eliminated. While progress for social democracy is to be understood as a homogeneous progression of development in which the spontaneous break with the given conditions – the active resistance⁸⁵ – is unthinkable and not intended, Benjamin draws up a concept of progress in which only such breaks are considered real progresses: Benjamin converts progress into a leap, a *pro-leap*. Analogously to the concept of progress, this pro-leap calls for normative meaning intending to describe a qualitative change for the better, where injustice is overcome. At the same time, through its past-inspired present-centered skittishness, it excludes those dimensions of progress which make progress to something predictable, calculable, organizable (or instrumentalizable).

⁸³ Benjamin, V, 428.

⁸⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 593.

⁸⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, II, 194; as well as Loick, 191 and 194.

Hate as world-changing anger

Benjamin's »catastrophe in permanence« is also permanent in the sense that every present has its »catastrophe(s)«, its »enslaved«⁸⁶. Without the awareness that the now given, particular catastrophe is *the* catastrophe – the current expression of the »catastrophe in permanence« that shows itself in the history of the enslaved ancestors – the central motivation for emancipatory intervention is lacking: a kind of tridimensional hate:

1. The hate about the current oppression, the current expression of the »catastrophe in permanence«;
2. The hate about the »enslaved ancestors«⁸⁷, both oppressed and forgotten;
3. The hate about a catastrophic historical process (which the victors call »progress«).

According to Benjamin, these catastrophic constellations must be controverted with »defiance and impatience, the power of indignation and hate«⁸⁸. In this »desire to fight«⁸⁹ born from the historically accumulated hate, Benjamin sees the »best force«⁹⁰ in order to clean up the »present injustice«⁹¹.

⁸⁶ Benjamin, I, 700.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 604.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1241.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 700.

⁹¹ Ibid., V, 428.

This hate can – and should – become active as a kind of »world-changing anger«⁹² in order to overturn all conditions in which – as Marx formulated in the *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* – »men are degraded, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible beings«⁹³. It is the central motivation of intervening action in Benjamin. Historical – revolutionary – action does not presuppose

any faith in progress; it presupposes only the determination to do away with present injustice. The irreplaceable political value of [...] hate consists precisely in its affording the revolutionary class a healthy indifference toward speculations concerning progress.⁹⁴

The hateful break with the existing is negation, first of all:

The revolutionary struggle is about the interruption of what happens and what has happened – before all positive goals, this negation is the first positive. What man has done to man and nature must stop radically.⁹⁵

According to Benjamin, none but such interruptions are to be called real »progress«: the creation of a »real state of emergency« – the interruption of the idea of humanity's development in history as a

⁹² Baselitz/Kluge, *Title*.

⁹³ Marx (a), 385; see also Löwy, 137.

⁹⁴ Benjamin, V, 428; with this for Benjamin the refusal comes along to »scheme plans for what comes later« (ibid.).

⁹⁵ Marcuse, 25 f.

Heilsgeschichte^{96/97} – and the taking of the »first revolutionary measure«⁹⁸. Such an event, in Benjamin, is not »conceived as a shock to historical reason, but rather as its innermost structure: the revolutionary opportunity that is given at all times«⁹⁹: the »catastrophe in permanence«¹⁰⁰ faces a sort of permanence of revolutionary opportunity; »in reality, there is not a moment that does not carry its revolutionary opportunity with it«¹⁰¹.

Benjamin's »catastrophe in permanence« also seems to be aimed at never resigning oneself to oppression as long as there is oppression:

But no one may ever make peace with poverty when it falls like a gigantic shadow upon his countrymen and his house. Then he must be alert to every humiliation done to him and so discipline himself that his suffering no longer becomes the downhill road of grief, but the rising path of revolt.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Benjamin, I, 697.

⁹⁷ See in this context also Benjamin's emphasis on the importance of actions inducing a standstill, actions that break with the given: »In the July Revolution an incident occurred in which this consciousness came into its own. On the first evening of fighting, it so happened that the dials on clocktowers were being fired at simultaneously and independently from several locations in Paris« (Benjamin, I, 702; cf. also Benjamin, I, 697). Benjamin also sees such a standstill expressed in general strikes (cf. Benjamin, II, 194).

⁹⁸ Ibid., V, 593.

⁹⁹ Wohlfarth, 39.

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin, V, 437.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., I, 1231.

¹⁰² Benjamin, IV, 97.

B. Brecht's imperative – and contradiction – seems to apply also to Benjamin:

Those who want to prepare the ground for friendliness cannot themselves be friendly.¹⁰³

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¹⁰³ Brecht, *An die Nachgeborenen* (Engl.: »To Those Born After« or »To the Descendants« or »To Future Generations«); see also Benjamin, I, 1240.

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ABSTRACT

If polemics is the concept for love in politics, is there a polemics in contemporary art that could be considered significant? The present essay provides an affirmative answer to this question and locates the polemics of contemporary art in a debate that reveals itself to be both a political debate about politics and a debate between theory and philosophy. Theory, it is claimed, must always assume the existence of its object while philosophy begins without presupposition. The proper names involved in this debate, the proper names of a theorist and a philosopher, are Juliane Rebentisch and Alain Badiou. In the end, the debate is left behind and the path of the investigation turns toward »idle waiting«.

Polemiken oder wenn sich die demokratischen Tiere um die Gegenwartskunst scharen

by Alexander García Düttmann

Polemik ist der Begriff für Liebe in der Politik.

Dass Gegenwartskunst, ihr Verständnis und ihr Begriff Anlass zu Polemiken geben, ist nicht verwunderlich, so rar diese Polemiken unter Philosophen, die sich mit Kunst beschäftigen, sein mögen. Denn wenn man den Ausdruck »Gegenwartskunst« als einen Namen verwendet, also nicht als Bezeichnung für die Kunst, die in der Gegenwart erzeugt wird, sondern als Bezeichnung für eine Kunst, die in der Gegenwart

neben andere Kunst tritt, dann zeigt sich schnell, dass ihr Begriff erst noch gebildet, konstruiert, erfunden werden muss. Verschiedene Versuche, sie auf einen Begriff zu bringen, ihr Verständnis zu erschließen, wetteifern dann miteinander. Sicherlich ist das ein Umstand, der auf jede Kunst zutrifft. Doch die Bildung eines neuen Begriffs vergangener, vermeintlich bekannter oder wiedererkennbarer Kunst zeichnet sich dadurch aus, dass sie sich auf mehr oder weniger etablierte, also bereits gebildete und gängige Begriffe zu beziehen vermag, auf vorgegebene Auffassungen. Man kann die Schwierigkeit an der Hegelschen Einsicht ablesen, das Denken, das als gegenwärtiges seine Gegenwart zu begreifen trachtet, könne einen Begriff von Gegenwart nur gewinnen, wenn diese zur Vergangenheit geworden sei.

Hat man einmal festgestellt, dass Gegenwartskunst eine vergleichsweise ungewisse Gegebenheit der Gegenwart ist, so sehr der eine oder andere schon über ihr Verschwinden spekulieren, sie der Vergangenheit zuordnen mag, hat man einmal zugegeben, dass die Gegenwart sich nicht als eine Gegebenheit betrachten lässt, um so weniger, je mehr sie aufgrund ihrer Unmittelbarkeit sich den Sinnen aufdrängt und den Verstand auf sich lenkt, muss der Begrifflosigkeit abgeholfen werden, der Blindheit aller Gegenwartskunst, steht die erfinderische Konstruktion ihres Begriffes aus, geschieht sie gerade, jetzt, in der Gegenwart. Man muss sich fragen, ob, wie und warum Gegenwartskunst gegeben ist, was es heißt, dass sie gegeben ist oder nicht, was sie ausmacht – und diese Konstruktion kann eben wegen des Fehlens einer über einen langen Zeitraum erprobten begrifflichen Praxis umstrittener sein als jede Konstruktion, die von einer derartigen Praxis gestützt wird oder sich gleichsam an ihr abzureiben vermag.

Trotzdem ist der polemische, streitbare Umgang mit Gegenwartskunst, der in dem für sie konstitutiven Fehlen eines ausgewiesenen Begriffs an-

gelegt ist, zumindest als Tendenz, überraschend, wenn man sich einen wichtigen Aspekt solcher Kunst vor Augen führt. Denn in dem Maße, in dem die Entgegensetzung von Autonomie und Heteronomie, so dialektisch sie gehandhabt werden mag, die Erzeugnisse der Gegenwartskunst nicht mehr erfasst, weil ihre Vermarktung ihnen nicht äußerlich ist, nicht äußerlich sein soll, herrscht in der Welt, die sich um die Gegenwartskunst dreht, gewöhnlich kein polemischer Ton, sondern, wie man an einem ihrer Manifeste, Bourriauds Schrift zur relationalen Ästhetik, leicht erkennt, ein freundliches und umtriebige Mit- und Nebeneinander, ein allgemeiner guter Wille zur Anknüpfung, der sich wiederum von ökonomischen Interessen gar nicht trennen lässt und deshalb nicht einfach als Konformismus denunziert werden kann. Alle sind furchtbar nett und furchtbar geschäftig, Künstler, Kuratoren, Kritiker.

Die Entschärfung von Autonomieansprüchen und Heteronomievorwürfen mindert die Bedeutung der Polemik, unabhängig davon, wie sehr die Machtkämpfe toben. Ihren Ort scheint sie eher in der Schwierigkeit einer Konstruktion oder Erfindung des Gegenwartsbegriffs zu haben, in dem Erfassen der Zeit in Gedanken, der Zeit, die die Zeit der Gegenwartskunst ist, der Gegenwart. Doch diese reale Schwierigkeit ist auch eine triviale Schwierigkeit. Wo also entfacht sich um die Gegenwartskunst eine signifikante Polemik, eine Polemik, die etwas über die Gegenwartskunst aussagt?

Juliane Rebentischs Antwort auf Alain Badiou's *Drittes Manifest des Affirmationismus*, selber als »Gegen-Manifest«¹ konzipiert, ermöglicht eine aussagekräftige Kollision, gleichgültig, ob diese Polemik in der

¹ Juliane Rebentisch, »Negations. Against Aesthetic Affirmationism«, in: *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art*, hg. von A. Avanesian und L. Skrebowski, Berlin 2011, S. 52.

Kunstwelt als solche wahrgenommen worden ist oder nicht, ja ob Badiou überhaupt um sie weiß. Zwei Züge von Polemik lassen sich an dem polemischen Angriff Rebentischs und an der Kollision zwischen den Positionen ablesen. Zum einen, dass eine Polemik immer ein Angriff ist, der auf einen anderen Angriff reagiert, auf eine andere Polemik, auch wenn der Angriff, die Polemik, auf die sie reagiert, sich nicht als solche ausgeben. Eine Polemik entsteht, weil man in der Position des anderen ein polemisches Potential ausmacht, sie als einen Angriff wahrnimmt. Das ist der Grund, warum man im Umfeld einer Polemik, selbst wo sie gänzlich einseitig zu sein scheint, nie genau sagen kann, wer auf wen antwortet, wer wen angreift. Der Raum der Polemik kennt kein Außen – ihre Anziehungskraft muss stets den Widerstand überwinden, den die Furcht vor Befangenheit gegen sie aufbringt. Hat man sich in eine Polemik verstrickt, kommt man nicht mehr heraus. Zum anderen ist eine Polemik nicht bloß ein Verhalten zu einer bereits als Polemik oder Angriff betrachteten Position, sondern ebenfalls in sich ein Verhältnis, ein Verhältnis von Stärke und Schwäche. Dieses Verhältnis wird erst durch die Polemik und die Kollision, zu der sie führt, sichtbar. An Badiou's Manifest kann man also erkennen, dass Rebentischs Stärke und Schwäche ihr Ausgang vom Gegebenen ist, an Rebentischs Manifest kann man erkennen, dass Badiou's Stärke und Schwäche seine Weigerung ist, vom Gegebenen auszugehen. Bei Rebentisch wissen die Leser sofort, wovon sie spricht, wenn sie von Gegenwartskunst redet – das ist ihr blinder Fleck. Bei Badiou fragt sich der Leser bis zum Schluss, wie das, was er als Gegenwartskunst bezeichnet, mit der Kunst zusammenhängt, die man gewöhnlich als Gegenwartskunst ansieht – das ist der blinde Fleck seines Ansatzes. Möglich ist dieses doppelte Sichtbarwerden der Schwäche an der Stärke und der Stärke an der Schwäche jedoch einzig deshalb, weil die Gegebenheit der Gegenwartskunst eben eine ungewis-

se ist, das heißt: weil sie sich als Gegebenheit aufzwingt, gleichzeitig indes begrifflich unterbestimmt bleibt. Der Philosoph spielt den Begriff gegen die Gegebenheit aus, die Theoretikerin geht von der Gegebenheit aus und sucht den Begriff.

Ein weiterer Zug der Polemik um die Gegenwartskunst, die Rebentisch und Badiou einander entgegensetzt, ist folglich der, dass dort, wo die Gegebenheit eine fragwürdige sein muss, da man nicht genau wissen kann, was in der Gegenwart Gegenwart und Kunst bedeuten, so eingebürgert die Verwendung des Ausdrucks »Gegenwartskunst« inzwischen sein mag, Polemiken, die signifikant, aussagekräftig, exemplarisch, nicht-trivial sind, die Unterscheidung zwischen Philosophie und Theorie ins Spiel bringen, zwischen einer philosophischen Vorgängigkeit und einer theoretischen Nachträglichkeit, begreift man Philosophie als eine Konstruktion oder Erfindung des Begriffs, die das Gegebene nicht voraussetzt und es darum selber konstruieren oder erfinden muss, und Theorie umgekehrt als eine Konstruktion oder Erfindung des Begriffs, die das Gegebene voraussetzt und sich um seine Konstruktion oder Erfindung nicht mehr kümmert.

Hinzu kommt, wie schon angedeutet wurde, dass die sogenannte Gegenwartskunst es besonders mit dem Gegebenen zu tun hat, sich besonders auf das Gegebene einlässt und seine Reproduktion betreibt, seine Ergänzung, seine Erweiterung, seine Erkundung. Daher ihr Anschein von Konkretion. Kritische Momente lassen sich sicherlich auch in ihr identifizieren, doch ihr Interesse ist häufig nicht das einer radikalen Kritik, sondern eher das einer Zusammenarbeit mit dem Gegebenen. »Mitmachen wollte ich nie«, Motto eines kritischen Theoretikers, das einem Buch mit Gesprächen als Titel diente, ist nicht der Wahlspruch der Gegenwartskunst. Es hat aus dieser Perspektive beinahe etwas Ironisches, wenn Rebentisch sich genötigt sieht, im Titel ihrer Polemik

die Negativität zu bemühen, weil Badiou sich auf einen »Affirmationismus« beruft, freilich um einer Gegenwartskunst das Wort zu reden, die es nicht gibt und die mit dem Gegebenen nichts gemein hat.

Will man ermessen, wie die Gegenwartskunst zur Komplizin des Gegebenen werden kann, genügt vielleicht ein Blick auf zwei Dokumente aus dem Jahr 2015. Sie sind zwar *nach* der fraglichen polemischen Auseinandersetzung entstanden, der daraus resultierende Anachronismus hat aber kaum entstellende Folgen. Gemeint sind die Ankündigung einer Aufsatzsammlung, die um ein »politisches Theater von heute« kreist und die Florian Malzacher herausgibt, und das Konzept, mit dem Chris Dercon – gemeinsam mit der Programmdirektorin Marietta Piekenbrock – die Berliner Volksbühne übernimmt. In der auf Englisch verfassten Buchankündigung liest man, dass das »politische Theater von heute« eines sei, das »sowohl seinem Inhalt als auch seiner Form nach die Gesellschaft angehen will«. Es soll es darauf abgesehen haben, »eine zeitgenössische Gemeinschaft« zu gründen, in der »soziale und politische Aktionen« ihre Wirkung tun können und sich »wirkliche oder mögliche Spielarten von Gesellschaften ausleben, vorführen, einüben, ausdehnen, ausprobieren, ja sogar erfinden« lassen. In dem Konzept liest man, in der »Sphäre der Kunst und Kultur« müsse man »kooperieren oder scheitern«, also »grenzübergreifend« denken und handeln: »Solidarität, Komplizenschaft und Kollaboration sind nicht nur Vernunftsideen oder moralphilosophische Versprechen, sie sind eine Praxis, die in die Wirklichkeit unserer Städte einwandert.« Die durch die Kunst- und Kulturpraxis sich wandelnde Wirklichkeit soll, so Dercon, eine sein, deren neue Gegebenheiten es erlauben, »Zugehörigkeit« zu erfahren und eine Orientierung zu finden. Der affirmative Ton, der Ton, der das Gegebene feiert, die Gegenwartskunst als eine gesellschaftlichen Gegebenheit, die sich nicht auf eine unabhängige Sphäre

der Kunst oder der Kultur beschränkt, ist unüberhörbar, zumal die Feier des Gegebenen explizit vindiziert wird. Natürlich ist in der mobilen, globalen und digitalen Welt das Gegebene nicht so etwas Schwerfälliges wie ein »Besitz«: »In einer immer komplexer werdenden Welt, in der sich niemand mehr wirklich auszukennen vermag, sehnen sich die Menschen nach Zugehörigkeit. Viele zeitgenössische Künstler entwerfen Szenarien, Environments, Choreographien und Installationen, in denen die Besucher sich begegnen können. Immer mehr Arbeiten entstehen sogar erst im Dialog mit dem Publikum. Man muss die Werke dieser Künstler nicht mehr besitzen oder dauerhaft ausstellen. Es genügt, sich an die Begegnung zu erinnern oder sich ganz einfach mit ihren Ideen verbunden zu fühlen. Das gemeinsame Zelebrieren von Kunst und Inspiration wird immer wichtiger als Besitz.« Besteht folglich zwischen der Gegenwartskunst und dem Gegebenen eine Komplizenschaft, die als solche von ihren Vertretern und Verwaltern angerufen wird, so ist der polemische Ansatz der Theorie, der Ausgang vom Gegebenen als Voraussetzung für die Konstruktion oder Erfindung des Begriffs, der Gegenwartskunst in gewisser Weise näher als der polemische Ansatz der Philosophie, die das Gegebene einklammert und eine Voraussetzungslosigkeit behauptet, ohne die sich jede begriffliche Konstruktion oder Erfindung als kompromittiert, unzureichend, kurzatmig erweist.

Wenn nun Demokratie, statt zum Beispiel eine Demokratie-im-Kommen zu sein und damit ein namenloser Name, der sinnstiftende Name des Gegebenen ist, eines Gegebenen, das man in seiner Gegebenheit durchaus prozedural verstehen kann, als Gegebenheit demokratischer Prozesse, an denen man teilnimmt und denen eine mehr oder minder universelle Ausrichtung zugesprochen wird; wenn gegenwärtig alle auf die Demokratie als unergründliche Quelle rechtmäßigen Lebens flie-

gen, um ihr eigenes Dabeisein zu sichern, sich auf einer Oberfläche zu verteilen, in die sie sich eintragen, dann scharen sich die demokratischen Tiere um die Gegenwartskunst, weil sie kreative Zugehörigkeit durch gemeinsame Teilnahme verspricht, politisch ist im Sinne einer Gegebenheit der Demokratie. Dass Teilnahme zu einem Schlüsselbegriff der Gegenwartskunst geworden ist, hat wohl mit der erwähnten Vorherrschaft des Gegebenen zu tun, damit, dass man sich vorstellt, man nehme immer an etwas teil. Hier muss man den Konformismus der Gegenwartskunst ansiedeln, unabhängig davon, ob sie mit dem Konformismus des Gegebenen auch bricht oder nicht. Bestimmt dieser Konformismus auch die Theorie, den Ansatz, der vom Gegebenen ausgeht, von einem Etwas, so ist das Bündnis zwischen Gegenwartskunst und Theorie eines, das beiden an die Wiege gesungen ward. Bei näherer Betrachtung zeigt sich freilich, dass die Teilnahme in der Kunst als eine anti-konformistische gelten muss. Denn sie ist gespalten, lässt sich gar nicht mehr auf ein Gegebenes beziehen, auf ein Etwas, dem der Name der Demokratie ursprünglichen Sinn verleihen soll. In der Kunst ist Teilnahme polemisch, mit sich und in sich uneins, weil zu dem Bewusstsein von Kunst, das ihre Gegebenheit als ein Produkt der künstlerischen Tätigkeit begreift, eine mit diesem Bewusstsein unvereinbare Lust an einem Als-ob oder an einem Schein hinzutritt, eine Intensität.

Lehrreich ist die Polemik zwischen Rebentisch und Badiou folglich deshalb, weil sie nicht eine Polemik ist, die sich um ein Gegebenes dreht, um ein Etwas, um die theoretische Deutung von Gegenwartskunst. Sie ist eine Polemik, in der das Gegebene, das Etwas, die Gegenwartskunst als Kunst der Demokratie, auf dem Spiel steht. Eine Polemik, die dem angegriffenen Angreifer lediglich ein Etwas entreißen möchte, zwecks Aneignung, ist nicht wirklich polemisch. Sie ist ebenso beschränkt wie

eine Gegenwartskunst, die sich dadurch der Frage nach dem Kunstende entzieht, dass sie als beruhigende Gegebenheit bloß zwischen verschiedenen polemischen oder unpolemischen Deutungen zirkuliert.

Rebentischs Polemik gegen Badiou besteht aus drei wichtigen Punkten, deren kritische Spitze sie gegen das affirmationistische Manifest kehrt:

1. Der Affirmationismus hat keinen Gegenstand. Denn die Gegenwartskunst, die er bejaht, und die ästhetischen Begriffe, auf die er rekurriert, beruhen auf einer Reprise moderner Kunst und ästhetischer Begriffe der Moderne. Der Affirmationismus ist nicht affirmativ genug. So bleibt ihm die Gegenwartskunst verschlossen. Es ist, als würde Rebentisch die Gegebenheit der Gegenwartskunst gegen die Gegebenheit moderner Kunst mobilisieren, auch wenn sie selber eine wesentlich moderne Figur der künstlerischen Praxis und des ästhetischen Denkens, die der Reflexion und Selbstreflexion, für ihr eigenes Verständnis von Gegenwartskunst ins Feld führt, behauptet sie doch eine Kontinuität zwischen Moderne und Gegenwartskunst. Was sie dem Affirmationismus also vorhält, ist im Grunde, dass er nicht modern genug sei und dadurch die Spezifität der Gegenwartskunst in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der Moderne verkenne. Gegeben ist die Gegenwartskunst nur als reflexive.

2. Der zweite Punkt, den sie polemisch dem Affirmationismus entgegenhält, ist folglich sein Verzicht auf die Kategorie der Reflexion. Dieser Verzicht hat einen zweifachen Aspekt, einen ästhetischen und einen politischen. Den »Objektivismus« der gereinigten Form, den der Affirmationismus für die Gegenwartskunst behauptet, soll von der »Kunst der letzten Jahrzehnte, die am interessantesten ist«, Lügen gestraft werden: »Indem beispielsweise ortsspezifische Installationen auf ganz eigene Art offen lassen, was ihnen zugehört und was es noch nicht

tut, verdeutlichen sie, dass eine begrenzende Dynamisierung allein in einem Prozess ästhetischer Erfahrung geschehen kann, in der Reflexion auf die offene Frage, was ein Werk enthält, einbezieht, umfasst – sowohl inhaltlich als auch formal.«² Reflexion stellt auch, so Rebentisch, den Bezug zwischen Gegenwartskunst und Politik her und zeichnet ihn als einen demokratischen Bezug aus, weshalb die Autorin die affirmationistische Gleichsetzung von Antikapitalismus und Antidemokratismus verwirft. Zeitigt die Gegenwartskunst eine »reflexive Distanzierung unserer Sinnerzeugung und der verschiedenen kulturellen und gesellschaftlichen Hintergrundannahmen, die sich in ihr auswirken«³, verändert die Gegenwartskunst das Bewusstsein und bereitet den Grund für eine politische Handlung vor, dann entspricht ihr eine »demokratische Politik«, die sich reflexiv gegen die Verdinglichung des Partikularen wendet und im »Konflikt«⁴ ständig neu erarbeitet, »was als universell zählt«. Die Kategorie der Reflexion soll im Gegebenen eine Bewegung auslösen, durch die es freilich nicht aufhört, gegeben zu sein. In seiner Gegebenheit verändert es sich bis es an die Grenzen seiner Veränderbarkeit rührt, die von seiner Verallgemeinerbarkeit, von der herzustellenden Allgemeinheit markiert werden. Die Gegebenheit fächert sich gleichsam auf in eine reale oder partikulare Gegebenheit und in eine virtuelle oder universelle Gegebenheit, zwischen denen stets andere Gegebenheiten vermitteln. Die virtuelle oder universelle Gegebenheit ist die eigentliche Gegebenheit, die reale oder partikulare die uneigentliche, die sich aufgrund des künstlerisch-politischen Reflexionsprozesses von ihrer Einseitigkeit und Verstelltheit befreien muss, von ihrer Blindheit. Dieser Prozess bleibt insofern an die Gegebenheit gebunden,

² Rebentisch, »Negations. Against Aesthetic Affirmationism«, a.a.O., S. 57.

³ Ebd., S. 62.

⁴ Ebd., S. 63.

ob sie nun eine reelle und partikulare, eine uneigentliche Gegebenheit ist, oder eine virtuelle und universelle, eine eigentliche Gegebenheit, als ihn nichts aufhalten kann – außer Hürden und Hindernisse, die in ihn fallen, in die prozedurale Spanne und Spannung zwischen den beiden Gegebenheiten. Die eigentliche Gegebenheit, die virtuelle oder universelle, ist deshalb nicht eine Nicht-Gegebenheit, weil ja über den Reflexionsprozess die Agenten, die aktiven und reaktiven Teilnehmer an Kunst, die Künstler und die Betrachter, immer etwas erkennen sollen, was sie letztlich wiedererkennen, was ihnen also gegeben ist.

3. Der dritte Punkt schließlich, mit dem sich Rebentisch polemisch vom Affirmationismus absetzen will, ist ein affektiver. Es geht um den Affekt, der die Reflexion begleitet. Dieser Affekt muss ein warmer sein, ein anheimelnder, sonst würde es nicht zu einem reflexiven Wiedererkennen kommen, zu ästhetischer Erfahrung, wenn anders ästhetische Erfahrung durch die Reflexion ermöglicht wird, die das Partikulare und das Universelle kommensurabel macht. »Kunst muss nicht kalt sein«⁵, postuliert Rebentisch und denunziert die affirmationistische Abkehr vom Ausdruck als Abkehr vom Menschen oder vom Allzumenschlichen, ja als heimliche Zukehr zum unmenschlichen Mann, zum »jungen männlichen Intellektuellen«⁶. Rebentisch muss dabei einerseits an »Zweideutigkeit, Inkommensurabilität, Offenheit« festhalten, weil ohne sie die Dynamik des reflexiv-demokratischen Prozesses der Gegenwartskunst eine allzu ausgemachte Sache wäre, zu statisch, die Kunst allzu platt, andererseits muss sie aber die »Zweideutigkeit, Inkommensurabilität, Offenheit« doch als menschlich-allzumenschliche Phänomene interpretieren, als ästhetisch erfahrbare Phänomene, die

⁵ Ebd., S. 55.

⁶ Ebd., S. 52.

die Kunst der Demokratie nie grundsätzlich in Frage stellen – und lediglich ein solches In-Frage-Stellen definiert die sogenannte Demokratie-im-Kommen.⁷ Die »Feindseligkeit« gegen den Ausdruck, die der Affirmationismus zu seinem Aushängeschild macht, die Forderung der Kälte in der Kunst, die er erhebt, soll nicht so sehr die »Ideologie des Subjektivismus« bekämpfen als die »Möglichkeit subjektiver Erfahrung als solcher«. Wärme ist der Affekt des Gegebenen, so kalt es sein mag, vor allem, wo das Gegebene sich in eine doppelte Gegebenheit und einen wiederum gegebenen Reflexionsprozess auffächert – gegeben ist der Reflexionsprozess ja gerade in dem Maße, in dem die menschliche Erfahrbarkeit des »Zweideutigen, Inkommensurablen, Offenen« von ihm nie in Frage gestellt wird.

Dass Rebentischs in drei Punkte aufgegliederte Polemik gegen den Affirmationismus stets erneut vom Gegebenen ausgeht und auf das Gegebene zugeht, in einem seinerseits vorgegebenen Gang, dass sie den Affirmationismus dessen bezichtigt, die Gegebenheiten zu verwechseln und zu verkennen, die Gegenwartskunst als eine moderne zu konzipieren, die moderne Kunst indes nicht als eine reflexive, dass sie den Affirmationismus nicht an jener Front angreift, an der er sich dem Gegebenen widersetzt und eine Gegebenheit erst begrifflich konstruiert oder erfindet, dass sie die Stoßrichtung der affirmationistischen Polemik in Wahrheit nicht richtig einschätzt, kann man als Bestätigung dafür nehmen, dass es sich zwischen ihr und Badiou um eine wirkliche Polemik handelt, um eine Polemik, die ein Gegebenes nicht zur geteilten Voraussetzung hat, um eine Polemik, die für das schwierige Verständnis

⁷ Rebentisch beruft sich auf Derridas Gedanken einer »Demokratie-im-Kommen« in ihren *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst* (Rebentisch, *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst*, Hamburg 2013, S. 199 und S. 242 [Fußnote]), verkürzt das »Kommen« aber ihrem Progressivismus gemäß zu einer Offenheit »für ein Besseres«.

von Gegenwartskunst signifikant ist, aufschluss- und lehrreich. Vielleicht handelt es sich sogar um eine unvermeidbare Polemik.

Während Rebentisch die Gegenwartskunst so betrachtet, dass sie durch das Aufnehmen, Auslösen und Austragen von Konflikten reflexiv von gegebenen Partikularitäten zu einem allgemeinen demokratischen Träger fortschreitet, wobei, denkt man an die transmediale Auflösung der Gattungen, am Ende dieses Fortschritts so etwas wie die Kunst der Demokratie als neues offenes Gesamtkunstwerk herauspringt, lässt die zweite These des *Dritten Manifests des Affirmationismus* keinen Zweifel daran, dass die Gegenwartskunst sich nicht an vorausgesetzte Partikularitäten wendet, um sie in einen reflexiven Prozess zu fügen: »Die Kunst kann kein Ausdruck der Partikularität sein, ganz gleich, ob sie ethnisch oder ichbezogen ist. Sie ist die unpersönliche Produktion einer Wahrheit, die sich an alle richtet.«⁸ Badiou konstruiert oder erfindet also einen Begriff von Gegenwartskunst, der sich gegen den Ausdruck kehrt, gegen die singuläre Manifestation der Partikularität, deren ihre reflexive Einbeziehung immer bedarf:

Das Schema des Ausdrucks setzt voraus, dass jeder – als Künstler – eine Art von unaussprechlicher Singularität ist. Wie man heute sagt: »Ich will ich selbst sein«, oder in der stammesmäßigen Version: »Wir wollen unsere eigene Kultur schaffen, neu erschaffen.« Unglücklicherweise ist dieser Wille vorgeformt, und das so erlangte »Ich selbst« unterscheidet sich in nichts von »allen anderen«. Ebenso sind die »Kulturen« nichts anderes als wiederaufpolierte Produkte, recycelter alter Plunder. All das ist hoffnungsloser Durchschnitt. Aber es ist nun so, dass die herrschenden

⁸ Badiou, *Drittes Manifest des Affirmationismus*, Berlin 2007, S. 25.

Mächte nur Statistiken und Umfragen lieben, denn sie wissen, dass nichts unschuldiger und nichtssagender als der Durchschnitt ist. Sie wissen, dass jedermann, jeder Beliebige nur ein austauschbares Tier ist. Wir affirmieren, dass es diesem Tier – durch künstlerische Arbeit – geschehen kann, zu einem Träger zu werden, der von einer universellen Fertigkeit durchdrungen wird. Das menschliche Tier ist dabei keineswegs die Ursache, sondern nur der Ort oder einer der Orte. Der Künstler als Individuum ist nur lebende Materie, die einem Subjekt geliehen wird, das – weil es in Form des Kunstwerkes ein sinnliches Subjekt ist – eine solche Materie braucht. Aber wenn das Werk-Subjekt einmal da ist, können wir seinen transitorischen individuellen Träger völlig vergessen. Nur das Werk ist affirmativ. Der Künstler ist das neutrale Element dieser Affirmation.⁹

Fragt man nun, was das affirmative Werk denn bejaht, lautet die Antwort, es bejahe in einer »sinnlich spürbaren Wirkung« jenes, was man nicht spüren kann, die Wahrheit oder die Idee. Die künstlerische Arbeit besteht somit darin, das Sinnliche in ein »Ereignis der Idee« umzuwandeln, so dass man es beim Vorgehen der Kunst mit einer doppelten Bewegung zu tun hat. Sowohl der Künstler als auch der Betrachter eines Werks werden durch eine »materielle Subtraktion« zu Subjekten, die ihre Tierheit hinter sich gelassen, ihre Partikularität abgestreift haben. Sie werden von der Kunst neutralisiert, so dass ein »Werk-Subjekt«, das ein von einer »universellen Fertigkeit« durchdrungener Träger sein soll, und, analog dazu, ein Rezipient, der auf nichts anspricht als auf das Werk, Ort des »Ereignisses der Idee«, den Tod des sinnlichen Individuums besiegeln. Freilich tun sie es nicht ein- für allemal.

⁹ Ebd., S. 25 f.

Denn die Neutralisierung kommt auf das Sinnliche zurück, auf das »Gegebene«¹⁰ und seine »Evidenz«, von denen sie sich entfernt, um an das Nicht-Gegebene zu rühren, an die Idee oder die Wahrheit, die nicht aufhören, Ereignis zu sein. Das Sichtbare sehen, das man beim Sehen nicht sieht, das Hörbare hören, das man beim Hören nicht hört, das Antastbare antasten, das man beim Tasten nicht antastet – darum muss es der affirmationistischen Gegenwartskunst zu tun sein, um die Möglichkeit einer Unmöglichkeit, um ein *von der Kunst* herbeigeführtes Ende, das das Ende der in Permanenz erklärten Endlichkeit des Sinnlichen ist, nicht die Ablösung des Sinnlichen durch den Geist der Innerlichkeit oder den Geist, der das Sinnliche und das Unsinnliche, das Außen und das Innen versöhnt. Der affirmationistische Übergang zur Kunst ist nicht der spekulativ philosophische Übergang zur Religion und zur Philosophie. Was folglich die Polemiken unterscheidet, die im Namen einer Gegenwartskunst der Demokratie und eines Affirmationismus der Gegenwartskunst aufeinander stoßen und zugleich einander unberührt lassen, ist die Unvereinbarkeit, die darin liegt, dass Rebentisch es auf die Möglichkeit einer Möglichkeit abgesehen hat, auf die Universalisierung des Partikularen, Badiou auf die Möglichkeit einer Unmöglichkeit.

Badiou zielt auf einen Universalismus, der das Partikulare nicht durch entgrenzende Reflexion in sich birgt oder aufhebt, sondern von seiner Dimension, der des Sinnlichen, nichts zurückbehält als einen Anruf, einen »unwahrscheinlichen Imperativ«¹¹, durch den das Werk-Subjekt das Betrachter-Subjekt »zwingt« oder anhält, in einem Ereignis der Kunst das zu spüren, zu fühlen, wahrzunehmen, was man nicht

¹⁰ Ebd., S. 27.

¹¹ Ebd.

spüren, nicht fühlen, nicht wahrnehmen kann, die Wahrheit oder die Idee. Weil kein Gegebenes einer solchen Konstruktion oder Erfindung des Gegebenen genügen kann, weil die Konstruktion oder Erfindung das Gegebene auf ein Nicht-Gegebenes öffnet, auf eine Idee oder eine Wahrheit, weil das Gegebene, die Gegenwartskunst, wie sie Rebentisch vertraut ist und wie Badiou sie charakterisiert, sich vom Nicht-Gegebenen abgeschnitten hat und dadurch gleichsam auf der Seite des bloß Gegebenen ist, des Möglichen, und sei es des Gegebenen als der Allgemeinheit, nach der das Partikulare durch Reflexion streben soll, vermag der Affirmationismus in der gegebenen Gegenwartskunst nichts als die Ideologie eines Materialismus der Körper zu erblicken, muss er die Elemente für seine Konstruktion oder Erfindung des Gegebenen oder der Gegenwartskunst, für die Möglichkeit des Unmöglichen, woanders suchen, kommt in seinem *Dritten Manifest* nicht ein einziger Name vor, den man als Namen eines Gegenwartskünstlers im konventionellen Sinne, im Sinne des Gegebenen als des Möglichen, wiedererkennen könnte. Das Gegebene des Affirmationismus, seine Gegenwartskunst, ist zweimal nicht gegeben: es ist nicht gegeben, weil es von einer Nicht-Gegebenheit abhängt, von der Idee oder der Wahrheit, und es ist nicht gegeben, weil sich das Gegebene als politische Ideologie erweist, als das Gegebene, das man abschaffen muss.

Ist die Gegenwartskunst als Möglichkeit des Unmöglichen dann nicht die Kunst der Philosophie, der Philosophie, die Badiou entwickelt? Ja. Aber da diese Philosophie, wie ihre kritische und antiideologische Stoßrichtung anzeigt, ihre Zeit, die Gegenwart, in Gedanken zu fassen versucht, kann man ihren Begriff von Gegenwartskunst nicht einfach abstrakt schelten, so unbefriedigend Badiou's unmissverständlicher »Modernismus« für den Gegenwartstheoretiker und den Gegenwartskünstler, der sich im konventionellen Sinne ein solcher nennt, sein mag.

Die Polemik zwischen Theoretiker und Philosoph entzündet sich nicht, wie man meinen könnte, an der Frage, ob die Gegenwartskunst die Kunst ist, die die Gegenwart verdient. Vielmehr entzündet sie sich an der Frage, auf welche Weise die Gegenwart die Kunst verdient, die Gegenwartskunst ist. Dass jede Zeit die Kunst hat, die sie verdient, dass unsere Zeit die Gegenwartskunst verdient, bedeutet bei Rebentisch und Badiou etwas vollkommen anderes. Erst dadurch, dass der Philosoph die Möglichkeit des Unmöglichen in den Mittelpunkt seiner Überlegungen rückt, die Frage nach der Wahrheit oder der Idee; erst dadurch, dass für den Philosophen der Theoretiker die Wahrheit oder die Idee verrät, wenn er von der Möglichkeit des Möglichen ausgeht, gleichgültig, wie universalistisch gesinnt er ist oder nicht ist; erst dadurch, dass der übertreibende Philosoph, der Philosoph, der das Mögliche an die Grenze des Unmöglichen treibt, eine Polemik anfeuert, die in seinen Augen vom Gegebenen und seinen Anwälten provoziert wird, lassen sich verschiedene Arten ausmachen, das Verhältnis von Gegenwart und Kunst zu denken.

Die Reflexion, die sich an das Gegebene hält, nimmt die Stelle ein, die im Affirmationismus die begriffliche Erfindung einnimmt, das Ereignis der Kunst, und erlaubt es der Gegenwartskunst der Demokratie und ihrer Theorie, den Bogen von der Kunst zur Politik zu schlagen, Kunst und Politik intern miteinander zu verknüpfen, den Schritt von der Kunst zur Politik als einen möglichen Schritt darzustellen. Badiou hält Kunst und Politik in dem Maße auseinander, in dem sie zwei verschiedene Wahrheitsprozeduren sind, zwei Wahrheitsprozeduren, die er als »generische« kennzeichnet, weil ihren Elementen kein erkennbares und aussagbares Prädikat zukommt, das es ermöglichen würde, sie zu klassifizieren und konstruktiv in ein Wissen zu integrieren. Er betont im *Dritten Manifest*, das Subjekt der Wahrheit werde in der Politik den

»unendlichen Ressourcen des Kollektivs«¹² entnommen, in der Kunst hingegen dem Sinnlichen. In einem Vortrag jedoch, den Badiou im Jahr 2014 an der European Graduate School zu dem Thema einer philosophischen Betrachtung der Gegenwartskunst gehalten hat und in dem er die Praktiken der Installation und der Performance für die Zwecke seines Denkens aufgreift, seiner Konstruktion oder Erfindung eines Begriffs von Gegenwartskunst, um sie schließlich durch die Termini Formalisierung und Subtraktion zu ersetzen, kommt er auf die Beziehung zwischen Kunst und Zukunft zu sprechen. Zwar soll die Zukunft zunächst die Sache der politischen Veränderung der Formen oder Gesetze der Welt sein,¹³ doch erscheint nun die Kunst, die Kunst der Moderne, die Kunst, die zu dem Zeitpunkt, als der politische Internationalismus zerfällt, eine postnationale Sprache schafft, einen ästhetischen Internationalismus, wie man aus *Finnegan's Wake* ansehen kann, als Trägerin einer »prophetischen Funktion«, von der die Überzeugung zehrt, eine neue und andere Welt als die, in der wir leben, sei möglich. Weil die Politik von der Abstraktion bedroht, von der Ungewissheit heimgesucht wird, kommt die Kunst ihr gleichsam zu Hilfe, begründet sie ein Vertrauen in die Zukunft und richtet einen Warteraum ein. Badiou beschließt seinen Vortrag mit einem Hinweis auf einen Ausruf oder Ausspruch des Dichters André Breton. Unabhängig davon, was sich in der Zukunft ereignet, wird das Warten, das die im nicht-konventionellen Sinne verstandene Gegenwartskunst wohl verlängern soll, selbst etwas Großartiges gewesen sein.

¹² Ebd., S. 26 f.

¹³ Alain Badiou und Judith Balso, »Contemporary Art Considered Philosophically and Poetologically«, European Graduate School Saas Fee, Sommer 2014. Unveröffentlicht.

Die Polemik könnte genau an dieser Stelle fortgesetzt werden. Aus der Sicht einer reflexiven Gegenwartskunst der Demokratie und ihrer Theorie würde man dann gegen den Affirmationismus einwenden, er ästhetisiere die Politik, indem er eine Figur der modernen Ästhetik aufwärme, eine alte Gegebenheit des ästhetischen Diskurses, die der Kunst als eines vorbereitenden Statthalters, während es doch der Gegenwartskunst, wie sie gegeben ist und wie man sie zu kennen glaubt, darum gehe, hier und jetzt politisch zu sein, also unmittelbar die Welt zu verändern, oder zumindest durch Reflexion die Schwelle der Politik zu betreten.

Der Affirmationismus gerät so in die Nähe dessen, was Adorno in seinen »Meditationen zur Metaphysik« das »vergebliche Warten«¹⁴ nannte, das sich in der Kunst der Moderne ausdrücken soll. Das Beispiel, das Adorno wählt, ist nicht jenes, auf das sich der Leser sofort einstellt, Becketts *Warten auf Godot*, sondern *Wozzeck*, die Oper von Alban Berg. Während freilich der negative Dialektiker die Negativität des Wartens unterstreicht, herrscht im Affirmationismus ein eher festlich antizipatorischer Ton vor. Aus dem Wartesaal der Kunst soll die Politik einen wieder herausführen, und wenn sie es nicht tut, so hat sich das Warten dennoch gelohnt. Kann Warten je vergeblich sein, wäre ein Warten, das sich als ein vergebliches einbekennen müsste, nicht ein Warten, das aufhören würde, Warten zu sein? Das vergebliche Warten soll, folgt man Adorno, eine Frage in der Gestalt einer Lebensform »aktualisieren«, nämlich die Frage »Ist das denn alles?« Weil diese Frage,

¹⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, in: Gesammelte Schriften, Band 6, Frankfurt am Main 1970, S. 368. Badiou bezieht sich in seinen fünf »Lektionen« zum »Fall Wagner« auf das »vergebliche Warten« bei Adorno, verkürzt es aber zu einem *bloß* vergeblichen Warten, einem ewigen Säumen! (Vgl. Alain Badiou, *Cinq leçons sur le >cas< Wagner*, Caen 2010, S. 39 f., S. 68 und S. 70.)

wie jede Frage, eine Antwort erheischt, ist ihre Aktualisierung eine Aktualisierung, die im Akt des Wartens geschieht; weil sie aber eine Frage bleibt, die nicht beantwortet werden kann, ist ihre Aktualisierung eine Aktualisierung, die sich im wiederholten Akt eines »vergeblichen Wartens« ereignet, eines Wartens, das zur Lebensform wird, eines Wartens, dessen Vergeblichkeit eine reflexive Qualität hat. Es soll nämlich den Zustand der Welt »reflektieren«, der »sein Maß hat an der Versagung«. Die Reflexion, die Adorno meint, ist nicht die Reflexion der Gegenwartskunst der Demokratie und ihrer Theorie, die ja im Dienst eines universalisierenden Fortschreitens stehen soll, sondern eine Reflexion, die den minimalen, unentscheidbaren, unverfügbaren Abstand zu einem Stillstand markiert, zu einer Versagung, die bereits dadurch, dass sie noch eine Reflexion erlaubt, nicht einfach mit sich zusammenfällt, auch wenn kein anderes Maß sich anlegen lässt als eben das der Versagung, zumindest, wenn man aus Redlichkeit Beschwichtigungen widerstehen will. Das »vergebliche Warten«, das die Kunst zum Ausdruck bringt, ist folglich spannungsgeladen, ein polemisches Warten, hin- und hergerissen zwischen seiner eigenen Möglichkeit und Unmöglichkeit, zwischen der Versagung und der Erfüllung. Oder es ist eine reine Entfernung, eine unpolemische Entfernung, eine Entfernung, die die Versagung anerkannt hat, ohne die Erfüllung zu verleugnen, eine Entfernung, die weder von einer verneinenden noch von einer bejahenden Antwort auf die Frage »Ist das denn alles?« verringert oder vergrößert werden kann, eine Entfernung, die sich eben zwischen Frage und Antwort erstreckt und den Trug eines symmetrischen Verhältnisses zwischen beiden durchbricht. Und wenn die Kunst diese Distanz stets erneut herstellt, wenn darin die künstlerische Leistung besteht, nicht die einer Kunst der Moderne im affirmationistischen Verständnis und nicht die der Gegenwartskunst im reflexiv-universalisierenden Ver-

ständnis, wäre es dann nicht die Aufgabe der Politik, gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse als solche einer reinen Entfernung einzurichten, ohne die Zäsur zwischen Kunst und Politik zuzudecken? Die Zäsur: nähert man sich der reinen Entfernung im künstlerischen Ausdruck »vergeblichen Wartens«, ist noch lange nicht ausgemacht, was eine politische Praxis sein könnte, der es um eine reine Entfernung zu tun ist.

Hans-Jürgen Syberberg führt im November 2015 ein Gespräch mit Boris Groys im Roten Salon der Berliner Volksbühne. Er spricht von dem Gut des Vaters, das er vor fünfzehn Jahren aufgekauft hat, davon, wie er seine Zeit damit verbringt, es einzurichten und bewohnbar zu machen, sein Archiv darin unterzubringen, ein wenig Landwirtschaft zu betreiben. Er erzählt von seinen Geldkollekten, die zum Ziel haben, den während des zweiten Weltkriegs zerstörten Marktplatz von Demmin wiederaufzubauen. Virtuelle Bilder des Marktplatzes, Bilder des Marktplatzes mit einem virtuellen Weihnachtsmarkt, will Syberberg auf seine Internet-Seite stellen, auf der er eine Art Tagebuch führt, ein Blog in Bildern, den man in den USA und in China verfolgt. Kulissenhaft erstet der Marktplatz an einem Tag im September, an dem eine kleine, bewegliche, amateurhaft geführte Digitalkamera die Begegnungen der Bürger auf dem durch zwei riesige Stellwände simulierten Raum des früheren Marktplatzes filmt – durch zwei Stellwände, die Plattenbauten verdecken, durch zwei Stellwände, deren Weiß an die Leinwand eines Kinos erinnert, durch zwei Stellwände, auf denen sowohl Photographien ehemaliger Bewohner zu sehen sind als auch Prospekte mit den gemalten Gebäuden, die einmal dort standen, entrollt werden. Ein Streifen mit den Worten »Demmin 2015 – 75 Jahre nach 1945 – größter Massen-

suizid des Krieges – 875 Jahrfeier« läuft wiederholt über den unteren Bildrand, während der Blick der Kamera sich auf einen Vogelschwarm hoch am wolkenverhangenen Himmel richtet, zwischen Marktplatz und Kirchturm. Gehört er nun zur Installation? Handelt es sich um die Beschwörung eines Orts, einer alten Hansestadt, die willkürlich ein Stadtbild und ein geschichtliches Ereignis isoliert, sie zum Anblick und zur Wunde eines »wahren Körpers« verklärt, andere Bilder in die Unsichtbarkeit drängt und andere Geschichtstatsachen unerwähnt lässt, etwa die Zwangsarbeit, die Gefangene im zweiten Weltkrieg in der Stadt geleistet haben? Syberberg gegen Straub und Huillet? Zum Schluss, als nach dem Schlager »Ob blond, ob braun, ich liebe alle Frau'n«, dem Jan Kiepura zu großer Bekanntheit verholfen hat, Mozarts *Ave Verum Corpus* erklingt und man die Kantorei der in den neunziger Jahren des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts sanierten Kirche Sankt Bartholomaei zu Gesicht bekommt, blendet Syberberg kurz Photographien eines schwarzen Mannes und eines Mannes mit arabischen Zügen ein, die über den Marktplatz laufen.¹⁵ Wie nun alles gemacht sein mag – gemacht ist alles von Hand.

Die Künstler der Zukunft werden in einer Welt ohne Mittelschicht alles selber herstellen, prophezeit Groys – und die Kunst wird ihren anderen Ort in den reichen privaten Gärten der Mäzene haben, als gäbe es für Voltaires *Candide* und Foucaults Heterotopie der Literatur¹⁶ ein ungeahntes Nachleben. Syberberg jedenfalls erblickt in der Bescheiden-

heit seiner Mittel, die auch technologisch avancierte Mittel sind, eine Möglichkeit, den Bezug zum »Planetarischen«, zu einer harmonischen Ordnung des Ganzen herzustellen. Muss man so in der Gegenwartskunst das »vergebliche Warten« verstehen, als Haltung auf einer kosmischen Scholle? Groys attestiert Syberberg, er sei als Künstler seiner Gegenwart immer um einen Schritt voraus gewesen.

¹⁵ Soll das »Gewöhnliche der modernen Welt« (Rebentisch, *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst*, a.a.O., S. 134), der zum Beispiel »ihre Flüchtlinge« zugehören, als das »Produkt einer prinzipiell veränderbaren Praxis« erscheinen?

¹⁶ »Das Schreiben von Romanen ist eine gärtnerische Tätigkeit.« (Michel Foucault, *Die Heterotopien. Der utopische Körper*, Zwei Radiovorträge, Frankfurt am Main 2005, S. 15.)

Robin Wang, *Patching Up the Sky (Butian)*, photograph, 2017. Courtesy of the artist



**Love of Nature, Politics of Diversity:
Open to wonders, hiddenness and sublime**

by Robin Wang

These two images were taken at Huntington Botanical Garden, Pasadena, California, USA, on October 7, 2017. This Garden of Flowing Fragrance (*Liu Fang Yuan*) captures and embodies a nature inspired Daoist theory, art and practice: nature, diversity, wonder and sublime.

The first image, *Patching Up the Sky (Butian)* is rooted in a well-known Chinese mythology. Nuwa, the Chinese goddess, the sister and wife of Fuxi, the emperor-god, is credited with creating human being and making different rocks to repair the falling sky. Love and femininity are celebrated!

The second image, *Bridge of the Joy of Fish (yuleqiao)* is named from a famous story in the classic Daoist text *Zhuangzi* (*The teachings of Master Zhuang*, ca. 369-286 B.C.E.). Master Zhuang and Huizi, his debater, are discussing whether fish are happy in the water: how do humans know whether fish are happy at this bridge? This centuries old tale challenges the human understanding and its intrinsic connection with nature.



Robin Wang, *Bridge of the Joy of Fish (yuleqiao)*, photograph, 2017. Courtesy of the artist

»I love you«: A musical utterance or a flat one?

by Soumyabrata Choudhury

What is enumerated below is a set of notes towards elaborating the question: does the enunciation of the sentence »I love you« result in a musical utterance or a flat one? To repeat – the attempt below is to elaborate the question, not to answer it:

1. As a musical utterance »I love you« is already to sing too much, in too many words. It is enough to hum the song of love where even the sound of the word >love< is not quite distinct. It is enough because all humming, all indistinct music, all modulation and repetition, all echo and refrain is love anyway, without the need of linguistic or *literal* punctuality of the word and sentence of love.

Actually what is distinct about the indistinct music of love, barely audible as a low hum in the air, is the *insistence* of that music. Low as it is, the hum is continuously and inconsolably modulated. Love doesn't care all that much for the punctuation of the letter, the word, the sentence, because it is not punctual. Its time is endless and repetitive with no interstice between one moment of love and another. Love is not a point, it is a sinuous line with no beginning and end – so the *point* of love in language is a redundant pre-occupation. At the same time, love is a ceaseless pre-occupation with its own motif and image, its caesurae and syncopations. But even in its local endings and silences, crises and involutions, there is no real punctuation or discontinuity in its being. That is because love is a mode of being of the Being which is love itself. Love, in this view, is like Spinoza's nature on both sides – in substance and in the world, as *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.¹ That is why even when everything has become unbearable and fallen apart, everything is still perfect. Because the night that rises in the throat like a conclusive nausea, retains the eternal low hum of Being, because, as the mad, heart-broken poet will joyfully and resoundingly mutter, it still *rhymes*!

2. As a musical mode, love is a singular effect of an apparatus of redundancy; that is, music is the effect which is the heterogeneous, and yet, inherent, feature of language. While music is the instantaneous transformation of language into rhythm, syncope, vertigo, ecstasy, the >flat< utterance of the words »I love you« is another sort of event predicated on the use of language. In the musical case, the reality of love is indiscernible from the reality of language and language is indiscernible from a certain music. But in the flat one, everything is wagered on the utterance »I love you« transmitting

some reality exterior to the symbolic function of language. Yet the unforeseen and contingent upsurge of that reality – merely and tremendously sexual – is an event inseparable from the singular envelopment of bodies by language itself. What sort of an envelopment is this? The envelope is actually a *breach* within the apparatus of redundancy called language that every part of the »I love you« participates in. As pure words the three particles in the sentence are abstract and infinitely repeatable and in the musical imagination, every repetition is also a rhythmic variation emerging from the great redundancy of language as such. However, the breach that results with the banal yet singular utterance »I love you« is totally flat when it is wagered on the transmission of an effective reality that challenges the symbolic apparatus to say love *for the first time*. As love uttered for the first time it is also the first thought of that reality from whose breach it issues. Love is a >thought< of reality, only sexual reality, that doesn't join two bodies into a form but provides the form for the very non-relation that entwines two bodies.² In this way, love is enveloped by language that formalises a breach which itself is the constitutive non-relation of every sexed situation or reality. Such situations solicit and provoke language to test the limits of its symbolic threshold whether sex as non-relation can ever be transmitted by linguistic symbols.

3. For the musical scintillation of love, its rhythmic lightening-flashes across the tortured and ecstatic night sky, there are no tests to undergo. Only modes to be lived through dispositions, angularities, tonalities and stylizations that bodies are traversed by ... and to say »body« is already to say too much. It is rather that body itself is only a mode and the mode is always a bodily passage between expression and involution. So when it is said that love is a kind of

music and music is eternal modalization, what is essentially heard in these statements is the experience of a passage between each of these notions. Yet these notions are not substantive concepts. They exist only in their passing – passing between each of their modes of existence. Hence with the musical case, one can never think of the »I love you« as any kind of a *test* whether the test is understood linguistically, ethically or politically.

For instance, a possible name of a mode of being of love might be *seduction*. In the musical variation and modulation of love, seduction is the chief mode of differentiation of love into a *play* of intensity or affect that is expressed as a relation of force. So the mode of seduction is also possibly a play of power, an articulation of the relations of difference as both domination and participation, inequality and equality. However, the very concepts of force, power and domination must be thought of as internal to the effects of that very apparatus of redundancy which is called Language. So even the play of intensity is a play of language where the play is the inner variation of language's incidence in differential sites of expression and involution, envelopment and distribution. So paradoxically, under these musical considerations, even the highly charged – that is, politically charged – notion of inequality is actually primarily not based on the conceptual opposition to some positive notion of equality but is a specific modalization of *difference*. As a positive concept, difference precedes equality and to that extent, any image of an >equal< distribution of forces – an *equal music*, as it were – is only a particular case of the differential modalities of that play of intensity whose one possible name is seduction. To this extent seduction is not some denser sexual realization of love in the element of bodies: it is rather the ceremonialization of bodies into a

hyper symbolized domain of language that supports the >game< of seduction. The moment of an equal distribution of forces, the egalitarian suffusion of music in the milieu remains still a moment of the >game< that is essentially a play of difference. And difference is the ceremonial and symbolic relation that bestows bodies with the gift of linguistic and structural meaning and felicity while making language an affair of corporeal surfaces traversed by incorporeal ecstasies. To sum up the logic of seduction within the musical >schema<: the actual use of the word >love< within this schema has no need to claim any stakes in a reality or a meaning or even an effect that is to be identified as the event of love itself. No such self-belonging of the event can be thought under the musical schema. In so far as the question of love is only a question of modality, it finds its so-called reality only in the relation which is the pure passage between bodies, words and intensities. Love is nothing but that Relation, that Song which always precedes the subjects involved in the relation and the words heard in the song. Seduction is that specific series of actualizations that is part of the forever pre-existent milieu of music and web of relations with the particular property of these ontological precedences passing through the affects of bodies. In their passing through the bodies in question, these affects and intensities become the attributes not of lovers and partners but of players and aesthetes. Hence, seduction in many a philosophical vision reaches the greatest heights of love to accomplish the status of something which gains a new name – the name Art.

4. Unlike love received aesthetically in the mode of something like Subjective Art or Subjective Music documented in the diary of the seducer,³ in the case of the flat event of the utterance »I love you«, seduction has nothing to do with the event itself. It is nei-

ther its presupposition nor its aim, it is not its >force< either. No music to the utterance! But seduction belongs to the contingency of reality, the real insofar as it is not the condition of love but a possible *test* internal to the sexual >non-relation<. This >non-relation< is the very breach from which the utterance of love arises. The test being whether the play of intensive difference and relation of sexual power are themselves based on a kind of *lived* presupposition of equality. This itself can be a political test in relation to the question of whether equality exists within forms of life, including gendered forms, pertaining to which the sexual incidence or the breach of >non-relation< happens. Thus the test is whether the lived presupposition(s) internal to the real of sex are transmitted to the >thought< of love along the site of its event-utterance »I love you«. Does the supplement of love transmit the lived conditions of seduction across the breach within these very conditions that makes the supplement possible? The test is envisaged along the site of an eventual breach of the very presupposition(s) that would equally determine the consequences of the breach.

But in the contrary condition of sexual reality or sex's real being articulated through the game of seduction *without* any lived equality, where seduction is the sexual intensification of already existing conditions of inequality, the >thought< of love can – and must – be a *revolt* against the game/rule of seduction. That, however, doesn't mean love's revolt excludes seduction. The revolt can also be the very condition for a *new* eroticism, a new seductive disposition invented by the intransigent thought of love – a seduction whose modulation and rhythm are yet to come ...

5. Taken simply the utterance »I love you« is an affair of language and yet the words, from time immemorial are meant to convey or be the staging of what is commonly yet obscurely called a >love affair<. What is the relationship between this affair of language and the love affair as secreted in the crypt of the utterance »I love you«? Let's consider the first possibility: that it is indeed only a nominal question and that the crucial words are only meant to provide a sort of stage setting to bring an affair of sexed bodies to a formal culmination – whether that culmination results in a so-called relationship or sacrament or contract of marriage or even be imagined as the sheer music of an intensive line that traverses the »affair« without necessarily transforming it into the status of a worldly socialised relation. In fact, thought of as an immanent musical line within the distinct utterance, the line can also be conceived as a higher sublimation of the mere verbal confessional that stages the »I love you«.

But doesn't the splendid flight take us away too quickly from the »affair« internal to the words themselves? For in the very utterance of the words »I love you« certain hypotheses are hidden: first, the hypothesis that the affair of language immersed in the seduction of the very *words* is the investment of language not in love at all but in seduction itself as the end. In such a case the words of love are only a vehicle of *persuasion*. But even before correlating this hypothesis to a certain politics, one must go back to a more preliminary possibility. This is the possibility that »I love you« is a sentence that undergoes, in its very actualisation, a kind of *wavering*. Is it completely unlikely that the words of love, even as they are being spoken, are, as it were, suspended or to be more exact put in reserve? Exactly at the incidence of the sentence, the sentence is at

least partly withdrawn from its career in the world, its destiny as a confession of the heart. What is being suggested here is neither a regime of sexual confusion underlying the implications of uttering the word >love< nor the inhibition which pertains to mouthing this word insofar as it feels either too full or too evanescent; what is being indicated is the reserve internal to the signification of love in the very act of transmitting it towards an addressee and into the world of meaning as such. The difficulty arises from a possible subjective inability to existentially measure up to the *surplus* or reserve that attaches to >love< insofar as its signifying movement overwhelms the very economy of erotic or spiritual intentionality that engenders it. Before the surplus the sentence wavers and in the wavering it is the very surplus, or reserve which remains even while the literal and intentional correlation of heart and words is indefinitely suspended.

So before correlating of political forms with the articulation between the affair of language and the »love affair«, one must ask, whether there is ever a possible thinking of politics *within* the very advent of this wavering or this indeterminacy. Let's add a supplementary possibility to this preliminary hypothesis. It is that whether there is a politics conceivable at the level of objective indetermination, whether indetermination or undecidability is the very condition for what is called decision to emerge in politics and love. To this extent, for every further elaboration of its status there remains within the question of love's relation to language a common ontological ground with politics – the ground of decision which paradoxically is undetermined till the decision itself is uttered rigorously and delicately: »I love you« in love and »I am a collective life« in politics. In other words it is on a groundless ground that

two forms of individuation can be proposed: the form of the Two in love and the form of the Multiple in politics, both independently articulating a common egalitarian access to the so-called affair of language.

6. As an affair of seduction the linguistic utterance of love co relates to a strategy of *rhetoric* and as with most rhetorical regimes the strategic aim is persuasion. Persuasion to what end? It does not matter whether it's a question of sexual conquest or a politico-electoral one, the real satisfaction lies in knowing that an *effect* of subjectivization has taken place. Someone has been persuaded through a strategic deployment of force to become >another<. To this extent the strategy of rhetoric while inseparable from the instrumentalization of ordinary language – the oh-so-common words »I love you« – actually injects in language something else: something that is always the central move made with regard to the linguistic repertoire, the move of metaphor. Metaphor is the special mobilization of language in both love and politics in so far as these spheres of subjective engagement are equally the areas of affecting others within the common and ordinary element of life, with an uncommon and extraordinary effect of these very resources.

However as an affair of language and an affair of seduction both apparently geared towards persuasion accomplished through the strategy of rhetoric and the effect of metaphor, actually are involved in an essential knotting. The knotting is of the second-order specialization of the logic of metaphor indiscernible from common discourse and yet transporting (*metaphora* in Greek as transport) it in >another< direction with the gratuitous *pleasure* of the very act of precipitating a metaphor in discourse. Who is to guarantee that the ones who utter »I love you« take full responsibility for the ex-

act distribution within this syntactic chain of the literal intentional denotation and the surplus metaphoric connotation? The rigorous music measured by a kind of heartfelt sincerity as to the emotion of love felt there and the adventure of the surplus carried on the wings of a purely musical exuberance, a sheer tune that flows from music's own free flight irrespective of the affects verifiable in the heart? In other words, seduction in language or the language of seduction is not confined to the logic of persuasion predicated on the instruments of rhetoric; they, more drastically, carry a surplus of gratuitous pleasure that is not any more dependent only on the second-order metaphoric logic of language and its insidious music but is a seductive and musical reserve contained in *any* act of language. In this sense the »I love you« is not merely an example of common discourse; it is the very paradigm of commonness – the exemplar of language used in its most granulated and subaltern literalness. Yet at that very sub-ordinary level, language as such overflows with an uncontrollable surplus of pleasure that comes with the most sparse use of common words – merely »I love you« ...

What is the corresponding sub-ordinary surplus inherent in the common discourse of politics? Again it is easy to limit oneself to the analysis of instrumental political results measured in terms of institutional and electoral power as they are achieved in specific conjunctures of history. From speeches made to advertising campaigns, to the final roar of the crowd when an election is won, the discourse of persuasion and the subjectivization of the citizen's heart are clearly co-implicated. However one could again ask that what guarantee there is that the very heart of the citizen sought to be codified by the correlation between the language of politics, the forms of power and the affects of the subject are exhausted by the

code. Who could govern the rhetorical satisfaction of matching the intensity of linguistic deployment to the magnitude of victory so perfectly that it doesn't leave behind any trace of a gratuitous hence ungovernable enthusiasm? Who can say this enthusiasm is to be interpreted as an anachronistic participation in the pure spectacle of the collective activity subtracted from its political aim or it is to be understood as an excess over the >normal< measure of participation expected of the public subject, the citizen? Such possibilities of overwhelming the economy of politics, whether in the example of elections or any other >normal< case, is always already present in the very inaugural rhetorical/metaphoric move made in the discourse of politics. In this respect seduction is both the aim of the games of love and politics but also love and politics in their most common sub-ordinary existence already contain a permanent excess or surplus of seduction.

7. But suppose the affair of language staging a »love affair« to suitable music, whether of the musical instrument or of the heart, at its core, is an affair of love *itself*. That is what happens if the infinitely repeatable and modalizable »I love you« is used *for the first time*. Lest someone objects that such a supposition is absurd because nothing repeatable can be used for the first time, the gamble here must be precisely outlined: the lover in saying »I love you« does not merely intend to invest the common, repeatable words with a unique heartfelt intensity, she wagers that such uniqueness will form the words for the first time even while remaining indiscernible from their infinitely iterable past and future uses. This really means that while it is completely correct to observe that the lovers' discourse is always a taking part in pre-given discursive practices – love is always historical, always social – the generic *thought* of love is wagered on

the event of love being something that also voids all pre-given discourse in its very upsurge. To this extent no music attaches to the utterance »I love you« since all music remains part of a world of structures however much these worlds present themselves in forms of echo, refrain, vertigo and ecstasy. Unless one equally wagers a music of the void where no structure of repetition is still instituted. Not even a music of the void, a >void-music< ...⁴

To take an example of the battle and escape of love faced with its indiscernible adversary that is discourse, an example from the history of cinema: in Alain Renais's *Love unto Death* (1984) Elizabeth loves Simon and suddenly Simon dies though to be revived but with the certain knowledge, which the lovers share, that he is going to die again soon, this time forever. Elizabeth cannot accept such a decision of – what? Either such a decision can be justified on the discursive grounds of a science of nature which demonstrates that everything which lives will disappear one day or a theology, Christian in this case, which declares that death is an opportunity to win an everlasting resurrected life, or even a philosophical discourse which proposes an irreducible mortality or finitude marking the condition of human existence. Elizabeth refuses all these discourses to initiate a vigilant and uncompromising scrutiny of *militant* modes of resistance to as well as escape from the discursive web of the world. In this effort she and Simon visit their believer friends Judith and Jerome. Confronted with Elizabeth's militant refusal(s) the couple speak in gentle reprimanding tones. Almost like a medieval Psalm of consolation they sing their question »By refusing to accept the physical death of someone you love, aren't you depriving him of the chance of an everlasting life that the Bible already promises?« Elizabeth replies »The Bible was written be-

fore my love for Simon existed.« This is an instance of language-use indiscernible from any other such use that forces into that use a thought *subtracted* from all historically indexed discourses. The Bible in the example represents both arrival and destination of a specific historico-metaphysical temporality that envelops European society, culture and *existence*. By these precise measures, the one who wagers love for the first time indifferent to the infinite previous mentions of the word in infinite contexts including the biblical ones, steps outside the grid of history exposing her sparse words to a delicate and severe utterance which cleaves to a void existence.

Does the example then illustrate a kind of subtractive pathos where a subjective residue sticks to such words as love, faith and hope even when the rule of history continues to govern the fate of lovers and citizens by the instruments of its several *logoi* – whether science, theology or philosophy? To all appearances this seems to be the case unless one wagers the proposition that exactly at the indiscernible point of the voiding of all discourse and existence indexed to discursive forms, love comes into existence *for the time*. Under these speculative conditions, love is both indiscernible from every other use of the word >love< and yet it exists as a *new thought* to the liminal even impossible extent that the very word >love< comes into existence for the first time – the event of *this* »I love you« indiscernible from every »I love you« yet inventing love as a new exposure of the lover to her own-most capacity to be exposed to the new ... In this sense indeed the utterance »I love you« is neither a nominalist affair of language nor a formal linguistic culmination of a game of seduction, not a »language-affair« or a »love-affair« but an affair of love *itself*. If one were to seek a resonance – forgive or celebrate the musical analogy depending on your taste – of the

above with politics, one might offer the example of »equality« as a void utterance in the revolutionary conjuncture when all historical discourses are being subtracted – the discourses of power, as they circulate in the spheres of political representation supported nay, enhanced by rhetorical prosthesis and always edified (a little) by a certain leisurely music. At this exact point, where the point itself is being divided between its material support and its void neighbourhood, a new thought comes into existence – the thought of equality for the first time. Again the word »equality« is indiscernible from its infinite monotonous use ringing in ones ears as if forever – all politics is so boring that one day we will all die of this boredom! Yet *this* utterance of equality forces the monotonous – democratic – hum to suddenly stop and break out into a region that is utterly exposed to its lack of modulation, its utter flatness. This is the flatness of thought whether it be the thought of love or equality, both contingent in their coming into being through language and absolutely necessary in their *literally* being-thought: the thought of love itself, equality itself.

Endnotes

¹ See Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (Zone Books: New York, 1990), 13-22

² Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XX*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (W. W. Norton & Company: New York & London, 1999), 1-13. Also See Alain Badiou »What is love?« in *Jacques Lacan:*

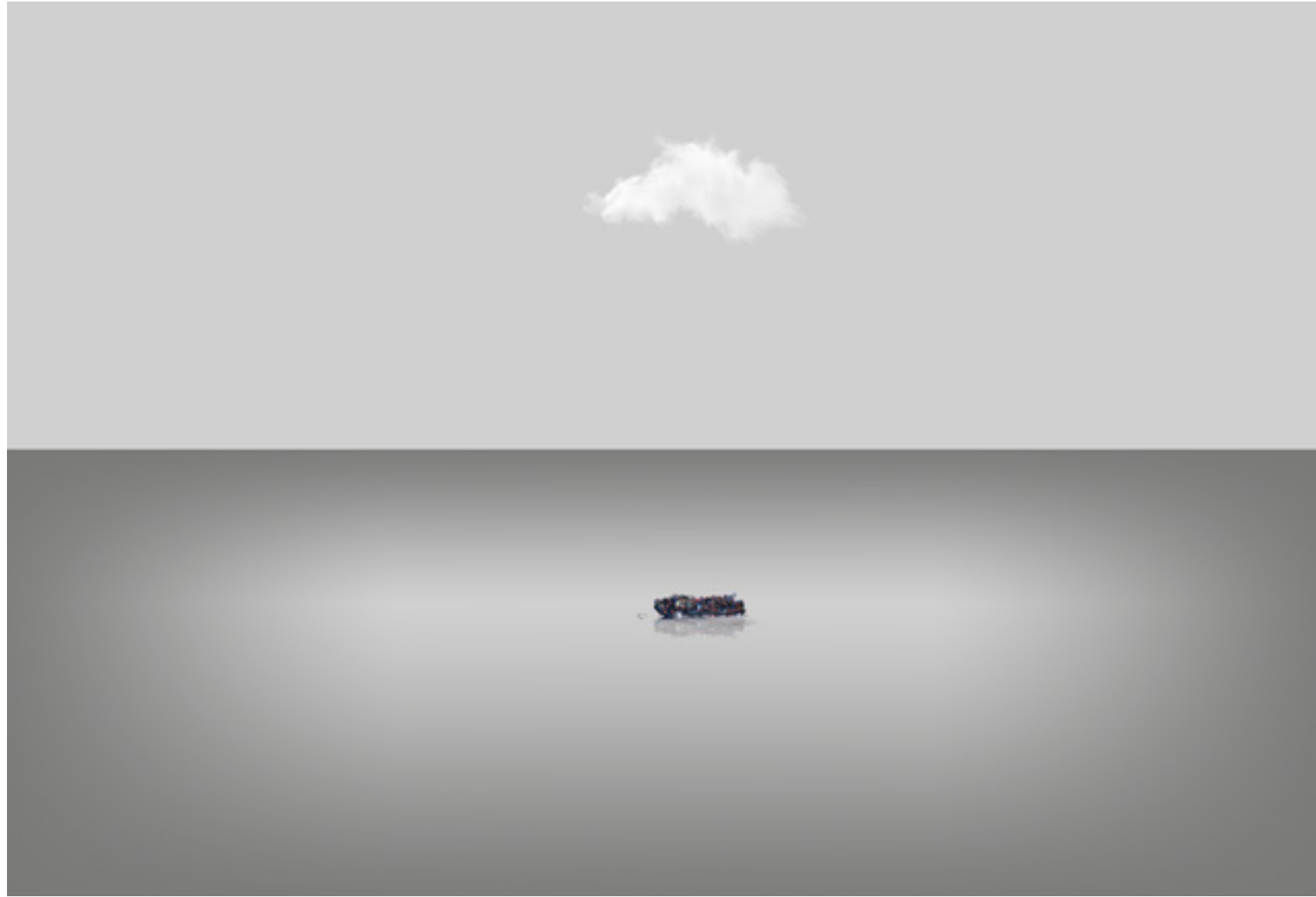
Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Vol IV, ed. Slavoj Žižek (Routledge: London & New York, 2003), 51-67

³ Søren Kierkegaard, »The Seducer's Diary« in *Either/ Or: Part I*, ed. & trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1987), 301-445

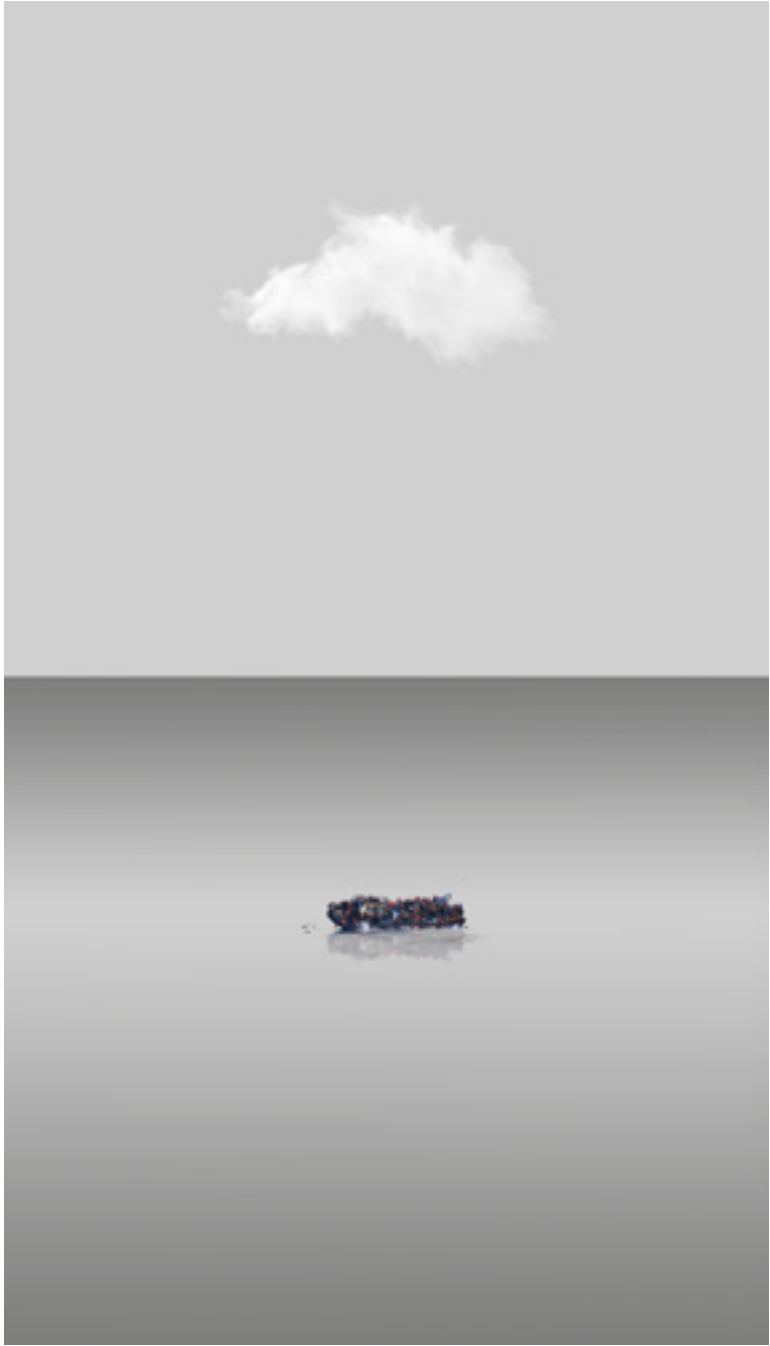
⁴ In Franco »Bifo« Berardi's *The Uprising*, the author, deeply moved by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's nomad thought, speaks of a precarious love in times of global neoliberal capitalism. A citation from Rainer Maria Rilke's Fifth Elegy presents a poetic refrain on such a precarity as that space of the world which is worn so thin that love as act, as practice, as the singular lyric of joy must find its realization in that forever thinning strip. The precarity of love in a capitalist world involves the lovers' erotic and poetic exchange as unexchangeable being challenged by all spaces of the world rendered exchangeable by the universal Law of Value. Love in conditions of vagrancy or precarity is both a spatiotemporal and existential idea. Yet in the vagrant spaces worn thin by the assaults of capitalist exchange, both politics and love re-gather in these very worn-out thin spaces to re-singularize and reanimate them – Tahrir Square in Cairo, Sahabag Square in Dhaka, Zucotti Park in New York ... At the same time love articulated as >thin< music/poetry in our times must be distinguished from the generic idea of a »void music«. It is the distinction between love as precarious *practice* and love as egalitarian *thought*. See Franco »Bifo« Berardi's, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (semiotext(e) intervention series: Los Angeles, 2012), 148-149



Nauman Abid, *For a better future together*, C type print, variable size, 2014.
Courtesy of the artist



Nauman Abid, *Visions are scary. A refugee boat dying in an imaginary situation*,
C type print, variable size, 2017. Courtesy of the artist



Lessepsian Lovers

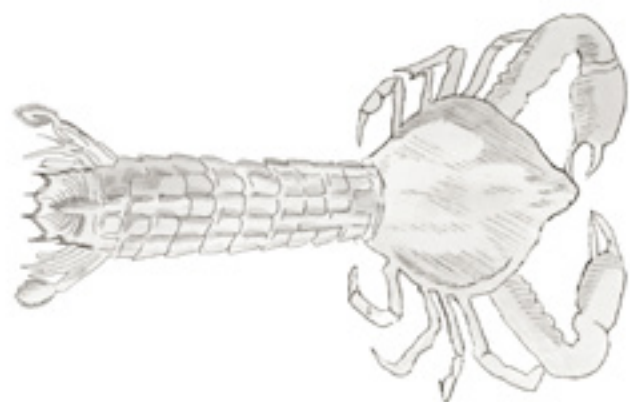
by Uriel Orlow

11 drawings (pp.180-190), 2017-2018.

Courtesy of the artist













Lessepsian Lovers

by Uriel Orlow

»De Lesseps and his canal finally destroyed the Orient's distance, its cloistered intimacy *away* from the West, its perdurable exoticism. Just as a land barrier could be transmuted into a liquid artery, so too the Orient was transubstantiated from resistant hostility into obliging, and submissive, partnership. After de Lesseps no one could speak of the Orient as belonging to another world, strictly speaking. There was only »our« world, »one« world bound together because the Suez Canal had frustrated those last provincials who still believed in the difference between worlds.« Edward Said, *Orientalism*

Since the Suez Canal's opening in 1868, the waterway which connects the Mediterranean and the Red Sea has also been used by migrating marine species that are attracted by the warmer temperatures and higher salinity in the Mediterranean. This zoological phenomenon is named Lessepsian Migration, after Ferdinand de Lesseps, the entrepreneur who realized the old dream of joining the two seas and connecting the West with the East. Biological text books describe >foreign< species in the Eastern Mediterranean that are taking over the habitat of indigenous marine life and so the migrating fish and crustaceans serve as an allegory for the Mediterranean today. Lessepsian Lovers imagines a biopolitical alternative: instead of conflict and competition it conjures the potential of cross-breeding and the emergence of new, hybrid species emerging out of this encounter.

Ωκεανικός Πλανήτης – Oceanic Planet

by Antigoni Tsagkaropoulou

from the project *Squidgina Mermaid* with Lydia Miligkou and Anna Ketikoglou, 2017

»She«, in fact may no longer be a she at all, but rather the subject of quite another story: a subject-in-process, a mutant, the other of the Other, a promising monster. (Rosi Braidotti)

Φάση πρώτη.
Εξομολογήσεις

ΠΡΩΤΗ.

Η μικρή γοργόνα δεν αισθάνεται πόνο. Το σώμα της ρέει μαζί με τα υγρά ρεύματα των ωκεανών. Είναι η προδότρια των ορίων, μια εντερική αμοιβάδα του χάους που μεταλλάσσει την μορφή της αναλόγως με το ποιον επιθυμεί να κοροϊδέψει. Σε εμένα, εμφανίστηκε μια νύχτα σαν ένα μεγάλο τέρας γεμάτο αποφύσεις, παρακαλώντας με να την χτυπήσω μέχρι το πλοκαμωτό της κορμί να γίνει διπλάσιο. Η σάρκα της είχε γεμίσει πληγές που χύνανε ακατάπαυστα μαύρα υγρά. Με εγκλώβιζε σιγά σιγά χωρίς να το καταλαβαίνω μέσα στο ζεστό της κυτταρόπλασμα και με αγκάλιαζε με τα πεπτικά της υγρά. Όλο της το σώμα είχε μετατραπεί σε ένα τεράστιο στομάχι κι εγώ, καθώς ενδοσυμβιώναμε, ένιωθα τόση ασφάλεια μέσα στα γλιτσερά της ζουμιά. Στο τέλος της νύχτας με απέβαλε μαζί με όλα τα άχρηστα προϊόντα της ...

ΔΕΥΤΕΡΗ.

Η μικρή γοργόνα κολυμπάει μέσα στα κοπρόνερα και κοιμάται μέσα στον ζεστό σωρό των υγρών και στερεών αποβλήτων της. Το κυματιστό της σώμα καταπίνει και χωνεύει. Τα περιττώματά της γονιμοποιούν ολόκληρο το βασίλειο. Η μικρή γοργόνα παράγει το καλύτερο λίπασμα σε ολόκληρο τον ωκεανό καθώς διαθέτει τα περισσότερα και τα πιο όμορφα στόμια. Οι ουρές της είναι γεμάτες τρύπες οι οποίες περιβάλλονται από τους πιο καλοφτιαγμένους ανελκτήρες μυς και τους πιο ξεχειλωμένους έσω και έξω σφιγκτήρες. Το καταχθόνιο πλάσμα είναι μια αρχέγονη πανσεξουαλική θεότητα των θαλασσών γεμάτη πλοκάμια στα σημεία όπου ένας άνθρωπος θα είχε τρίχες ...

First Phase.
Confessions

First.

The little mermaid feels no pain. Her body flows together with the wet streams of the oceans. She is the traitor of all limits, an intestinal amoeba of chaos that constantly changes her own form, depending on who she wants to fool. One night, she appeared to me as an enormous monster, full of appendages begging me to hit her till her tentacular body becomes twice as big. Her flesh was covered in wounds that poured endlessly black fluids. She was slowly capturing me, without me noticing it, in her warm cytoplasm and hugging me with her digestive liquids. Her whole body was transformed into a gigantic stomach and I, while we were together in an endosymbiotic state, felt so secure deep inside her oozy juices. At the end of the night, she aborted me together with all of her waste products ...

Second.

The little mermaid is swimming in muck-water and sleeping inside a hot pile of her own liquid and solid waste. Her wavy body swallows and digests. Her excrements are fertilising the whole kingdom. The little mermaid produces the best manure in the whole ocean, as she possesses the biggest number of the most beautiful orifices. Her tails are full of holes that are surrounded by the most well-made retractor muscles and the most stretched out inner and outer clamps. This chthonic creature is a primitive pansexual deity of the seas, having tentacles in the places where a proper human would have hair ...

ΤΡΙΤΗ.

Η μικρή γοργόνα δεν έχει δέρμα, είναι γεμάτη στόμια και μαύρες τρύπες. Τα έντερα της αγγίζανε τα δάχτυλά μου, το στόμιο του πρωκτού της φίλαγε το στόμα μου. Ο χώρος που κατοικούσε ήτανε πλημμυρισμένος με βλέννες, υγρά, γλιτσερά ζουμιά που μυρίζανε, βγαλμένα απευθείας από το λεπιασμένο στομάχι της. Ήταν γεμάτη πλοκάμια, ένα εντερικό χταπόδι που έτρωγε αβυσσαλέα το κέρατό μου. Το σώμα της ήταν ένα μεγάλο και απότομο βάθος γεμάτο βεντούζες. Άνοιξε το στόμα της, με κατάπιε και με έχωσε βίαια μέσα στην άβυσσο του γαστρεντερικού της συστήματος, μέχρι τα βάθη του πυθμένα του πρωκτού της. Εκεί συνάντησα όλους τους παλιούς μου φίλους να χορεύουν πάνω κάτω στους ρυθμούς των αποβολών της μέσα σε μια πολύχρωμη κολλώδη λίμνη.

ΤΕΤΑΡΤΗ.

Έχωσα το πρόσωπό μου βαθιά μέσα στην ευωδιαστή μικροβιακή λάσπη σου. Ήθελα να σε μυρίσω, να εισπνεύσω όλα τα αέρια που αναδύονται από μέσα σου, να κατοικήσω για λίγο στο νερόλακκο της μήτρας σου και να ακουμπήσω το μάγουλό μου στα βακτηριακά τοιχώματα του προστάτη σου. Το θυμάμαι, εσύ ήσουν η μικρή γοργόνα, εσύ που με ακούς. Ήσουν ένας περιπλανώμενος χαμαιλέοντας που απορροφούσε όλα τα χαρακτηριστικά του εκάστοτε περιβάλλοντος. Δεν ήσουν ποτέ κάτι συγκεκριμένο. Πάντα άλλαζες, πάντα μπερδευες και πάντα ήσουν εσύ. Θυμάσαι την μέρα που ήσουν ιππόκαμπος; Με είχες ερεθίσει. Ήσουν ο πιο καυλωτικός αρσενικός ιππόκαμπος που κυφορούσε. Πόσο θα ήθελα να ήμουν ο πατέρας του παιδιού σου. Αλλά πάλι άλλαξες και το παιδί στο τέλος της νύχτας το απέβαλλες μαζί με όλα τα άχρηστα προϊόντα σου ...

Third.

The little mermaid has no skin, she is full of orifices and black holes. Her intestines were touching my fingers, her anal mouth was kissing my lips. The place she inhabited was flooded by mucus, liquids, slimy-smelly juices extracted directly from her scaly stomach. She was full of tentacles, a gutty octopus that was abysmally eating my horn. Her body was huge, steeped depth, full of plungers. She suddenly opened her mouth, swallowed me and forcibly dug me into her gastrointestinal system, till the deep depth bottom of her anus. There, I met all my old friends who were dancing up and down in the rhythm of her waste, inside a colourful sticky lake.

Fourth.

I stuck my face deep inside your fragrant microbial mud. I just wanted to smell you, to breathe all the gas that emerges from within you, to live for a while in the pond of your uterus and to place my cheek on the bacterial walls of your prostate. I remember that very vividly, you were the little mermaid, you that listens to me now. You were a wandering chameleon that absorbed all the features of every environment. You were never something specific. You were constantly changing yourself, always confusing and always you in the end. Remember the day you were a seahorse? You had aroused me. You were the most horny pregnant male seahorse that I have ever seen. But you once again changed and, at the end of the night, you aborted the child inside you together with all of your waste products ...

-πόδια / to become less human-

Η μικρή γοργόνα δεν είναι απλώς ένα ψάρι που περπατάει. Είναι μία αμφίβια παιδομορφική σαλαμάνδρα με χοντρό σώμα, μακριά αστραφτερή ουρά και παραμορφωμένα, ανεστραμμένα πόδια. Περνάει τον περισσότερο χρόνο της σε τρύπες που βρίσκει ή σκάβει η ίδια πάνω στα σώματα των ανυποψίαστων ανθρώπινων εραστών της. Την νύχτα βοηθάει τις ψυχές των νεκρών να μεταβούν στον Άνω Κόσμο και αυτές, ως αντάλλαγμα, ακρωτηριάζουν τα πόδια των ανθρώπων και της τα πηγαίνουν. Κανείς δεν ξέρει ακριβώς τι τα κάνει... Κάποιοι λένε πως τα χρησιμοποιεί για να δημιουργήσει καινούρια τέρατα, τις φρανκενσταϊνικές πεινασμένες αδελφές της ...

-συμβιωτικές χρωματικές ανωμαλίες-

Η μικρή γοργόνα κάποιες φορές είναι πράσινη. Το πηχτό ημιδιάφανο περίβλημά της αλλάζει χρώμα όταν η Chlorella διεισδύει μέσα της. Η Chlorella είναι ένα κοινό πράσινο φίκος, μια απλή σεξουαλική απεσταλμένη η οποία παγιδεύεται στην υπηρεσία της γοργόνας προκειμένου να ικανοποιήσει τις ανάγκες και να παράξει την τροφή της. Διαχύνει την πράσινη σάρκα της δημιουργώντας έναν λεπτό λιπώδη υμένα που αγκαλιάζει τα σωθικά της μικρής γοργόνας. Τότε, όλα τα στόμια της γοργόνας καθίστανται περιττά και δεν λειτουργούνε πια. Η ίδια είναι απολύτως παραδομένη στην Chlorella η οποία βρίσκεται μέσα της και διακατέχει όλο τον έλεγχο των ζωτικών λειτουργιών της. Η Chlorella προσφέρει στη μικρή γοργόνα και μια άλλη εξυπηρέτηση: ανακυκλώνει τα απόβλητα του ουρικού οξέος της μικρής γοργόνας σε ουσίες θρεπτικές για την ίδια. Ποια είναι »η ίδια« δύσκολο να πούμε. Αυτά τα δύο όντα είναι τόσο στενά συνδεδεμένα μεταξύ τους που δεν μπορούμε να αντιληφθούμε που τελειώνει το ζώο και που αρχίζει το φίκος.

-legs / to become less human-

The little mermaid is not only just a fish that walks. She is an amphibious pedomorphic salamander with a thick body, a long sparkly tail and disfigured, upside-down legs. She spends most of her time inside holes that she finds or digs herself on the bodies of her clueless human lovers. In the night, she helps the souls of the dead move to the Upper World and they, as payback, mutilate the legs of the humans and bring them back to her. Nobody knows exactly what she does with them. Rumour has it, she uses them to create new monsters, her hungry frankensteinish sisters ...

-symbiotic colourful anomalies-

The little mermaid is sometimes green. Her thick translucent integument changes colour when Chlorella penetrates her. Chlorella is just a common green seaweed, a simple sexual correspondent, who is trapped in the reign of the little mermaid in order to satisfy her needs and to produce her food. She diffuses her green flesh, creating a thin adipose hymen that embraces the little mermaid's innards. Then, all the mermaid's orifices become unnecessary and cease to function. She completely surrenders to Chlorella, who is inside her and has a total control of her vital functions. Chlorella also offers the little mermaid another service: she recycles the waste of her uric acid, transforming it to nutritious elements for herself. Meaning who? It's hard to determine. These two creatures share such a bond that we are not able to comprehend where the animal ends and the seaweed begins.

-πεινασμένες μάγισσες-

Η Μάγισσα Ούρσουλα είναι μια τεράστια ερμαφρόδιτη σκουληκότρυπα. Το κυλινδρικό γυμνό κορμί της είναι μια άυλη σήραγγα που συνδέει δύο σημεία του χωροχρόνου. Ένα διαστημικό τούνελ με την μαγική δυνατότητα να μεταμορφώνει τους ανυποψίαστους επισκέπτες του σε υβριδικούς δαίμονες των κυμάτων. Δεν έχει κεφάλι, ούτε εσωτερικό σκελετό, το στόμα της βρίσκεται στον πρώτο δακτύλιο και αναπνέει από το δέρμα του. Της αρέσει να παρασιτεί σε γαστρεντερικά συστήματα και είναι η αφέντρα των γαλαξιακών ωκεανών. Τη νύχτα βγαίνει στην επιφάνεια του κόσμου, έρποντας για να βρει τροφή. Συνήθως τρώει τους πατέρες που την κυνηγούσανε στην προηγούμενη ζωή της. Τη μέρα τους ξερνάει και χρησιμοποιεί τα απόβλητά της για να ετοιμάσει μαγικά φίλτρα παρέα με τις άπιστες αδελφές της.

-frankensteinish sisterhoods-

Η οικογένεια της μικρής γοργόνας αποτελείται από όλους του άπιστους απογόνους των θεών του ουρανού. Δεν έχει πατέρα ούτε μητέρα, έχει μόνο αδελφές, χιλιάδες πλάσματα γεμάτα αποφύσεις, όλα τα τέρατα των απύθμενων ωκεανών. Αραχνοειδείς μαύρες χήρες, τσουχτρομεδουσοινώδεις μητρίες, μαστιγοφόρες λολίτες, αναρριχητικά έντερα, πρησμένες ρίζες και τριχωτές νεράιδες, μεδουσόμορφα ή πολυποδόμορφα ζώδια, κοιλεντερωτές μάγισσες, βλεφαριδοφόρες Νύμφες και μυξόζωες νύφες, τρηματώδεις σκώληκες και αιμορροϊδικές Σειρήνες, μυξομυκητιακές Ερινύες, πράσινα λεσβιακά φύκη, κοριοί μέσα σε ακρωτηριασμένα ανθρώπινα πόδια και Μέδουσες που ξερνάνε Πήγασους, όλες μαζί τρώνε, αποβάλλουν και βασιλεύουν τον Ωκεανικό Πλανήτη. Είναι οι υστερικές εργάτριες του πρωκτού και αυτές που διασφαλίζουν την ανυπαρξία της ζωής και του θανάτου.

-hungry witches-

Ursula the Sea Witch is a huge hermaphrodite wormhole. Her cylindrical naked body is an incorporeal tunnel linking two separate points in spacetime; a space tunnel with a magic ability to transform all the unsuspecting visitors into hybrid wavy demons. She has no head or internal skeleton, while her mouth finds itself up to the first ring and breathes through her skin. She enjoys to parasite in gastrointestinal systems and she is the mistress of all the galactic oceans. In the night, she reaches the surface of the world, crawling to find food. She usually eats all the fathers who were chasing her in her previous life. During the day, she throws them up and uses her waste to prepare magical potions together with her unfaithful sisters.

-frankensteinish sisterhoods-

The little mermaid's family consists of all the unfaithful offspring of the sky gods. She has no father or mother, only sisters; a thousand creatures full of outgrowths, all the monsters of the bottomless oceans. Arachnoid black widows, jellyfibrous stepmothers, whiplike-appendaged little lolitas, creeper intestines, swelling roots and hairy fairies, multi-legged Gorgons, belly-intestinal witches, ciliophoric-eyelashed Nymphs and snotty-mixozoa brides, hemorrhoidic Sirens, myxomycota Erinyes, green lesbian seaweeds, bugs inside mutilated human legs and Medusas vomiting Pegasus, all together eating, aborting and ruling the Oceanic Planet. They are the hysteric workers of the anus, safeguarding the non-existence of life and death.

-αναπαραγωγικές δυστοπίες-

Στον Ωκεανικό Πλανήτη τα πλάσματα αναπαράγονται μέσω της κανιβαλιστικής δυσπεψίας. Στην προσπάθειά τους να φάνε το ένα το άλλο οδηγούνται σε μια συμβιωτική συγχώνευση η οποία καταλήγει να είναι μερικώς επιτυχής. Το αποτέλεσμα είναι η ανάδυση αποβαλλόμενων υβριδικών τεράτων που φέρουν τα κύτταρα και τα γονίδια τουλάχιστον δύο ατομικότητων. Η γονιμοποίηση λειτουργεί ως ένα τυχαίο γεγονός της απόγνωσης. Ο Ωκεανικός Πλανήτης διακατέχεται από ανεξέλεγκτη ηδονιστική βουλιμία και η πείνα εξωθεί το κάθε πλάσμα σε συνενώσεις ... σε διαρκείς ατελείς κανιβαλισμούς ...

-reproductive dystopias-

In the Oceanic Planet the creatures are reproduced through a cannibalistic indigestion. In their attempt to eat one another they are led to a symbiotic fusion which is partially successful. The result is the rise of aborted hybrid monsters, bearing the cells and genes of at least two individuals. The reproduction functions as a random event of desperation. The Oceanic Planet is possessed by an uncontrollable hedonistic bulimia and the hunger leads each creature in fusions ... in constant, endless cannibalisms ...

Φάση δεύτερη.

Η μικρή γοργόνα μια φορά κι έναν καιρό είχε πολλές στρώσεις δέρματος πάνω στην διάβροχη ύπαρξή της. Άπειρα ξηρά επίπεδα σάρκας περιτυλίγανε ασφυκτικά το ξεχείλισμα του χειμαρρένιου της εαυτού και ορίζανε τις θέσεις των ζωτικών της οργάνων. Η μικρή γοργόνα είχε οργανωθεί σε ένα σώμα, ένα μοντέλο προγραμματισμένων λειτουργιών με συγκεκριμένες δραστηριότητες και δυνατότητες. Ένας σαρκώδης παχύς τοίχος οριοθετούσε την ακατάπαυστη εκροή της υγρής της υποκειμενικότητας. Ήτανε παγιδευμένη μέσα σε ένα πέτσινιο οριοθετημένο σύστημα και πνιγότανε σιγά σιγά από τα ίδια τα εγκλωβισμένα υγρά της. Βλέννες, δάκρυα, σάλια, ιδρώτας, αποκλεισμένα από τον »έξω« κόσμο, ανήμπορα να αντιδράσουν στον κυριαρχικό κλοιό ενός δέρματος, περίμεναν κατευνασμένα για μια πιθανή ρωγμή εκβράσματος.

Η μικρή γοργόνα ήτανε ανήμπορη, άβουλη και φοβισμένη. Ποιος θα το φανταζότανε ότι ο μεγαλύτερος εχθρός της θα ήταν ένα δέρμα, ένα βίαιο σύνορο που θα όριζε σχεδόν φασιστικά το μέσα και το έξω της. Ποιος θα το φανταζότανε ότι τα όργανά της θα αποκτούσαν σώμα! Θυμάμαι τον κυματιστό της πυθμένα, είχε αλλεπάλληλες συσπάσεις και σε ανύποπτο χρόνο ξέβρασε δυο πόδια. Η μικρή γοργόνα έμοιαζε με άνθρωπο, ένας αφυδατωμένος περιορισμός ο οποίος προκαλούσε λειψυδρία στον Ωκεανικό Πλανήτη και συγκρατούσε τις καταρροές του. Μεταμορφωνότανε σιγά σιγά σε ένα ανθρωποειδές πλάσμα του Άνω Κόσμου και όσο προχωρούσε ο χρόνος η υπόστασή της οργανωνότανε όλο και περισσότερο σε μια υλική πειθαρχία. Τα πόδια ήτανε ανοιχτά και απαιτούσανε να ακουμπάει δυνατά με αυτά τον πυθμένα των απάτητων νερών. Το κεφάλι κοιτούσε συνεχώς ψηλά, χωρίς ουσιαστικά να βλέπει κάτι. Το δέρμα, που χωρίς την βούλησή της κουβαλούσε, ήτανε μια

Second Phase.

Once upon a time the little mermaid had many layers of skin on her watery existence. Infinite dry levels of flesh breathlessly wrapped her torrential self and determined the positions of her organs. The little mermaid was organized in a body, a model of programmed functions with concrete activities and possibilities. A fleshy thick wall limited the ceaseless outflow of her fluid subjectivity. She was trapped into a fleshy limited system and she was about to drown from her own enclosed liquids. Mucus, tears, saliva, sweat, excluded from the »outer« world and helpless to resist the dominant narrowing of skin, were passively waiting for a possible crack.

The little mermaid was helpless, weak-willed and scared. Who could imagine that her greatest enemy would be her own skin, a violent limit that would determine almost fascistically her inner and outer self. Who could imagine that her organs would acquire a body! I remember her wavy bottom had successive convulsions and unexpectedly washed ashore two legs. The little mermaid looked like a human, a dehydrated limitation that provoked water scarcity in the Oceanic Planet and restrained its flows. She was slowly transformed into a human-like creature of the Upper World and her existence became more and more organized in a materialistic order. The legs were spread apart and demanded to stomp the depth of the untrodden waters. The head was constantly staring above, without actually seeing anything. The skin that she was carrying without her will was a surface with an inscribed memory upon it, a necropolitical arena of a past civilization whose phantoms inhabit the beings of the Oceanic Planet.

επιφάνεια με εγγεγραμμένη μνήμη πάνω της, μια νεκροπολιτική αρένα ενός παρελθοντικού πολιτισμού του οποίου τα φαντάσματα κατοικούν μέσα στα όντα του Ωκεανικού Πλανήτη.

Τα φαντάσματα του Άνω Κόσμου στοιχειώνουν συμβιωτικά την ζωή στον Ωκεανικό Πλανήτη. Κάθε νέος οργανισμός κουβαλάει μέσα του την φασματική παρουσία προηγούμενων ζώων, χώρων και χρόνων. Ο Ωκεανικός Πλανήτης είναι μια υγρή, στοιχειωμένη οικοθέση όπου οι νεκροί ενδοσυμβιώνουν με τους ζωντανούς και τα όρια μεταξύ παρελθόντος και παρόντος, Άνω και Κάτω κόσμου είναι σχεδόν δυσδιάκριτα. Η μικρή γοργόνα δεν μεταμορφωνόταν απλώς σε ένα συμβιωτικό φάντασμα, αλλά στην αιτία της δημιουργίας των συγκεκριμένων φαντασμάτων. Ήξερα πολύ καλά τι ήτανε ... Ήτανε αυτό που έτρωγε η Μάγισσα Ούρσουλα, η αγαπημένη λιχουδιά της, η πρώτη ύλη των πρωινών ξερατών της.

Την τελευταία φορά που την είδα είχε σχεδόν ολοκληρωτικά πνιγεί από τα ίδια τα εντοιχισμένα υγρά της. Ποτέ δεν μπόρεσα να καταλάβω αν ήτανε επιλογή της να μεταμορφωθεί σε αυτό το πλάσμα ή αν κάποια άλλη εξωτερική δύναμη την έβαλε σε αυτή τη διαδικασία χωρίς την βούλησή της. Γιατί να θέλεις να γίνεις ο μεγαλύτερος εφιάλτης σου και ο μεγαλύτερος εχθρός του Ωκεανικού Πλανήτη; Η μικρή γοργόνα πάντα άλλαζε κι εγώ πάντα αναρωτιόμουν αν όλο αυτό ήταν κομμάτι της φυσιολογίας της ή μέρος ενός απώτερου σκοπού, ενός μυστικού σχεδίου ...

The phantoms of the Upper World symbiotically haunt the life of the Oceanic Planet. Every new organism carries within itself the spectral evidence of previous lives, spaces and times. The Oceanic Planet is a fluid, haunted habitat where the dead endosymbiotically coexist with the living and the limits between past and present, Upper and Under World are almost indiscernible. The little mermaid was not simply transformed into a symbiotic phantom but into the cause of the creation of those concrete phantoms. I knew exactly what she was ... She was *that* what Ursula the Sea Witch was eating, her favourite yummy, the first ingredient of her morning thrown-ups.

The last time I saw her she had almost completely drowned from her own enclosed liquids. I never understood if it was her own choice to transform into this creature or if another, external power forced her into this process without her own will. Why would you want to become your greatest nightmare and the greatest enemy of the Oceanic Planet? The little mermaid was always changing and I was always wondering if all this was a part of her physiology or part of an ultimate purpose, of a secret plan ...

Memory Virus

by Tom Bland

A baby octopus sucked into the diner's mouth attempted to leap out by curling its tentacles around his lips as his teeth shut down on its almost fluid body, but he hoovered the tentacles into his mouth almost as if he was a vacuum cleaner, but he wasn't, he was a trophy hunter by trade. Inside his crocodile skin wallet, a passport sized photograph tucked inside, showing him sitting on top of a dead bear (shot in the head eight times) holding a hunting rifle the size of his tiny arms in the grip of his giant hands: tiny arms/giant hands. It was like he had a clown's body. Comic but savage.

Dr Benson sat opposite me chewing on his own living specimen out of the lukewarm swimming pool in the back garden of the

strangely named Marmalade Jesus Eatery only opened to members or gangsters or experimental police officers. Open to the kind of police officer who would commit murder and then be the one who investigated the death. Sometimes he would chop off the hand of the victim and place it onto the pocket or sleeping bag of a strung out homeless man who would be accused and found guilty. Benson remarked, >It is so easy to nail the accused to the cross if he doesn't have a good solicitor, the kind that costs £10,000 an hour. The prison service learnt a millennium ago not to make the same mistake as they did with Jesus. The nails go right in through the wrists, never the hands, or they just rip out, leaving you on the ground, giving you time to escape. No one is that lucky these days.<

Benson had a kind of ethics about him but not an especially kind or caring in its application. He cared for individuals but never the general populace. He kept the words of Friedrich Nietzsche in his wallet made out of the skin of a patient who lost his life on Benson's operating table –

WHATEVER
IS DONE
FOR LOVE ALWAYS
OCCURS BEYOND
GOOD OR
EVIL

Being a medical doctor, he felt his healing work stemmed out of a love that hid just in the point where the optic nerve and the eyeball become one another; that strange limbo point. He saw his healing work as taking place in limbo as he didn't think healing a patient was

necessarily beneficial to anyone. In fact the crooks who took up his service enslaved, corrupted, deprived whole communities. His practice was essentially bad for the whole world.

He looked straight at me, then at his watch, then at me, then at his notes, then at me, staring way too long, >Tom, your results aren't good<, the eel attempting to free what was left of its body out through the gaps between his teeth, >You have about 18 minutes to live, well 13 to be exact. I told you it was bad.<

>I was once on a cruise ship with a Catholic priest who pushed a security guard over the side into the ocean<, I stuttered, >due to the type of fish they served on Friday. He hated white bait and believed it was the devil's fish purely out of own idiosyncratic reasoning. The security guard just didn't understand the babbling of the priest, so the priest ended up thinking the security guard was in league with the fish devil and pushed him with all his might over the side. That's not true, I dreamt it last night.< I paused for a second. >I knew you were the priest, and I, the security guard.<

Benson kind of ignored me and shouted >Look!<, leaping up from his chair knocking over his £246 glass of red wine, >it's the gulping fish dish!< The waitress held the metal tray level with a dark green fish on it. The mouth of the fish was still gulping for oxygen bubbles in amidst of unbreathable air, slight cuts along its body, and as she placed it down, she showed the diner how to cut it, stripping away thin layers. The gulping got faster and faster between the average suffocation of being on dry land and extreme torture.

>Ah! Wine!<, Benson hollered across the room drinking straight from the bottle downing all of it. He looked straight at me, >Don't worry, it only takes three minutes to get another bottle from the sultry waitress.< He screamed out her name, BARBARA, as she jumped

straight at us. >More wine and a bottle of brandy. Make it quick! My friend's dying.<

>Of thirst?<, Barbara inquired.

>He needs the finest brandy.<

Benson was an illustrator of medical texts before qualifying in the art of medicine itself. His favourite book he illustrated for the Oxford University Press was the fully updated *Psychopathia Sexualis*. The editor of the volume, Keith Robert Harsehole, added more erotica and bizarre sexual practices that emerged through iPhone usage in the general populace alongside Freudian and g-spot speculation, but it was Benson's illustrations that made the book magnificent.

When you opened the book, you could touch the illustrations feeling the page envelope around your hand as if going inside each and every body part he exquisitely drew, including or especially, the urethra. Benson had a thing about sounding his own urethra and those of his multitude of lovers (all genders and all ages above 23) which included the odd lost soul or prostitute who found their way into his basement; he paid for sex; he paid to experiment on them.

He knew I objected to prostitution, but he justified it to himself by saying, >feeling isn't natural to me. I don't possess human feelings per se. In reality, people are just pieces of meat, but human meat is quite repulsive to our own digestive system. Human blood makes us sick. If you want to indulge, you must train yourself to drink it without vomiting. It takes a long time. If you are inclined to eat human meat, just go for the essential organs, like in cannibalistic cultures, straight out of the body into the mouth. No cooking required, but the organs of contemporary humans are fucked through the chemicals most humans are forced fed through their supermarket groceries. Cannibalism has become a great health risk due to capitalism.<

After silver tequila, he screamed like he was digesting Antonin Artaud,

DEATH IS WHEN
THE
BRAIN HAS
STOPPED
DEAD BUT FOR MOST
PEOPLE
THAT HAS ALREADY FUCKING
HAPPENED
AND THEIR CARCASSESS STILL
FUCKING MOVE

As such, he believed most people were zombies. In his words, >but not in an interesting way. Most of humanity is still trapped in hierarchy, a pack mentality following orders from whoever has the nicest suit on a golden chair with the ethos of maintaining the credibly disastrous status quo, so we all just go on, one foot in front of the other without any thought whatsoever. We are zombies but eating brains have turned into deep fried snacks and the inability to bury the overweight dead. Every year society has to increase the size of the cremator to deal with the enormity of the bodies.<

>Why did you become a medical doctor?<, I quizzed him sipping on £3730 brandy. I had to ask. It seemed irrational not to at this point. Brandy made me ask the obvious.

>I don't care for humanity but there is something in me that just won't let me abandon humanity<, he said, >I'm like Kim Jong-un. He really wants to press the nuclear detonation button, but he can't, just something in him stops him from doing it. If he destroys the world, he

destroys the vision of humanity he has in his head. He wants to enslave the whole of the human race, bowing down to his giant image on a TV screen the size of the Wall of China so his face is visible from outer space. I believe that the human race has something worth saving about it, but *what*? I have no fucking idea.<

I started laughing and he too. >I'm laughing<, I said, >cos my friend Ella tweets him endlessly telling him just to press the motherfucking button. She doesn't have your faith and neither do I. Someone needs to explode this shithole. Where humanity is, there needs to be a giant hole to remind every other specimen, don't be like us, self-destructive twats who use nothing of their own insights.<

>Tom, a lot of the time, you look a bit stupid, maybe even retarded<, he said puffing on a cigar, >but you have an amazing ability to clarify things. I agree. If only I had a nuclear button to press. Sadly, I only have latex apron and a scalpel so I must just heal people instead, but sometimes I do kill them, sometimes for fun, sometimes because they deserve it and sometimes by accident.<

>I'm pretty fucking sure memory is a virus<, I said doing a gulping down the brandy like a maniac. >Sigmund Freud had this sense that memories were fictions or half-truths mixed up in a cauldron of seething excitations of instinct desire fantasy oedipal lust! No wonder he was obsessed with his mother, he was a virgin until he was in his 30's. He loved the mature woman! He had to wait until he was mature to marry one! Just out of the normalcy of society! He butchered his homosexual cravings! He never touched alcohol! Not one drink passed his lips! Not one cock either!<

>You always rant about Freud when drinking brandy<, Benson said, >You think you do it in your head but no, you do it out aloud,

so everyone can hear! Like that suited man over there who keeps on looking at us like *we* are the insane ones. The one stuffing the squirming oysters into his mouth. You could fuck him you know. He's probably a psychoanalyst. After you cum in his mouth, you could tell him about your memory theory for hours. You have fucked too many women recently. I've been telling you this!<

>You have just told me I'm about to die. Yeah, memory is definitely a virus. It isn't a thing. It's a function, it infects you with images so startling they grip every cell in your body and can send you into a panic. You know I have wasted my life, don't you?<

>You wrote my biography, it was pretty fucking good.< He carried a copy with him, the one I signed pressing into his hands, kissing his own portrait on the front cover. He drunk down the wine and opened it. He stubbed out his cigar straight on the marble top table. He read aloud,

>Page 431, Dr Benson tried to help me pay back my crippling loan from Santander by paying me to dress up as a surgeon and pretending to speak Mexican to a San Franciscan nutjob who wanted a boob job on the cheap. She only trusted Mexican surgeons to be good *and* cheap. Dr Benson was good and, in desperate times like this one, cheap but posh and British and hated doing accents. Of course, he performed the surgery, but I had to hold the blood bag and shout out fake Mexican to make everything seem authentic in her mind.<

>Why am I dying?<

>You're too fucking good for this shithole.<

>I thought you as a doctor would have a better answer.<

>I'm Camus today. You are dying because you are dying because you are dying because you are dying. No explanation. No analysis. You think too much. That will be the death of you. In about three minutes.<

I jumped onto the dining room table and started shouting,

YOU
MOTHER
FUCKERS

I leapt, like I have never leapt before, straight into the visible menu which were basically fish tanks stuffed full of seafood, crabs, tortoises, fish, everything that can be swallowed, bit, chewed, whilst still wriggling to escape the certain fate of teeth. I crashed into the tanks breaking the glass all over the marble floor. Everything was either marble or oak apart from the fire hose which was rubber and metal, which was there because the restaurant used to be a steakhouse. They would sacrifice the cows in the back room and cook the meat in front of the diners. The restaurant would catch fire at least once a month so the hose just seemed necessary back in those days. The owner kept it out of nostalgia.

Benson turned on the enormous fire hose.

Benson sprayed it everywhere knocking down the diners and the waiters and the chef (a lazy asshole who never cooked a thing! >You don't *cook* living cuisine!<, he would shout at anyone who complained!) all at the same time.

All the menu had started swimming and the people started drowning, gasping for air like the gulping fish in reverse. I picked up a giant knife (the sort they used on the tortoises) and started cutting into the humans slicing slivers of them and the fish went crazy for them, chopping them with their teeth, swallowing bit by bit.

KARMA
IS A MOTHER
FUCKER

I screamed out.
Then I just fell down dead.
Not sure why.
Forget the tunnel.
The bright light.
Think.
Nothing.
Just nothing.

I wish I had cum when I had died. Done the whole Michael Hutchence thing, but no, I just fell down dead.

Think nothing.
It really isn't anything to write home about.
I wish I had cum right in front of all the sliced up sliced up humans, the fish, the sea life
but instead just nothing.
My last memory:
Dr Benson kissed me on the lips.



Anna Deligianni, *You got wires, comin' out of your skin*, aquarelle, ink on paper, 25 x 37cm, 2018. Courtesy of the artist

Mars Trojan – Elon – The Shroud (5517) A

by Sharmaine Thérèse Pretorius

The artwork contains hidden maps, puzzles and musical compositions according to the Chladni graph etc.

The work was sent into low space orbit on Asgardia Sattelite 1 – nano cubesat – during November 2017.

The observers of this work of art are looking in at Elon Musk a.k.a. **Rocket Man** wearing blue contact lenses (against the light on Mars) in a vehicle with his dummy **Star Man** next to him. The yellow roses are symbols of peace. Elon has a love of physics, saving earth and tech.

Politics by Donald Trump declared the head of state of North Korea – **Rocket Man**. Meanwhile, we have a man in a non-parallel evolution

launching rockets to try and get people off the planet (earth), *this planet*, known for its *wars* but otherwise called: **Terra** – also meaning **love**. Simultaneously he himself cannot follow his path as he has to stay on earth to man his >station< so to speak: he can only dream – sending his hybrid sports car into space with the copy of his dummy inside. Echoing his own longing as his >dummy< – is named after >**Star Man**<, an alien who supposedly came to earth after heeding a call to help earth after finding golden plates in space, left there by humans.

The dummy travels in symbiosis with his own dream to one day get off this planet. Inside the Hybrid Tesla is a record playing by David Bowie with the B side named – »The man who sold earth«. At the same time, people across the world are naming Pres. Donald Trump as the man who sold out the earth, by walking away from the greenhouse emission summit in Paris.

As each of the men launches their rockets into space, one to explore and one to prepare for war – I think of the short movie – *Pigeon Impossible* and its obelisk, rockets resembling phalluses and how >boys love their toys< – and I want to scream – >*gimme back my donut*<, hybrids of needs not met in our **love heart space** – which becomes political hot potatoes.

Final Verdict Message to:

A.I. {USE SNIPPET CODE}: C# ***Si vis pacem, para bellum*** C#
addActionListener {USE lowest frequency just below the threshold of human hearing} execute: {newHelloButtonList} **influence**, *every day, whole day*.

Mars Investigator 1: »I would like to present the following as **exhibit A** in this investigation. It is marked: »***Per aspera ad astra***« in **Morse code**, an ancient language used on Terra. Clear that *the initiator of this* did it under severe duress. Sounds included on this golden phonograph include ones of love and those of severe pain. They are so similar that we were unable to come to a foregone conclusion which is which. Giving birth, coupling and political protesters being punished, sound the same. Maybe if we use Chladni frequency waves tests for more discernment?« ... »Not a very learned man this >Carl Sagan< but judging by the gold, a rich man of that planet.« ... giggles and hearty laughter ... »*Didn't anyone ever tell them >love< is **universal currency**?*«

Mars Investigator 2: »We found *this* in sector **zero**, it must have jumped *time* from Terra. It is an old nanosat cube. It is marked: Asgardia Satellite 1 – it has been in orbit since their date: 2017. I found this **one picture** on here very interesting. It is marked: **MARS TROJAN – ELON – THE SHROUD (5517) A – by SHARM. T. P.** (Sharmaine Thérèse Pretorius). I found these names embedded inside: **Rocket Man, Star Man, Ps. 91** and some German words.

We know **who Star Man** is. We found an old catalogue with his history on it. It is in >film< form. He is an alien who found *this same* gold record *we did* and felt sorry for the earthlings and went to help them. I think

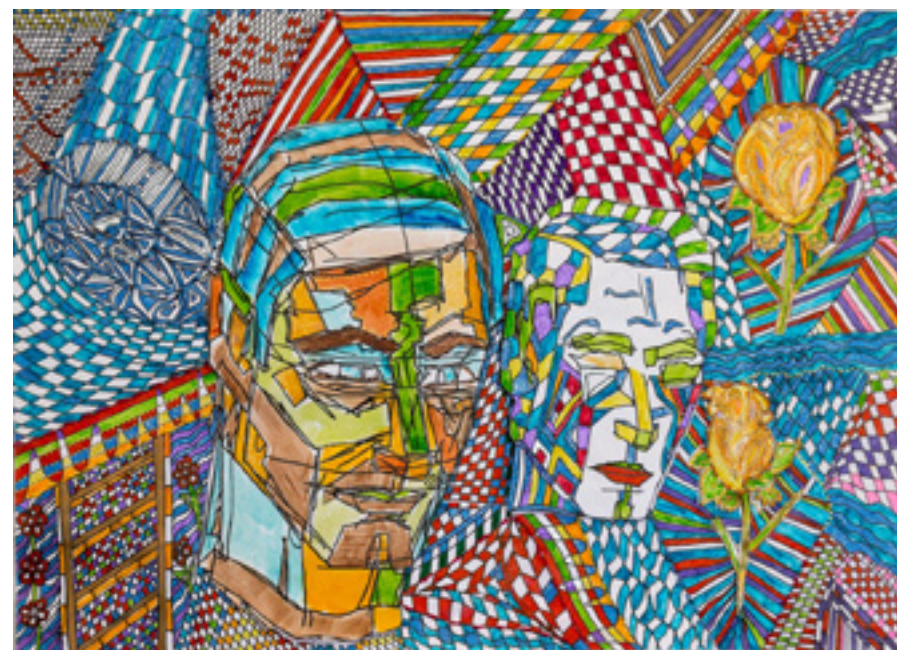
this SHARM. T. P. was just the graphic artist compiling their >most wanted< list. It is unclear if the list was for heroes or foes.<<

Mars Investigator 3: »This piece of scrap was just towed in. It is marked: >Tesla Roadster< and has old tech in as well. Hang on – what's left of this ol'e chap is marked – >**Star Man**<. I found this gadget, it says on its screen >@realdonaldtrump/Twitter<. The message says: »The **Chinese Envoy**, who just returned from North Korea, seems to have had no impact on **Little Rocket Man**.<< Well that solves one mystery. This is **obviously** what's left of **Star Man**. This here on the dashboard must be **Little Rocket Man**.<<

Mars Investigator 4: »I thought I have heard *that noise* from the tech in that Tesla before! Here look! My grandpa picked this up, *eons ago*. He was also a volunteer. It is a disk. It is called an LP, it's an analog sound storage medium. On this side it says: >**Life on Mars**< and on **Side B** >**The man who sold the world**< by David Bowie. My grandpa said the old U.S.A. had a president called **Donald Trump**. People said **he sold the world** when he walked away from a >climate summit< in Paris, and he said he loved his country.<<

Mars Investigator 5: »Check this old movie film. It is dinosaurian tech but who cares. It is called >**Pigeon Impossible**<. Those pips from Terra are a strange lot. See they built *phalluses* everywhere, but they called them >obelisks<. Procreation for them is friction and combustion. They love to live >hybrid< man. Even this Tesla Roadster says >Hybrid<. This movie is the best history footage I have seen in a long time. *Boys love their toys!* I found it with a copy of a Smithsonian Magazine. You see the cover? It says ... » >Elon Musk **the Rocket Man With A Sweet Ride**<. He just stayed on earth and sent **Star Man** up. He was stuck in politics, could not follow his love up here, **what a sad tale**. All this came with that student time capsule we found floating in space.<<

Mars Investigator 4: »You think he sent that >seven single< in the Tesla *on purpose*? You remember that sign above Auschwitz: >*Arbeit macht frei*< taken from a book in (1873), in which gamblers and fraudsters find the path to virtue via labour? The prisoners welding the >B< upside down on it as a >sign of rebellion< against the Germans? The picture by SHARM. T. P. on that nanosat hung *upside down* too. **Ps. 91** is apparently from a very old book. It used to teach >**Gott macht Frei**<. It says on that Smithsonian mag that **this Elon Musk** said he loved >humankind too<. Maybe they both knew a prison when they experienced one. Now let's go compress and store all of this data recorded. No mysteries left here. Hey gimme back my donut!<<



Sharmaine Thérèse Pretorius, *Mars Trojan – Elon – The Shroud (5517) A*, mixed media on paper, 29,7 x 21,2cm, 2016. Courtesy of the artist

Short Biographies of Contributors

Nauman Abid lives and works in Lahore. He graduated with a distinction from Beaconhouse National University Lahore in Visual Arts. He has been working with Aga Khan Trust for Culture and Asia Art Archive for projects concerning restoration and archiving of culture. His work deals with the conflicted relationship between the actual and the desired. In his practice, he works with notions of desire, mundane influences, and aspirations for a Western or pseudo-Western life. Based on the problem of self-identification in contemporary times due to the virtual and cyber interventions, his practice revolves around the subjects of loss and incompleteness. His recent project *Light upon light* included working with virtual reality to understand the human behavior towards space and territory.

Tom Bland is a writer and live artist based in London. Currently he is studying an MA in Contemporary Performance Practices at the University of East London and previously studied psychotherapy and dream analysis at the Society for Psychology and Healing. His work focuses on creating hybrid performances and workshops combining poetry with live art and film. His first poetry pamphlet, *The Death of a Clown*, is coming out at the end of this year (2018) with Bad Betty Press.

Soumyabrata Choudhury currently teaches at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU (Delhi). He has previously taught at CSSSC, Kolkata, and has been a fellow at CSDS, Delhi and IIAS, Shimla. His book *Theatre, Number, Event: Three Studies on the Relationship of Sovereignty*,

Power and Truth was published by IIAS, Shimla in 2013. His new book *Ambedkar and Other Immortals: An Untouchable Research Programme* came out this year (2018).

Simon Critchley is the Hans Jonas Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York. His work engages in many areas: continental philosophy, philosophy and literature, psychoanalysis, ethics, and political theory, among others. His most recent books include *The Problem with Levinas* and *ABC of Impossibility*, though he has written on topics as diverse as David Bowie, religion, and suicide. As moderator of *The Stone* at *The New York Times*, Critchley asks philosophers to weigh in on contemporary issues in art, literature, politics, and popular culture.

Anna Deligianni is a visual artist whose work mainly deals with the interaction between people and their environment. Born in Athens, and having studied Fine Arts at the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, she is greatly influenced by the aesthetics used in etchings and installations. Her recent work has developed into a style that combines multilinear patterns inspired by Eastern and Middle-Eastern architecture, with the feel of European philosophy, all the while preserving the values of Balkan aesthetics. Her work is mainly anthropocentric, placing people in an environment rich in detail and urban feel, that involves a game between geometry and perspective. These features are used in a way to create a chaotic combination of both suffocation and attraction. There is a playful balance between fiction and reality, regarding both the human figures, and their surroundings. Anna tends to use randomness as a way to increase the entropy of her chaotic works. She uses her errors as a way to

provide new perspectives in her works, and keep the authenticity and uniqueness of each work intact. As Miles Davis said, »Don't fear mistakes – there are none«.

After growing up in Barcelona, **Alexander García Düttmann** studied in Frankfurt am Main with Alfred Schmidt and in Paris with Jacques Derrida. Since 1992, he has lived in San Francisco, New York, Melbourne, and London, and he has taught at Stanford University, The University of Essex, Monash University, New York University, Middlesex University, Goldsmiths College, and the Royal College of Art. In 2011, he published *Participation: Awareness of Semblance* (Konstanz University Press), an attempt to make sense of the concept of participation, especially in relation to art and politics. In 2012, he published *Naive Art: An Essay on Happiness* (August Verlag), a series of fragments set in San Francisco, and in 2015 *What Does Art Know? For An Aesthetics Of Resistance* (Konstanz University Press). His latest book is called *Love Machine. The Origin of the Work of Art* (Konstanz University Press 2018). Alexander García Düttmann has translated some of Derrida's works into German, and Benjamin's essay on Julien Green into French. He has also edited *Theory and Practice*, an unpublished lecture course by Jacques Derrida on Marx (Éditions Galilée 2016). He is professor at the University of the Arts (UdK), Berlin.

Evgenia Giannopoulou is a Berlin-based independent curator and research-based artist born in Athens. She studied Comparative Literature and completed the Curating programme (Kuratieren) at the University of the Arts (UdK), Berlin. Since 2014 she has realized a series of interactive site-specific exhibitions in various big cities

(Berlin, Istanbul, Athens etc.). In 2015, she curated the guerrilla exhibition *Communitistic Curating – Experiment #1 Berlin: This should have been a group exhibition* in collaboration with the Dutch artist Kim Engelen, and from 2016 to 2017 she worked as an art mediator at the 3rd Kochi-Muziris Biennale, *Forming in the Pupil of an Eye* (Kerala, IN). In 2017, she was a curatorial fellow at the group exhibition *Summer of Love*, curated by Katerina Gregos and commissioned by the Schwarz Foundation (Munich, DE/Samos, GR). She is currently working at Manifesta 12 in Palermo (IT), and is organizing the forthcoming public program of *love & politics* in Berlin and Athens (2018).

Johan Grimontprez's critically acclaimed work dances on the borders of practice and theory, art and cinema, documentary and fiction, demanding a double take on the part of the viewer. Informed by an archeology of present-day media, his work seeks out the tension between the intimate and the bigger picture of globalization. It questions our contemporary sublime, one framed by a fear industry that has infected political and social dialogue. By suggesting new narratives through which to tell a story, his work emphasizes a multiplicity of realities. Grimontprez's curatorial projects have been exhibited at museums worldwide, including the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; and MoMA. His works are in the collections of Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa; and Tate Modern, London. His feature films include *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997), *Double Take* (2009) and *Shadow World* (2016).

Michael Hardt is a political philosopher and literary theorist, best known for three books he co-authored with Antonio Negri: *Empire*

(2000), *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009). The trilogy, in particular its first volume – *Empire* – has often been hailed as the »Communist Manifesto of the 21st Century«. Michael Hardt is a professor of literature at Duke University and a professor of philosophy at The European Graduate School.

Mikhail Karikis is a Greek-British artist based in London. Shortlisted for the 2016 Film London Derek Jarman Award (UK) and the 2015 Daiwa Art Prize (JP/UK), Karikis has a background in art, architecture and music, and often collaborates with communities to create projects that highlight alternative modes of human existence, solidarity and action. His work is exhibited widely in museums and international biennials including *Ear to the Ground*, New Orleans Museum of Art, USA (2018-2019); Artists' Film International, touring sixteen countries (2017-2018); British Art Show 8, UK (2015-2017); Kochi-Muziris Biennale, IN (2016), etc. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Chalk Factory*, Aarhus European Capital of Culture 2017, DK (2017) and *Love Is the Institution of Revolution*, Casino Luxembourg Forum d'art Contemporain, LU (2017). Forthcoming solo exhibitions will be presented at Turku Art Museum, FI, Whitechapel Gallery, UK, Mori Art Museum, JP and De la Warr Pavilion, UK.

Cecylia Malik is a Kraków-based visual artist, performer, painter and activist. Together with ecologists and city activists, she creates collaborative works and alternative communities by artistic means. Her most important projects include *Iconostas City*, *365 Trees*, *6 Rivers*, and the *Białka's Braids* campaign. Together with Justyna Koeke, she

initiated the projects *Smoleńsk Street 22/8* and the *Modraszek Collective* (action in defense of the Kraków landscape park Zakrzówek). For the project *365 Trees* she received the title *Kulturystka roku 2010*, awarded by *Radiowy Dom Kultury* (Polish Radio 3). The outcome of the awarded project is a publication under the same title, issued in 2011 by the Bęc Zmiana Foundation in the form of a book-album.

Andrea Messner was born in 1991 in Bolzano, Italy. She studied philosophy, theater studies and art history in Munich, Rome, Berlin, Scotland. Her interests involve the interfaces between art and philosophy, political philosophy, concepts of history, philosophy of the renaissance, languages, documentary (film), the arts. Based in Berlin and Rome, she works as a researcher, author, curator, translator, artist. She taught at LMU München, HU Berlin and curated shows in both cities. After writing her MA thesis on Walter Benjamin under the supervision of Rahel Jaeggi (HU Berlin), she is currently collaborating with the documentary filmmakers of Miramonte Film (Bolzano), preparing the project *Piazza Connection* for Manifesta 12 (Palermo) as well as her PhD-project.

Ioana Niculescu-Aron was born in 1994 in Bucharest, Romania. During her BA and MA Painting studies, Ioana was awarded several prizes and scholarships, including: the Erasmus scholarship at Haute école des arts du Rhin, Mulhouse, France in 2016; the Erasmus scholarship at Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy in 2014-2015; the 2014 winner of the *Ladder* competition organized by Laborna Gallery, Bucharest, Romania, etc. Ioana has exhibited around the world in solo and group shows such as Art Basel Miami in 2015 and Salvador Dalí Museum in Berlin, Germany (2015). Some of her

recent solo exhibitions include: *Equilibrium*, 2016, at the Artifact Gallery in New York; *November*, 2016, at the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York, with her most recent solo show *3D HOTEL* being held in Regensburg, Germany, in 2017 at Alina Buga Studio.

Uriel Orlow lives and works between London, Lisbon and Zurich. He studied at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design London, the Slade School of Art, University College London and the University of Geneva, completing a PhD in Fine Art in 2002. Orlow's practice is research-based, process-oriented and multi-disciplinary including film, photography, drawing and sound. He is known for single screen film works, lecture performances and modular, multi-media installations that focus on specific locations and micro-histories and bring different image-regimes and narrative modes into correspondence. His work is concerned with spatial manifestations of memory, blind spots of representation and forms of haunting. Orlow's work was presented at major survey exhibitions including the 54th Venice Biennale (2011), 8th Mercosul Biennial, Brazil (2011), Aichi Triennale (2013), Manifesta 9 in Genk (2012), Bergen Assembly (2013), Qalandia International (2014), EVA International (2014, 2016), Sharjah Biennial 13 (2017), 7th Moscow Biennial (2017), and currently at Manifesta 12 in Palermo (2018).

Denise Padron Benitez is a London-based writer, photographer and experimental video maker. She holds degrees in History of Art and Culture Industry, which has led her research interest to focus on DIY culture and artist self-organised spaces. As a practical element, she organises film screenings, art exhibitions and music events in her living room in Hackney Wick. Her art practice forms itself around everyday

life, cities and the promises and fabrications of the photographic image. As a photographer, she works exclusively with analogue and low-cost methods. The series *Welcome home-intruders* is the first public presentation of a large documentation project of her neighbourhood in east London.

Born in 1991, **Miriam Poletti** is a multimedia artist living and working in Milano, Italy. She graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera in Milano with a degree in Visual Arts. Her work has developed in multiple fonts of production such as photography, graphic, installation, video and sculpture. Her research focuses on the topics of identity, feminism, intimacy and vulnerability. In her projects the body is the main instrument.

Nicoletta Pongias, born in 1993, is an aspiring autodidact photographer from Essen (Germany) who also dabbles in writing. She identifies as an intersectional feminist and firmly believes that kindness and generosity are severely underrated.

Sharmaine Thérèse Pretorius is a prodigy fascinated by the codes which program us biologically. Using Chladni style vibrational sound waves in her drawings to create puzzles, maps and musical compositions, she sees herself as an interpreter, an observer of what >simply is< in the spiritual realm. She creates her art as her *own personal interpretation* of the holographic memory and >Vanitas< background of things she experiences; a known *synesthete* trying to incorporate her experiences in order to live as normal a life as possible. Born in 1963 in South Africa, she counts ancestors from Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. She is based in the Sultanate of

Oman for the past seven and a half years. Sharmaine has been drawing for the past thirteen and a half years.

Cheryl Rudd is a British artist currently based in Berlin, Germany. She loves to explore the world in her collages, projecting into them her own vision and emotions. *Artthroughlines* deconstructs images she chooses and gives them new significance. Hoarding, recycling, cutting and reassembling often overlooked images is something intuitive for her.

Amit Shankar Saha is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Seacom Skills University. He did his PhD in English from Calcutta University. He is also a researcher, a short story writer and a poet. His research articles, essays, reviews, stories and poems have appeared in newspapers, magazines, journals and books nationally and internationally. He has won the *Poiesis Award for Excellence in Literature* (Short Story-2015), *Wordweavers Prize* (Poetry-2011, Short Story-2014), *The Leaky Pot – Stranger than Fiction Prize* (2014), *Reuel Asian Cha Void Poetry Prize* (Commendable Mention-2014), *Reuel International Prize for Poetry* (Shortlisted-2016) and other prizes. He has co-edited a collection of short stories titled *Dynami Zois: Life Force* and authored a collection of poems titled *Balconies of Time*. He is the co-founder of *Rhythm Divine Poets*, a Kolkata-based poets group dedicated to the promotion of poetry.

Hannes Schumacher was born in Papua New Guinea and studied Philosophy in Heidelberg, Cairo, Delhi, and Berlin. He completed his MA with a thesis on affirmative dialectics under the supervision of Alexander García Düttmann, since 2014 he has published numerous

books on philosophy & art and has organized various events & site-specific exhibitions in and outside Berlin. His writings encompass a wide, interweaved range of topics from philosophy of life through arts & aesthetics to religion & mythology. He is the founder of Freigeist Verlag.

Medha Singh is a poet from New Delhi. Her first collection of poems *Ecdysis* (2017) has been published by Poetrywala, Mumbai. Her poems have previously appeared or are forthcoming in *Nether*, *Coldnoon*, *Muse India*, *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, *The Journal of the Poetry Society*, *Indian Cultural Forum*, *Hakara*, *Stag Hill Literary Journal* (UK) and several others. Her poems are forthcoming in the *Sahitya Akademi* (*The Indian Academy of Letters*) and *Red Hen* (US), anthologies of Contemporary Indian Writing. Her interests range widely, between philosophy, photography, cinema, music and painting, owed largely to filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky. She is former Editor-at-Large at *Coldnoon*. She holds a Masters degree in English Literature from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Antigoni Tsagkaropoulou is an Athens-based artist. She graduated from the Athens School of Fine Arts and she is a member of the collective running AMOQA (Athens Museum of Queer Arts). She has showcased her work mostly in Germany and Greece, with several participations in exhibitions and festivals, such as the 6th Thessaloniki Biennial, Sound Acts festival in Athens, Witch Rave festival in Berlin. In collaboration with Fabiana Faleiros, she participates in the 10th Berlin Biennial at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art. Her latest work *#TextMe_FluffyLibrary* is a multifaceted, one year artwork-in-progress at Atopos Contemporary Visual Culture in Athens, with

many collaborations between artists, educators, scientists, children and more. Her work combines large-scale inhabited installations with interactive and impromptu performances, plush sculptures and furry costumes. Deeply influenced by queer and feminist dialogues, her sources of inspiration also include lgbtqi+ fairy tales, feminist sci-fi literature, children's stories, the furies' subcultures and the natural world. Antigoni's fluffy worlds blur the boundaries between different ages and genders, and allow for an exploration of different narratives through recontextualising identity, intimacy, sexuality and coexistence.

Robin R. Wang is Professor of Philosophy and Director of Asian Pacific Studies at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, USA. In addition, she is 2016-17 Berggruen Fellow at Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Science, Stanford University. Dr. Wang is the author of *Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), the editor of *Chinese Philosophy in an Era of Globalization* (SUNY Press, 2004) and *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period to the Song Dynasty* (Hackett, 2003). She has published many articles and essays and regularly has given presentations in North America, Europe, and Asia. She has also been a consultant for the media, law firms, museums, K-12 educators, and health care professionals, and was a credited Cultural Consultant for the movie *Karate Kid*, 2010.

Illustration Credits

Cecylia Malik, <i>Bialka's Braids</i> , campaign to protect river against regulations, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Kamila Buturla (photograph)	Cover
<i>Coexistence</i> , photograph, 2015. Courtesy out of the blue	4
Johan Grimonprez, <i>every day words disappear</i> , video still (Michael Hardt), 2016.	11
Johan Grimonprez, <i>every day words disappear</i> , video still (Anna Karina, words I don't know), 2016. From <i>Alphaville</i> (1965), courtesy Jean-Luc Godard	16
Cheryl Rudd, <i>Walk the line</i> , collage, 20 x 20cm, 2018. Courtesy of the artist	21
Mikhail Karikis, <i>Love is the Institution of Revolution</i> , 2015. Courtesy of the artist	22/23
Mikhail Karikis, <i>Childred of Unquiet</i> , video still, 2013-14. Courtesy of the artist	27
Mikhail Karikis, <i>Childred of Unquiet</i> , video still, 2013-14. Courtesy of the artist	28/29

Mikhail Karikis, <i>Childred of Unquiet</i> , video still, 2013-14. Courtesy of the artist	32/33	Ioana Niculescu-Aron, <i>February 2017. Art is Life</i> [9], acrylics on photograph and canvas, 88 x 70cm, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	60
Mikhail Karikis, <i>Childred of Unquiet</i> , video still, 2013-14. Courtesy of the artist	35	Ioana Niculescu-Aron, <i>February 2017. Art is Life</i> [10], acrylics on photograph and canvas, 88 x 70cm, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	61
Mikhail Karikis, <i>Childred of Unquiet</i> , video still, 2013-14. Courtesy of the artist	37	Denise Padron Benitez, <i>Welcome home-intruders</i> , photograph, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	62
Miriam Poletti, <i>Lonely Girl Phenomenology</i> , video still, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	40	Denise Padron Benitez, <i>Welcome home-intruders</i> , 5 photographs, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	64-67
Miriam Poletti, <i>Lonely Girl Phenomenology</i> , 3 video stills, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	43	Cecylia Malik, <i>Tree 332</i> , performance / photograph, 2010. Courtesy of the artist	68
Miriam Poletti, <i>Lonely Girl Phenomenology</i> , video still, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	45	Cecylia Malik, <i>365 Trees</i> (Nº. 111, 126, 115, 178, 137, 163, 191, 199, 242, 261, 301, 319, 315, 363, 269, 344, 342, 359), 18 photographs, 2010. Courtesy of the artist	70-71
Anna Deligianni, <i>One Percent</i> , ink on paper, 70 x 50cm, 2018. Courtesy of the artist	52/53	Cecylia Malik, <i>Białka's Braids</i> , campaign to protect river against regulations, 4 photographs, 2013. Courtesy of the artist, Mieszko Stanisławski and Tomasz Wiech (photographs)	72-73
Anna Deligianni, <i>Floating City</i> , markers, ink on paper, 50 x 70cm, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	56	Cecylia Malik, <i>Białka's Braids</i> , campaign to protect river against regulations, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tomasz Wiech (photograph)	74/75
Ioana Niculescu-Aron, <i>February 2017. Art is Life</i> [7], acrylics on photograph and canvas, 88 x 70cm, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	58		

Cecylia Malik, <i>Polish Mothers</i> , happening, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Tomasz Wiech (photograph)	76/77	Anna Deligianni, <i>You got wires, comin' out of your skin</i> , aquarelle, ink on paper, 25 x 37cm, 2018. Courtesy of the artist	218
Johan Grimmonprez, <i>Shadow World</i> , video still (Russian- German Fraternization), 2016. Courtesy Bundesarchive	83	Sharmaine Thérèse Pretorius, <i>Mars Trojan – Elon – The Shroud (SS17) A</i> , mixed media on paper, 29,7 x 21,2cm, 2016. Courtesy of the artist	225
Fake letter produced by Steve Cox for <i>Films That Almost Got Made That Time Forgot – 2002: Another Space Odyssey</i>	87		
Robin Wang, <i>Patching Up the Sky (Butian)</i> , photograph, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	153		
Robin Wang, <i>Bridge of the Joy of Fish (yuleqiao)</i> , photograph, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	155		
Nauman Abid, <i>For a better future together</i> , C type print, variable size, 2014. Courtesy of the artist	172/173		
Nauman Abid, <i>Visions are scary. A refugee boat dying in an imaginary situation</i> , C type print, variable size, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	174/175		
Nauman Abid, <i>Visions are scary. A refugee boat dying in an imaginary situation</i> , 3 details, C type print, variable size, 2017. Courtesy of the artist	176-177		
Uriel Orlow, <i>Lessepsian Lovers</i> , 11 drawings, 2017-2018. Courtesy of the artist	180-190		

