

along the Ohio river / Josiah Warren ... the resettlement of / built from
exchange / of labor and goods,

shared amongst the community /
according to principles of

"mutualism" / founded, 1847



and based on the work of The Time Store, Cincinnati -

"cost the limit of price":

let us exchange on the

basis of labor and love /

the freedom of association /

to & Charles Fourier / the

first

settlement:

a phalanx of "attractive labor" /

"attractive labor" / ...along the banks of the Ohio river

"the synthesis of communism and property" /

anti-

capitalist free market /

// / to rethink the state, through a web of kinship

mutualism - municipalism / the city of lights and

lemonade and the migrant who hides in the trees

Berlin

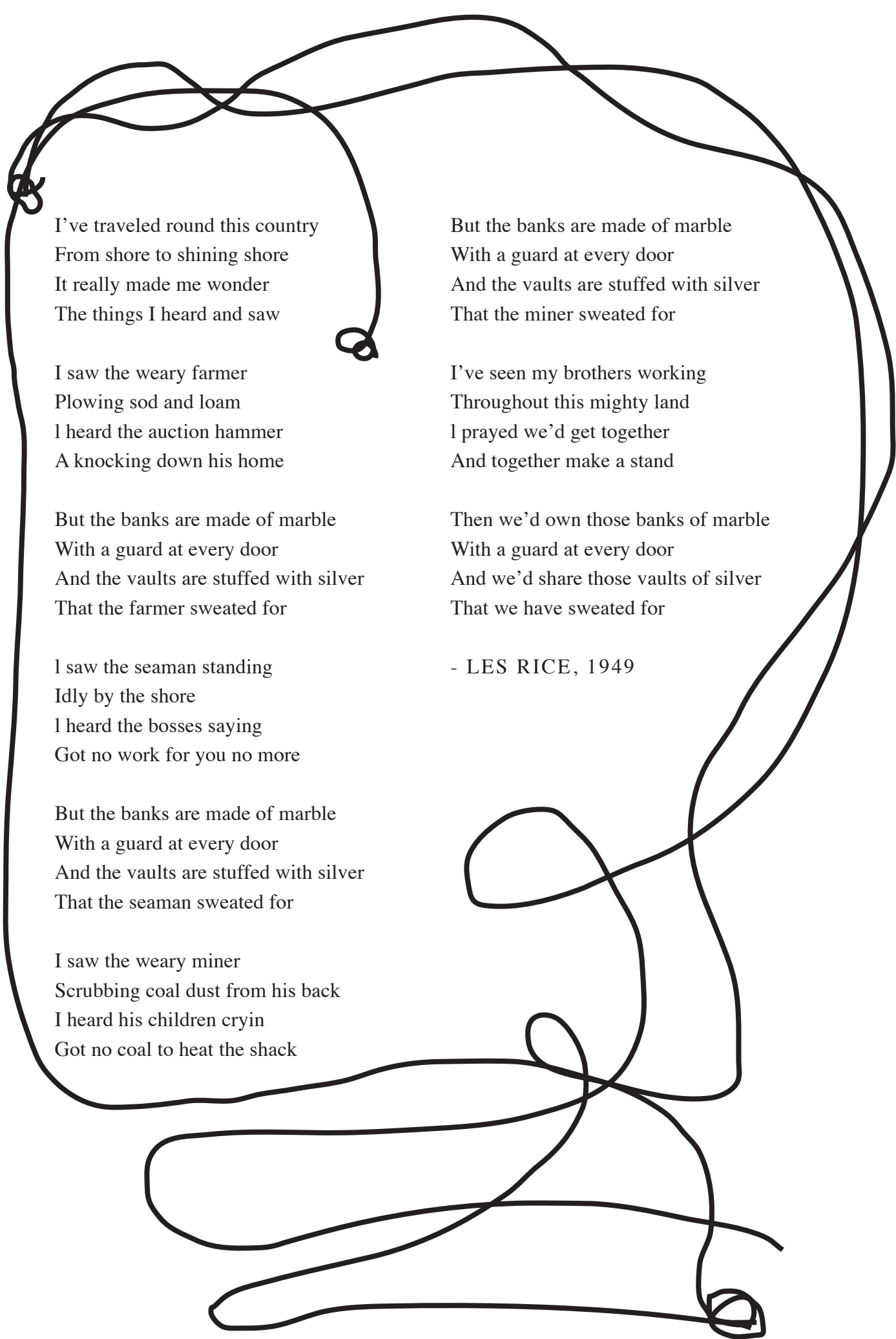
the reciprocating society ////////////////

the reciprocating society,

the club of joyful militancy /

/////

///// ...



I've traveled round this country
From shore to shining shore
It really made me wonder
The things I heard and saw

I saw the weary farmer
Plowing sod and loam
I heard the auction hammer
A knocking down his home

But the banks are made of marble
With a guard at every door
And the vaults are stuffed with silver
That the farmer sweated for

I saw the seaman standing
Idly by the shore
I heard the bosses saying
Got no work for you no more

But the banks are made of marble
With a guard at every door
And the vaults are stuffed with silver
That the seaman sweated for

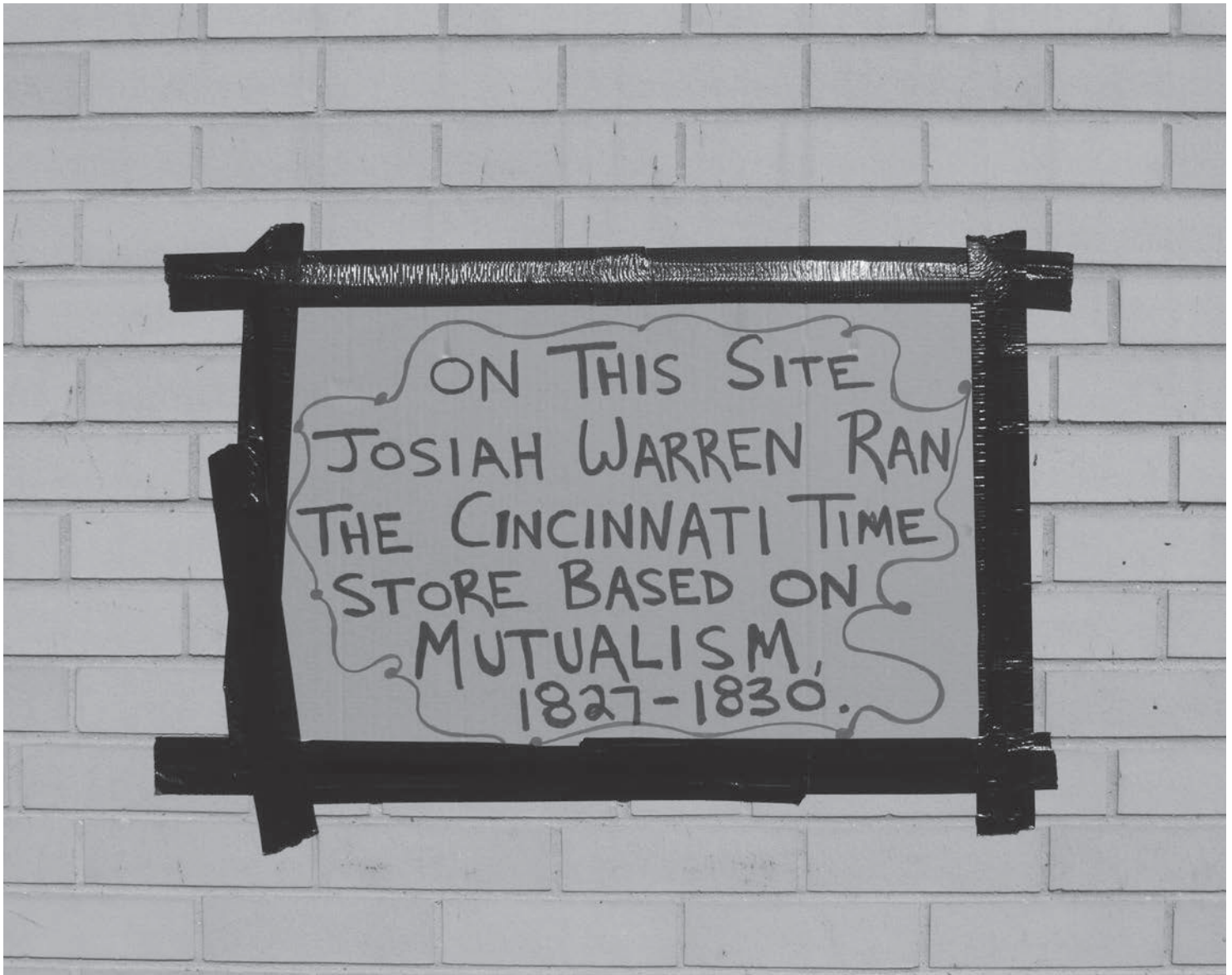
I saw the weary miner
Scrubbing coal dust from his back
I heard his children cryin
Got no coal to heat the shack

But the banks are made of marble
With a guard at every door
And the vaults are stuffed with silver
That the miner sweated for

I've seen my brothers working
Throughout this mighty land
I prayed we'd get together
And together make a stand

Then we'd own those banks of marble
With a guard at every door
And we'd share those vaults of silver
That we have sweated for

- LES RICE, 1949



Jelena Petrović

The Politics of Error:
Social Glitches, (Post)
Human Utopia,
and Art Today

In cooperation with airport engineer Robert Rauch, in 2006 artist Jasmina Cibic performed her art intervention titled *Dictionary of Imaginary Places* at the Ljubljana international airport. Under cover of night, the departures/arrivals board displayed destinations from the encyclopaedia of imaginary places, whose origins were to be found in world literature. The encyclopaedia had been created in 1980 by Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi, based on 1200 entries of imaginary cities, islands, countries, and continents, such as Xanadu, Ruritania, Shangri-La, Atlantis, Utopia, Oz, Wonderland, etc. The passengers who were waiting for the day's last flight to Istanbul were faced, with no forewarning whatsoever, with the changed flight schedule and the imagined destinations, whose meaning had throughout history been shaped by imagination, desire, the subconscious, and (im)possible utopias. Take-off, landing, check-in, boarding, flight delayed and, finally, cancelled for these metafictional destinations; a new map of the world was, nevertheless, made possible, if only for a brief period of time. The geography of everyday anxiety, caused by the stress, hurry, borders, fears, and expectations – even those beautiful reasons for travel – was suddenly replaced by the geography of desire, or, in other words, by an error deliberately made in order to pull us momentarily away from the unchangeable condition of the omnipresent and widely familiar, “hacking” into the system in which the expected information was replaced by utopian misinformation.

Jasmina Cibic's intervention was made at the time when a post-socialist society – the firstborn post-Yugoslav state the Republic of Slovenia – completed its transition in 2004 and entered into a new system of “egalitarian” neo-liberal statehood of the European Union. Created after the fall of the Berlin Wall, with the beginning of the 1991 war in Yugoslavia, the state has in the meantime, undergoing numerous turbulent changes, proved that it became democratic enough and economically capable of joining, under the defined circumstances, this promised union. The European Union inevitably brought with it a whole pack of administrative, economic, political, military, social, cultural, educational, technological, and many other common regulations, potentials and goals. Among others, with the great reconstruction of the Ljubljana airport in 2006, at the time of Slovenia's accession to the Schengen Area and elimination of the non-EU borders, air traffic and travel opportunities in the country changed significantly. Thus the geography of desire entered the sphere of possibilities and accomplishments. The freedom of movement, as regards both financial market and new EU citizens, started inciting people's imagination and dreams of a better life – individually rather than collectively, in accordance with neoliberal ideology, which is generated as a post-ideological social illusion.

The software programme used by the artist to momentarily change the existing reality, playing at the same time with the history of utopia, is the same program that controls the

ever-growing database of places in the current geopolitical map of the world. This art intervention, which confronts us with utopia and all its fictional and mythological places, also questions not only the purposefulness of our movement, with business, consumer, and (e)migration travel on the increase, but also the entire neoliberal structure of society and the desires this so-called free post-ideological democratic society produces. This deliberately induced systemic error, the glitch as it is called, makes use of technological infrastructure and intervenes into production of a global database, which in today's world largely shapes what we used to refer to as collective consciousness.

This example as well as many other contemporary art examples which fall within the (post)human (de)formations of social imagination and its political articulation raise questions about the purpose and role of art today. Or more precise, they actualise the old political question in the not-so-new social circumstances of artistic production:

What could art today offer for understanding and radicalizing the meaning of freedom beyond the existing state, or, more precisely, beyond the neoliberal state?

Looking at certain contemporary political or radical artistic practices, it is possible to claim that art today produces a glitch, error or interruption. As such, it calls for social imagination of a radically different future, for emancipatory reconceptualization of the community, as well as for political (re)articulation of the most emergent individual and/or social issues of the present. Or, more specifically, this art produces the politics of error that interrupts our social reality with a counter-historical emergency of facing the present, shifting in-between the unspoken history and utopian/dystopian future (Petrović 2018). Compared to previous avant-garde or radical attempts to break through canons, systems, oppressions, as well as breach the rules of proper meaning and productivity when it comes to art(ist)'s creation, recognition, and presence, this post-, inter-, trans-, or so-called contemporary art system basically gives us freedom to do whatever we want but keeps for itself the right to decide what freedom is, or at least how much it costs. Producing a state of permanent insecurity and crisis at many different levels, the neoliberal structure of society (reinforced by the state) processes and at the same time appropriates all those progressive social actions and “errors” for its own sake. This leads us to the meaning of the very concept of freedom today, within the framework of such state and its contemporary art.

What does freedom stand for today? is the question that Angela Davis posed in her book *The Meaning of Freedom* after so many years of fighting, thinking, and resisting the repressive mechanisms in the power structures of our contemporary world. Envisioning revolutionary freedom through a larger collective claim for a new society (unity), requiring the radical emancipatory conception of a complex community

beyond the existing power structures of the neoliberal state and its regulative and oppressive apparatus, Davis reminds that freedom is a permanent process of becoming. As she stated, it is a process “of being able to see and understand difference within unity, and resisting the tendency to reproduce the hierarchies embedded in the world we want to change” (Davis 2012). Thus, due to the most idealistic meaning, such freedom is permanent struggle, radically different future as well as fundamental social precondition for an emancipatory collective transformation beyond slavery, colonialism, racism, patriarchy, capitalism, fascism, and so forth. In other words, freedom is *the permanent revolution*, the basis for emancipation of the society gained through the constant struggle or resistance.

However, due to post-historical events and post-ideological political and economic transformations of society at the end of 20th century, freedom has drastically changed its meaning and become the most expensive word of the neoliberal state. Today, the meaning of freedom is (ab)used as a fetishizing synonym for the law of those who have permanently established themselves within the neoliberal system of political and economic power (Petrović 2018). Marina Gržinić’s definition of the neoliberal state as a war-state shaped by force, violence, and fear points out how individual freedom is constructed nowadays beyond the social one in order to preserve the system in power. This definition of the war-state goes beyond the historical meaning of the fascist state in order to underline what the major logic of dominance is in the world today and that is “the logic of war”. According to Gržinić, the war-state has elements of historical fascism, such as “a sovereign leader, people, death as the management of life,” but also elements of present neoliberalism, such as individual freedom and autonomy as a crucial right. Such a war-state twists the meaning of the capitalist nation-state in order to “sterilise the other, evacuate the conflict from public space and neutralise the political,” constantly demanding “a proliferation of unbelievable ‘freedom of particularities’” (Gržinić 2010). One of the best examples is, for sure, the reconciling agenda for human rights, which keeps strong borders between central and peripheral identities within today’s “democratic” or so-called multicultural society. Such society stands for individual and state freedom which mutually generate neoliberal positions of hegemonic power.

Being stuck between the neoliberal state and the meaning of freedom within it, it becomes clear that there is not much to be found beyond it because the neoliberal state today is in fact everything. Searching for a systematic change, a social glitch within the neoliberal, ideologically all-inclusive, and historically final geopolitical system, based on individual desires and achievements rather than social utopias and permanent changes, the politics of error and the related art today find new ways of production and theorizing, new affective, aesthetic, technological, even material, ways to liberate freedom from its meaning that is nowadays abused. However, deliberately induced errors, a social glitch, or the need to hack the existing system are all still in the sphere of the digital or postdigital

(sub)conscious, which is in pursuit of the politicization of the unknown, alienated, and nevertheless very present, (post) human subject. This sphere opens new possibilities for eliminating the bitter conflict, that is, the misunderstood meaning and, above all, the false choice between social liberty and individual freedom.

In an attempt to establish a dialectical relationship between individual and collective social imagination, the politics of error is thus reminiscent of the mutual connection between art and revolution, which demands radical, utopian contents from new art. These contents, as stated by Marx in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, must be expressed not in a voice from the revolutionary past but in the poetry from the future, which will change the world (Marx, 1852). In the year 2018, however, not many people can arrive at the answer to what the poetry from the future is and where a new error-aesthetic from the beginning of the 21st century could lead us. Some artists, theoreticians, hackers and other utopians have reintroduced poetry into the field of art – the poetry whose future, that is, radically relies on the ambivalent posthuman subject and/or the dystopian/utopian vision of a union between the virtual and so-called real world. A step towards a “manipulative” creation of new (post)human artistic situations, in which the poetry of the future is potentially born through contemporary technology (at least in our minds), is important to a collective liberation from social, artistic, and other stereotypes, and to individual freedom likewise, the meaning of which is still searched for outside the existing one.

Looking for a new poetry, sound artist Svetlana Maraš, for example, ventures into researching contemporary technologies and testing the old and new media, as well as into the field of the audio forensics of objects at hand, which she animates through interaction and creation of sound in the surrounding space. The fusion of text, music, and image which is formed by experimenting with different contemporary digital and post-digital methods (sampling, cutting, glitch, (de-)montage, abstract visualization, sound variations, and linguistic manipulation) creates an experimental kind of poetry. In her interactive installation *0%Loading* (2013) the glitch appears as space without meaning, a dystopian moment, soundscape which warns that what is learned and the fear of technology, as well as of the posthuman subject, lead towards social destruction. *0%Loading* appears to be, as the artist states, “a wasteland of our digital realities in an imaginary future,” an interactive ambience installation which invites us to produce a new sound, meaning, poetry, or an error that will stop the precipitous fall into the future dystopia. Hacking the system, producing the social glitch, politicizing the unknown, subjectivizing the alienated through new and still inconceivable social utopias – these are only some of the possible thoughts provoked by the syncretic experience of this (post)digital wasteland. Through another participatory art project *Matter of fact* (2016), the audience activates, varies, and manipulates sound-poetic compositions made by Maraš, which deal with



Jasmina Cibic, *Dictionary of Imaginary Places*, 2006.

the stereotypes of today's most common (self)referential concepts: *Myself, Society, People, Depression, Differences*. The compositions, based on the interviews with artists made on the occasion of Berlin's Seismographic Sounds exhibition (curated by Norient in 2016), have been re-contextualized into an audio-visual experience of interrupted textuality (cutting, sampling, repeating, manipulating, etc.) or into a fusion of digital-sound poetry. Using contemporary technology, this poetry questions the daily repeated ethical, political, and social marking of the given compositions' concepts, hacking into the existing system of our social relations, values, and knowledge. The effect of the glitch is thus manifested in the unlearning of learned borders, values, possibilities.

Establishing interactive (post)human networks and relationships which produce the variable meaning of words, as well as unexpected visual turns and sound effects, Svetlana Maraš creates through her (post)digital sound installations a syncretic disharmony that glitch is and often brings us to the point at which we understand art through its original basic meaning of aesthetic as an experience, or *aesthesis*. Such a turn towards the aesthetic, which resists clear logical contours and relies on the experience of social reality and the imagination of its future, is yet another artistic endeavour which aims to prevent us from sliding towards banalizing art under the excuse that everyone could understand and accept it through the obvious social meanings it offers. It is precisely in this way that Claire Bishop (re)defines the concept of aesthetic as an autonomous regime of experience, which cannot be reduced to logic, reason, or morality. As she writes up, socially engaged art should not offer ethical thinking, should not teach us or point to "a tacit analogy between anti-capitalism and the Christian 'good soul.'" Such artistic tendencies are nothing but failure "to accommodate the aesthetic or to understand it as an autonomous realm of experience" (Bishop 2012). Bishop's intervention into the field of socially engaged art, which resists many artistic turns since the 1990s (such as social, educational, relational, discursive, and others) leads us to a completely different understanding of (post)digital, interactive, glitch or error aesthetic in the art today. This aesthetic does not produce a representative or receptive meaning but interactive experience – an affective trigger which anticipates and produces radical artistic, as well as exhibition and theoretical, practices.

This interconnected field of art-theory-technology, activates *the politics of error* as a new concept, as a symptom of the living contemporaneity, which indicates the visibility and presence of the impossible, the freedom of experimentation through (post)human voices, visual inscriptions, and aesthetic glitches. As a trigger for new art, or at least a differential one, this politics intervenes into the institutionalized meaning of contemporary art, but also into the rationalized understanding of syncretic experience (*aesthesis*) when it comes to politically engaged art and its collective and participatory practices at the turn of the 21st century. The politics of error creates a new turn, or rather a counter-turn, which furthers social imagination of

a new world through the radical art practices, or, more precisely, through their failures, transgressions, and implications. As its allies, this imagination takes contemporary technology, all media channels or art exposures, poetry from the future, and its utopian or dystopian projections. Its drive is to raise a new political conscious against neoliberalism, patriarchy, colonialism, and other systems of human oppression/exploitation – but also for future (post)human lives in a free world that we have to imagine beyond this one in a permanent process of both *becoming* and *hacking*.

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Svetlana Maras. *Matter of Fact*. 2016.

Valentina Montero

Disobedient Poetics: From kisses to zombies on the streets



*From a lecture held at Kunsthall 3,14 Bergen, February 2014, as part of the Unrest lecture series, Bergen Academy.

In the past few years, Chile has seen renewed forms of demonstration and protest. With the occupation of public space, both physical and virtual, social movements have used creative and poetic practices to disrupt public order. These movements want to question the neoliberal model implemented during the dictatorship, which recent governments have only intensified, increasing the pressure of the neoliberal system and the tendencies of globalization. An important feature in these demonstrations and protests is the adoption of resources, strategies, and aesthetics borrowed from advertising, film, and pop culture in general, along with the use of technology and media.

Today's lecture will consider some of the most representative examples of these actions, trying to understand them within their specific political contexts and symbolic dimensions, and further tracing their connections to conceptual practices carried out in Chile in the 70s and 80s.

If we want to build a genealogy of the occupation of public space through poetic or artistic experiences, we have to look beyond what art history books have habitually taught us about Chile. Because the most innovative experiments that connect creativity with public space are rarely generated by artists coming from the academic salons of the fine arts. It's rather architects, designers and poets who have played a major role.

In his book *Psychomagic*, Alejandro Jodorowsky explains how, in the 1950s, Chile was a country where poetry was at the heart of cultural expressions. Poetry not only appeared in statements and declarations, but it was also part of a playful, surreal, and bohemian spirit that manifested in daily life.

Poetry permeated everything: teaching, politics, culture, life... The country itself lived immersed in poetry. This was due to the temperament of the Chileans and in particular the influence of five of our poets, who were transformed for me into archetypes. These poets were the ones who molded my existence from the beginning. The most well known of them was no less than Pablo Neruda, a politically active man, exuberant, very

prolific in his writing and who, above all, lived like an authentic poet. (Jodorowsky, 2010: 13)

At the beginning of the 50s, before an artist such as Richard Long made *Walking Lines*, Jodorowsky, and another poet Enrique Lihn, were inspired by a Futurist manifesto that declared art to be "poetry in action." They decided to put this calling into practice. Here is Jodorowsky again:

Lihn and I decided one day to walk in a straight line, without ever wavering. We walked down the avenue, and we came to a tree. Instead of going around it, we climbed up and over it; if a car crossed in our path, we climbed onto, walking on its roof. In front of a house, we rang the doorbell, entered through the door and exited where we could, sometimes through a window. The important thing was to maintain the straight line and not pay any attention to an obstacle, as if it did not exist. (Op.cit: 15)

In this context, one of the first interventions took place in public space in which a link was established between a political critique and a common visual and textual experience. In 1952, Nicanor Parra, Lihn and Jodorowsky developed *Quebrantahuesos* [Breakbones], which appeared as a type of wallpaper consisting of extracts from newspapers. This was based upon the folk practice of Lira Popular, which consisted of loose paper sheets with metered poetry in ten-line stanzas and that circulated from 1860 to 1920 approximately. The Lira also usually included etchings that accompanied the texts and that offered comments on daily life and politics. The Lira were sold on the streets hanging from a string, tied between trees or lampposts.

Breakbones consisted of collages made from newspapers, which were strategically placed on street corners in downtown Santiago. They were loaded with heavy doses of absurdist humor and social satire. Importantly, for Nicanor Parra, the Breakbones experiments had no ideological message:

It produced a significant release of big amounts of energy. In that sense it was related to physics. Something very mysterious happened, but it wasn't irony, or

anything previously established. We managed to propose a critical examination of the rules that sustain language and the spiritual function. We made fun of reasoning. (Piña, 1993)

Years later, in the midst of the dictatorship, the theoretician Ronald Kay brought the Breakbones back into the daylight. The approach to poetry and creative work immediately began to take precedence over other techniques that were being developed in the dictatorial context. In a 1975 issue of the Manuscripts magazine, Breakbones radically stood out, especially from the perspective of the recent historical events, as part of the need to recover a public space kidnapped by the dictatorship.

Kay additionally offered a series of keys to understanding Breakbones, starting with a multifaceted analysis of its many aspects. He did not limit his writings to a linear form. Instead, he tried to distance himself from the traditional essay, and the dominant structural criticism of the day, and went further in constructing an experience based upon poetic fragments, as well as by inserting photographic negatives, diagrams, maps, etc. into the text. He was mixing the descriptions and concepts that made up the lexicon of the artistic practice (like "impression" and "inscription"). As such, Kay inaugurated a way of writing that would transform the characteristic style of Chilean critical thought in the years to come. Similarly, other artists of the time, despite working from a certain political position, would explore methods of production that would avoid any one-dimensional reading.

Written in 1934 in the middle of tremendous political tension, Walter Benjamin's fundamental text, "The Author as Producer," offers a parallel view. According to the text, which would later be transformed into "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in 1936, politics in art had nothing to do with the literal or explicit content of a work. Politics in art rather has more to do with the position of the artist in the canonical structure of aesthetics. This is to say that the artists' socio-political role has more to do with the use of the means of production at hand. From this perspective, Benjamin poses that politics is a call to step

beyond disciplinary limits, and question what belongs to art, what belongs to science, and what belongs to philosophy.

In this “Benjaminian” sense, the strategic aesthetic disruptions, which came from a literary or poetic origin, strengthened in the 70s and 80s specifically as a means for ideological political struggle. This battle would also be waged in the visual arts in relation to other disciplines and practices, such as sociology, journalism, graphic design, theater, etc. Creative artists working together, and also individually, would explore a neo-vanguardist pathway in an attempt to update the call to merge art and life.

The body as a sign of resistance

As we know, the military coup d'état of September 1973 not only disrupted a socialist project, but also took the opportunity to install a revolutionizing economic model (Lavín, 1987; Moulian, 1996). Torture, disappearance, and the annulment of individual liberties were all so-called “persuasive” methods used to impose this model with a ferocity never before seen until then.

Confronted with a State that, without exception, repressed expressions of political dissidence, and suffocated traditional democratic tools like marches, strikes, union negotiations, elections, political parties, etc., various social actors – artists, writers, poets, and intellectuals – were obligated to experiment with new forms of expression.

In commemoration of the day of the woman worker, March 8, 1978, the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos – the association that dealt with missing relatives – held a public event featuring a folk music band. It was the very first time the “Cueca Sola” was performed in this context. The Cueca Sola is a typical Chilean folkloric dance performed by a couple with twists and turns, and the rapid flurry of a white handkerchief, like in a game of mutual seduction.

One important version of the Cueca Sola by Gala Torres introduces the lament and the protest into these types of compositions. In her song she speaks of a love lost:

There was a time when my days were joyous and peaceful,

But disgrace came to my life

And I lost what I loved most.

I constantly ask myself: where are they holding you?

And I get no response.

And you don't come back

You don't come back, my soul, your absence lingers on and on,

I go warning everywhere to be aware.

Without you, my dear, life is so sad.

(Rojas-Sotoconil, 2009: 6)

Her song demanded a crucial change in the method of performing this typical dance. For this reason, that day at the Caupolicán Theater the association of missing relatives took one of their own members to the stage, Gabriela Bravo, to dance the Cueca Sola without her partner. Her husband had been detained by the military. Her solitary dance deconstructed each one of the elements of the traditional dance. Her body portrayed his absence in a dramatic and ritualistic way. The handkerchief that was once an element of flirtation and joy now appeared transformed into a symbol of sadness, a cloth to wipe away tears. The solitary dance extended through a continuum of time, in the hope that it might never end, a continuum in which mourning could not be completed until the disappeared bodies were finally found.

The Cueca Sola became a protest that, when it eluded censorship, succeeded in transcending other spaces and crossing national boundaries, sensitizing the population and informing them poetically about all that was happening in Chile. Something similar happened in Argentina, where an image of a woman displaying the photograph of her disappeared loved one on her chest became a symbol of demands for justice. The body had become a structure, like a picture frame, to portray absence.

In 1979 the artist Elías Adasme was told of the shooting and subsequent disappearance of two friends. The news was a great shock. Until that moment his artistic efforts fitted comfortably within traditional frameworks. However, from that point onwards he decided to produce a non-conformist art.

I wanted to transmit my rage, and my art was a response for what I was living. I also wanted my art to transcend political

realities to reach a universal language.

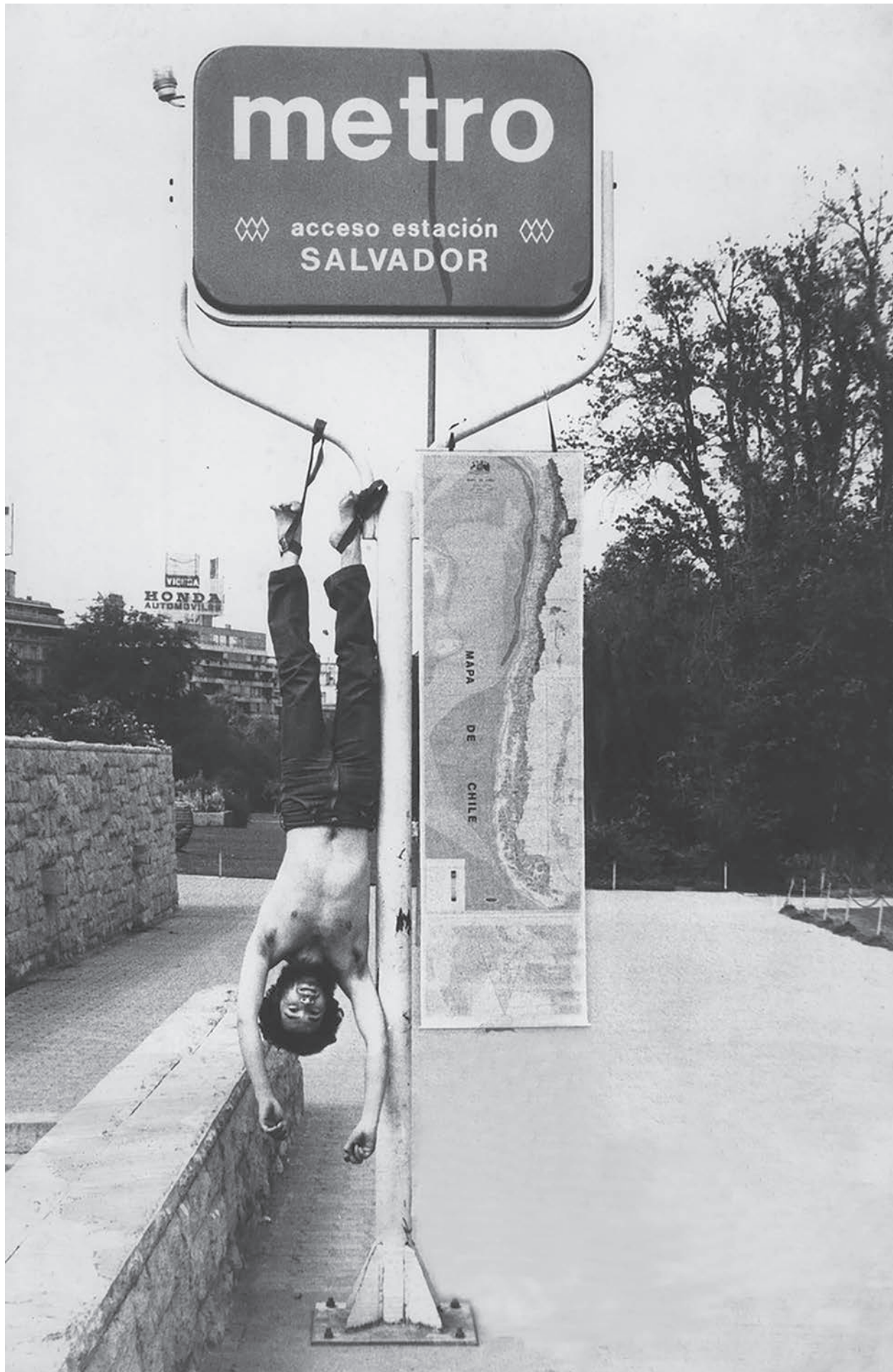
(Adasme & MAC, 2002)

At that moment he took to the streets. He grabbed a map of Chile and hung it outside of the underground station Salvador, in downtown Santiago. He then hung himself upside down next to the map wearing only jeans. His actions condensed a series of micro-strategies of representation that disobeyed the idea of normality, which had been imposed through repression and the silencing of the people. At the same time, he offered direct allusions to the national mood. The choice of Salvador station referred to the deposed socialist president, Salvador Allende, while his suspended and semi-nude body represented the humiliation imposed upon many people. Adasme further stated: “I used my body as a metaphor for the body of Chile, a repressed and vulnerable body.” (op.cit)

The project was an attempt at a “project that aspired to document through art the moments of a period and its reality, without abandoning a universal metaphoric language.” This performance was quickly staged, including the taking of the photo, so as not to call immediate attention.

I hung upside down from the underground sign post with the map of Chile to my left, and when I looked towards the stairway to the station, I saw a handful of cadets from the Military Academy emerging. My accompanying group and a small group of other people froze in tension. I thought I was going to end in jail one more time. But the cadets looked at me, and they looked perplexed, as if to ask themselves, “what is that?” Until finally they broke the silence, and cackling in laughter, one told the rest: “man, that (shit) is an ad for jeans,” after which they all left. Of course, the only thing I was wearing was an old pair of jeans. (Reyes, 2013)

This anecdote demonstrates the incapacity, at that time, of the dictatorship to read the least conventional political art, a practice that merged the conceptual and the contextual. The employment of hermetic poetic tools not only favored the renewal of an artistic language in Chile, but also allowed for it to survive.



"To Chile": Corporal intervention of a public space. Module 2. Elías Adasme. Art action 1979. Permanent Collection Reina Sofia National Art Museum, Madrid, Spain.

The body became a political gesture used by artists as it provided new possibilities for insubordination. Torture, detention, and assassinations by the State were a silent threat. They were terrifying realities that some people refused to acknowledge, and that the press regularly omitted. But these clandestine whispers of denunciation spoke of something else.

These tacit expressions took diverse and complex forms. The artist Carlos Leppe, for example, began to develop performances in alternative gallery-like spaces that brought together a whole generation of intellectuals and artists. In one of his video-performances, *Las Cantatrices* (1980), as part of the exhibition "Sala de espera" [Waiting Room], he displayed his disguised body while singing opera. It was a clear response to mainstream media, which had decided that "culture" consisted of foreign makeup that ignored the country's reality, and which had to disregard traditional peasant and urban culture unable to adapt to the canon of the politically correct. Leppe interpreted an aria, a symbol of the snobbish pretensions of the Chilean upper class; yet his face was tensed by a prosthesis that prevented him from closing his mouth, a stark allusion to the tools of torture.

Leppe worked in a modality of conceptual art from a situated perspective (a concept taken from the theoretical writings of Donna Haraway). This is to say, his performance exposed a separation from the solipsism and formalism of many European conceptualists; in contrast, his aesthetic strategies were deeply connected to the national political reality and to Chilean idiosyncrasies.

Earlier, in 1978, Leppe performed, *Edición de un signo cutáneo* [Edition of a cutaneous signal], which involved shaving his head in the shape of a star identical to the tonsure George Zayas practiced on Marcel Duchamp in 1919 and which was photographed by Man Ray. In Leppe's work, the artist appears dressed in white behind the Chilean flag, substituting the national star with his shaved head. Leppe had appropriated the Duchampian linguistic-conceptual gesture and located it within a local context. On the one hand, it was an allusion to the utilization of patriotic symbols by the dictatorship, and on

the other hand, he highlighted the connections and separations between art hege- monically validated by Europe and the United States, and that of countries in the third world.

Similarly to the Viennese artists who whipped themselves as a desperate answer to the conservatism of their time, or how Vito Acconci converted the video camera lens into a witness to his humiliations and self-cutting, in Chile, the poet Raúl Zurita read his texts whilst sprinkling ammoniac in his eyes. On the cover of his book, *Purgatorio*, published in 1979, he appears with his left cheek burnt, enacted as a protest against the abuses carried out by the dictatorship. That same year he also masturbated in public space at the Galería Cal. *No puedo más* [I can't hold it anymore] was the title he gave to this performance. The insubordination performed against social restraints was largely inflicted upon the body as a complete entity, including its secrets and secretions, its pain and its uncontrolled libido.

Pain zones

A few years later, applying the same logic involving sex and death, the writer Diamela Eltit bent on her knees and cleaned the floors of a brothel. Once inside the brothel, she cut her arms and legs with a pocket-knife whilst reading fragments of her novel *Por la Patria* [In the name of fatherland]. The action compelled the attention of neighbors, artists, and prostitutes at the brothel. "Her body effectively became a scapegoat and a sacrificial body as she conscientiously burnt herself and carried out her work with lacerated arms." (Galaz & Ivelić, 2009: 217)

In this way, the artist replicated onto her body the flagellation that, to that date, had been inflicted onto many Chileans in detention centers. At the same time, her presence in a brothel drew a symbolic line between the different layers of social stratification. In general, her literary work has attempted to access the collective imagination of marginalized territories. On this occasion, her commitment to the abject and marginal forms of life was carried out upon her own flesh, in an attempt to distance herself from the traditional art world represented by galleries and museums. As a result, she introduced a concept of representative art within a

live experience.

Along the same lines, the performance *Trabajo de amor con un asilado de la hospedería Santiago* [Love work with an inmate of Santiago's guest quarters] carried out by the group CADA in 1982, consisted of Eltit passionately kissing a tramp. As Eltit explains: "There was a tramp, a crippled who I had met in one of these premises... So what I did was to film a scene of a kiss, a silver-screen kiss." (Morales T., 1998: 167). The implication of closeness to the other could be interpreted as subversive, not only with respect to the separation of a client and a prostitute, but also to class divisions in Chile that grew steadily during the military dictatorship. "For Eltit, the outcast symbolizes the resistance to the system as a force that could destroy that system." (Juan Andrés Piña, revista APSI en 1983, en anexo 67 Ivelic & Galaz, 1988).

Eltit's artistic practice, based on her own experiences, works through a representation of daily life seen from a feminist perspective. In this sense, she attempts to dismantle the assumed conventions of gender, race, and social class.

Bristling with sexuality, at the heart of dissolution, I pose my body in a different way, between men and women who put themselves beyond art galleries. This is a practice that cannot be denied by anyone else. For it's my mode of articulation, it's my way of living. (Colectivo Acciones de Arte, Ruptura, 1982: 6)

Are you Happy?

The dictatorship left painful marks on the physical and social body of society. Those who were not subject to physical pain (torture or disappearance), or direct emotional pain (relatives of missing people), had to withstand in silence the repeated violations of their citizens' rights, either fearfully or in complicity (as many of them had supported the dictatorship). The society went through an accelerated process of privatization of institutions that had traditionally guaranteed health, housing, and education. And no mechanism for public participation in decision-making was made available. In the end, the streets had turned into a dangerous place.

In this context, Alfredo Jaar, who was then only 23 years-old and had recently

dropped out of architecture school, held one of his first public interventions, *Studies on Happiness*, developed between 1979 and 1981. The work was based on the use of advertising panels. Each one had a text that asked simply, “Are you Happy?” This was part of a greater effort that also included polls, personal interviews, portraits, and video installations. His intention was to “make the street attractive, a public space once crossed with fear. It was as if to make the face of the spectator appear on screen (a new concept at the time) and by making them speak, take them out of that tradition of mute contemplation.” (Valdés, A. 2006: 5). The phrase was deployed in public spaces, squares, and highways. Yet it was more than just a question. It could be understood as a subconscious message to a public that at the time was filled with fear, conformity, and indolence.

At the same time, the group Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (CADA) began to take shape. The multidisciplinary group was composed of the writer Diamela Eltit, poet Raul Zurita, artists Juan Castillo and Lotty Rosenfeld, and the sociologist Fernando Balcells. Together they produced a series of poetic-political actions that went against the core of the surveillance system put in place by the dictatorship. Their techniques were oriented towards drawing upon the principles and objectives of the historical avant-garde, linking art with life, and promoting the dissolution of disciplinary borders. They operated through the re-appropriation and recuperation of public space, both in the streets and in the media.

Their first action, *How to avoid dying of hunger in the art world*, took place in 1979 and consisted of several different stages and props. The first day they distributed 100 half-liter bags of milk to poor neighborhoods in La Granja. The empty bags, which were printed with the phrase “1/2 liter of milk,” together with other bags in varying states of decomposition, were held in a sealed box and then opened along with a photography exhibit of the milk distribution at the Centro Imagen Gallery. The milk made reference to Allende’s government promise of giving each child 1/2 a liter of milk every day. The next day this action was presented in a one-page publication in the front of Hoy news magazine with the following manifesto:

Imagine this page completely blank / Imagine this blank page traveling to all corners of Chile / like the daily milk to be consumed / imagine each corner of Chile / deprived of their daily milk (Neustadt & Colectivo Acciones de Arte, 2001: 15)

Along with this action, two weeks later they held another intervention, a so-called “Inversion de Escena” [Inverted Scene]. Eight trucks belonging to the milk company Soprole drove through Santiago and parked in front of the National Museum of Fine Art. The entrance to the museum was then blocked by a 100-square meter cloth. A short while later the company, to show its disapproval of the intervention, changed the design on their trucks.

Among intellectuals and artists much of these works involved an exercise of simulation. They relied upon referencing and understanding the bureaucratic jargon to achieve their objectives and, at the same time, to camouflage their true interests and objectives. Similarly, their theoretical writings also used a sort of makeup that crucially allowed them to circulate without being detected by the censorship apparatus of the regime.

The group CADA was also involved in launching the No+, or No More campaign, which was held in 1983, ten years after the military coup. This was a call to artists and creators to appropriate the symbol and use it actively. One of the pamphlets described the following:

We have developed a slogan that has been displayed in murals, exhibitions, performance art, theater, music, etc. This slogan is No+. The invitation is extended to international artists to activate their own country’s in the most appropriate way...This work began with the tenth anniversary of the military dictatorship, and we will keep it alive until the end of the dictatorship. (C.A.D.A, 1983: flyer)

The plus sign referred to another intervention by Lotty Rosenfeld held in 1979 called *A Mile of Crosses On Pavement*. The work consisted of intervening onto the white lines that run down the center of roads by adding a perpendicular line, thereby generating a long string of white crosses extending down stretches

of highway. Since then Rosenfeld has produced similar work in various countries and contexts. In the particular context of Chile, however, the crosses represented the absent tombs of missing people, also alluding to the mark made when voting, a right denied to the Chilean population. Importantly, No+ succeeded in having a transversal social impact, and became the image of the political campaign that led to the ousting of Pinochet through the 1988 plebiscite.

I can’t anymore

On November 11, 1983, the communist worker Sebastián Acevedo sprayed himself with kerosene and set himself on fire to demand the release of his children Maria Candelaria and Galo, who had been taken captive by the state internal security apparatus (CNI). Within days of Acevedo’s death his children were freed. His action revealed the power of the repressive organisms in the country. The radical and terrible act of Acevedo awakened the need to seek mechanisms for social organization that could present a common front to state violence. And so the Sebastian Acevedo Movement Against Torture was launched, along with the group Women for Life, formed by Mónica González, Patricia Verdugo, María Olivia Monckeberg, and Marcela Otero. This last group brought together women photographers, politicians, and feminists in protest around the country. Their protests were called, “lightning strikes” and consisted of symbolic civil disobedience in the streets. While they had no artistic pretensions, their actions were characterized by a high degree of political engagement and ritual.

The Acevedo movement, as well as the women’s movement, shifted attention toward the very places where torture was taking place. This has precedent in the Argentine “funas” or “scraches,” which have recently been brought back in the context of movements like M15 in Spain. The women’s movement also realized actions such as La Cueca Sola discussed earlier, and produced songs and slogans using a variety of props. One of the more famous ones being the No+ that would become an important part of the 1988 plebiscite.

Another of their first projects, titled *VIUDA* [WIDOW] (1985), was carried out by Eltit and Rosenfeld, both CADA



Diamela Eltit, *Trabajo de amor con un asilado de la hospedería Santiago*, 1982 / *Student Strikes*, 2011.

members, and in collaboration with Gonzalo Muñoz and Paz Errázuriz. It consisted of a photograph of a woman whose husband had been killed for “watching what was happening in his neighborhood” while a few blocks away a protest against the dictatorship was going on. (Neustadt & Colectivo Acciones de Arte, 2001: 56). Beneath the photograph the word VIUDA was marked in capital letters along with an image of the following text:

*Look at her extreme and common gesture
Pay attention to her widow-quality and
her survival
Understand a community*

“We looked at the victims from the perspective of the survivor,” explained Rosenfeld (op.cit: 54).

The use of a number of different props in mainstream media (heavily censored at that time) allowed for the work’s massive dissemination throughout the city, but it also shifted the focus of attention. The consequences of the dictatorship did not end at the crimes committed, but rather, were perpetuated by the sad silence of those who remained alive, which included some sectors heavily hit by repression, in particular, poor communities.

Happiness is coming (and going)

The end of the dictatorship was uniquely weird. It was the result of an agreement. Fundamental freedoms were regained, detention centers were eliminated, and democracy was restituted. But it came at the cost of maintaining authoritarian enclaves found in the political constitution created by the dictatorship, which installed senators and postponed the basic demands of the people, something still yet to be resolved. Not only did services and resources of the country stay in private hands, but also the process of privatization continued. The restraints on the market for education and health-care were loosened, and there was a proliferation of high schools, universities, and private health-care services. Public institutions would improve, but slowly, as they were forced to handle a deep precariousness found in the poorer sections of society, which increased as society became less equal.

The gap between the poor and the rich would sharpen dramatically. This is the period called the “Transition.” It is a

word that has served as a placeholder to avoid the radical changes that the country needed. The concept played out as a form of drama, usurping true change with a form of staging. It was something like this that happened to our democracy. Politics became theater and was filled with socialists injected with neoliberal genes, and military coup architects dressing up as democrats. Let’s not forget that Pinochet was designated a senator-for-life at this time. But it was just before the end of the dictatorship where we find the roots of the most transgressive work. It came from a certain sector that was marginalized from the official political circles, and who looked upon these changes with great suspicion.

In 1988, a collective called Yeguas del Apocalipsis, or Mares of the Apocalypse, was formed by a writer, Pedro Lemebel, and a poet, Francisco Casas. Both were homosexuals. Their work was oriented towards disrupting many topics that had seemed immune from criticism, shielded by the anti-Pinochet politicians who would later come together in an alliance called the “Concertación.”

One of their first interventions was held during a prize ceremony for the poet Raúl Zurita (mentioned earlier), who at that time was taking on the role as the official poet of the next government. The action was a coronation by thorns. The image of two naked “faggots” riding a horse succeeded in disturbing a conservative left-wing that would have preferred to postpone gender issues, and deny the existence of sexual diversity. Yeguas del Apocalipsis was a criticism of capitalism and its connection with social heteronormativity and patriarchy in a society still fearful of the military.

Another of their important performances, *Conquista de América* [Conquest of America], took place on October 12, 1989, at the opening of the Chilean Commission on Human Rights. Dressed as Frida Kahlo, the artists installed a map of Latin America covered with pieces of broken Coca-Cola bottles and then barefoot, and with tape players fixed to their chests, they performed a version of *La Cueca Sola*.

Clean Streets

Again in the 90s there was an attempt to regain the streets, but this time without

politics. There was an open call to the community to take part in a “carnavalesque” exercise that had little if anything to do with the characteristic Chilean idiosyncrasy. Instead, it attempted to replicate the happiness of Brazilians, but through entombed bodies clumsily imitating the classic dances of Rio. Carnival and murga rhythms were an ad-hoc importation as part of the slogan “Happiness is coming” used during the plebiscite campaign in 1989. Batucadas and murgas replaced the massively attended marches demanding justice. Everybody needed the superficiality of the party, happiness, without a doubt, although it was much ado about nothing.

At the beginning of 2006, the streets would be taken again, with the “pinguinos,” or penguins: high school students challenging authority. After years of apparent apathy, it was a surprising image to see young people raising their voices with commitment and energy in public spaces, offering concrete proposals that moved big masses of students and startled the government of Michelle Bachelet. They decided to go to the streets because the situation of the educational system was forcing middle class and poor families to collapse. Their first demands pursued specific ends regarding the reduction in value of the school transportation pass, the modification of the LOCE (the organic constitutional law of instruction), which had been passed four days before the end of the dictatorship, and which put education into the hands of the private system.

In formal talks, students, government officials, and teachers discussed possible changes to the education law. But after some time, these talks stalled and conversations fell upon deaf ears as officials systematically tried to undermine the students. In order to pacify the students, the government modified certain laws (LOCE by LEGE), but finally it resulted in simple patches to tackle a much more serious situation within education. The structural reasons that generated excessive indebtedness among students, low quality of education and inequality remained intact. At the same time, the media gave steadily less coverage to the student movements, and the image of student leaders was slowly replaced in mainstream media with caricatures of whimsical youngsters. The news stopped giving airtime to student

leaders and the screens filled with images of the more fringe Chilean youth subcultures: pokemones, Goths, otakus and emo kids. As a fact, media barely reflects realities, but it participates in the construction of the collective imagination. (I'm thinking of a documentary in which some North American gangsters from the 1950s confessed that they dressed according to the gangsters as they were portrayed in films.)

And so in this style the press substituted the image of politicized youth with images of urban tribes. (While this effect may happen worldwide, the dimensions and velocity with which it happened in Chile was stunning.) In Chile one can perceive a growing need to belong to a group, to be part of a collective trend (something repeatedly denied during the dictatorship). As an example, when the well-known photographer Spencer Tunnick came to Chile in search of naked individuals for his work, being a conservative country no one expected than 600 people would turn up in Santiago. Surprisingly, more than 4000 people came in spite of the low winter temperatures.

The Little Giant Girl

In 2007, between January 25th and 28th, the French theater company, Royal De Luxe was invited as part of the subsidized theater festival "Teatro a Mil." Their production consisted of two giant automatons, The Hidden Rhinoceros and the Small Giant, who were paraded through the streets of Santiago. It was a massive success that attracted thousands of people, and that counted on the support of the government, private enterprise, and the media. It accomplished several objectives: it compensated the general public for the limited cultural depth of government policies, supplying a widely seen spectacle broadcast through mainstream media. But it could also be seen as a "smooth manipulation of the masses," in the words of the art critic Justo Pastor Mellado (2007). Or else, as a method of redirecting energy in the street, which began to become particularly agitated because of the students' demands. Remarkably, the company returned in 2010, a few months before the end of Michelle Bachelet's government, and the end of over two decades under the rule of the Concertación, a social democrat coalition.

Despite strong criticism against the

Concertación, and the image of Bachelet, the arrival of Sebastian Piñera, a member of the right-wing and Chilean business class, was not auspicious. The meme didn't take long to appear, and the streets once again would be taken over by young people. People in the streets wanted to play a real role, and there appeared a few important markers of this new drive. One of the collective actions showed outstanding originality and precision, that of "Blondes for the Bicentennial Celebration" performed by the University Collective for Sexual Dissidence – CUDS – on September 18th, 2010. It was Chile's 200th anniversary of independence from Spain's colonial power. The students offered to dye blonde the hair of anyone who wanted it, while they read a manifesto that denounced the class divisions tightly linked to an internalized racism in the country. It created the image of people dyeing their hair, a precarious and messy moment, while reading the following:

To make yourself blonde isn't difficult, what is difficult is not being dark, because this oxygenated blonde isn't like ashes, but it is irregular and sometimes orange, an unreal tint, in this hair we see the failure of our brown hair so dark, so black, a possibility to clarify ourselves with these new colors, which placed against each other doesn't resolve anything, but instead proves why we are here like in a cheap hair salon, discoloring our hair beneath the blondour and 40-percent hydrogen peroxide, we end up all the same, and erase our differences, we produce our new names, our names that could be more if we changed our last names that bring us down we change the color of our blondness. (CUDS, 2010)

Megalomaniacs

Many years ago a classmate who worked in publicity told me about her job as adviser in a tourist stand in Curicó, in Southern Chile. She told me a story of how he jokingly proposed, more out of boredom than anything else, to take advantage of the megalomaniacal fever invading the country to join the Guinness Book of World Records by producing the "largest Curicana cake in the world." The idea to transform the iconic pastry of the region was enthusiastically received. The mayor contacted the owners of Tortas

"Montero," and after days of work and celebration a grand event in a school gymnasium succeeded in presenting a tremendous pastry measuring 10 meters in diameter and nearly a meter high. The Guinness judges accepted their entry. My friend said that for a long time she kept a piece of that cake, storing it in her freezer as if it were a piece of a meteorite, or rubble from the Berlin Wall. Despite the surreal bravado surrounding these types of initiatives, the event succeeded in also pulling the whole province together to create a real moment of citizen participation.

In those years, it was one of several experiences of the type that came to repeat themselves, operating as a way of attracting attention. It promoted tourism and local food, required citizen participation, while generating something totally delirious. In 1995, for example, they created the largest Curanto, a traditional regional dish where shellfish, meat and potatoes are stewed in a fire pit and covered in earth to cook. Puerto Montt, the largest barbecue, starring 237 lambs being cooked over a kilometer and a half distance in the community of Licanray. That was 1995. A year later it was the Paila Marina, or shellfish stew. There was also the largest Pisco Sour ever made, which also took advantage of the experience to throw a few jabs at Peru, a country with which Chile competes for ownership of the drink. Two years after there was the largest Pastel de Choclo, a Shepherd's Pie-like dish based in corn, onion, and meat. It measured 40 x 45 meters and was produced in the town of Maria Pinto.

In 1996 the obsession crossed over into artisanal crafts when a huge Chaleco de la Ligua was made, a 10 x 7 and a half meters wool cardigan. The installation of objects in gigantic dimensions in public space seemed to emulate the artist Claes Oldenburg. Yet, for some reason, such acts were able to pull communities together around common goals, in an environment characterized by a certain consumerism. And so taking advantage of this fetishistic impulse and pleasure in the gigantic monument, and the international exposure through the Guinness records, students began to carry out a number of similar acts. Attempts were made to attract media attention simply through sheer magnitude. At the same

time, it represented an attempt to regain subjective space, defying the control exercised by repressive forces and social conventions towards space and the behavior of bodies within it.

An academic survey showed that 18 billion dollars were needed to cover the educational needs of three hundred thousand Chileans (at an average cost of six thousand dollars). The statistic triggered an idea among an assembly of theater students. They decided to run for 1800 hours around La Moneda Presidential Palace to show that it could be done. Local media quoted one of the students, Diego Varas, as having gotten up from the assembly and said, “well, I am afraid...but I still think this could work,” and left the assembly hall running, leaving the group stunned. His classmates followed him running to La Moneda.” (Perez Ruz & Contreras, 2011)

For two months they were running lapses around La Moneda Palace, coordinating among volunteers to join the marathon. They also kept a counter showing the distance covered. More than 2000 people arrived to run, among them students, young and old people, and children. Later this initiative would spread to other cities.

The action inspired other pursuits as well, giving rise to a “kiss-a-thon” in which thousands of students kissed for eighteen hundred minutes. Add this to the political fight and the seriousness of their petitions, physical presence and social awareness that for so long had been restricted by the dictatorship and domesticated by mass media suddenly materialized on the streets. The kiss Diamela Eltit gave to the tramp to denounce marginality and exclusion was updated as a libidinous, collective gesture, and at the same time something festive and open to all.

In another distinctive action, thousands of young people wearing caps, swimming flotation devices and dressed in bikinis and bathing trunks approached the Education Minister at the time, Joaquín Lavín, to let him know that it would be best if he “took some holidays.” Coupled with the rhetoric of mourning, elegies and laments, this represented the appearance of bodies, bodies much less repressed than in previous generations. These were bodies that didn’t know of torture in flesh or running blood, still virgin to the policeman’s baton. These bodies were not fearful in demonstrating the power of

their libido as a revolutionary act.

It would continue in 2011, in Concepción, a large city in Southern Chile. A phrase was written with the bodies of young people lying on the ground: “No More Profit,” which could only be read from the air. And in Santiago they unfolded the largest flag in Chile (but they did not attempt to get it registered in the record books) and hung it inside a shopping mall located in a megalomaniacal building, the tallest in South America, called the Costanera Center and owned by one of the richest men in the country.

Like in the works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, the central campus of the University of Chile disappeared beneath a gigantic drape with the emblazoned words, “the University is not for sale.” It was an allusion to the packaging of a product, a metonym for the market. Somehow, for most Chileans everything has become a commercial product. Former President Sebastián Piñera himself, in one of his famous lapses, said education was a “commodity.”

Disobedient images

Pop culture has filtered into politics. The concept of a meme has come to represent new ways of participation as well as forms of technology. The concept of a “meme” was initially coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976 in his book, *The Selfish Gene*. According to Dawkins, memes are small parts of our culture that extend from person to person through copies and imitation. And so in the digital culture of web 2.0, we are participating in the rapid growth of this phenomenon. Why does a Youtube video like Gangnam Style, sung by the South Korean singer Psy, attract millions of online viewers? And even more so, why is it that so many people invest time and effort in spoofs of these videos? Last year we could see so many people dance to this idiotic dance – through digital effects, or in real life – from presidents to celebrities, regular people and including the artist Ai Wei Wei, who found a way to use it to communicate his political situation. Why is it that people produce these videos or photoshop images that are then shared by millions? What is the creative potential? What is the subversive potential?

The biological notion implicit in the concept of a “meme” is re-semanticized,

making it more complex and tentacle-like, bridging a space between politics and entertainment that intersects and feeds off of each other.

More than two decades have gone by since the anthropologist and cultural critic Néstor García Canclini alerted us in his book, *Culturas Híbridadas* (1990), about the convergence and exchange of areas that had once seemed separated: the popular or common, folklore and cult have seen their borders blurred when confronted by consumerism. Multiculturalism and globalization, the market and the overwhelming unfolding of the media, have revealed new social configurations, and most importantly, new and even faster rates of exchange.

Although it may seem like a paradox, artistic-political productions and the market have also seen their borders relax. The construction of this idea works in both directions. The market uses certain icons of popular culture and dissidence. For example, the energy drink called Ché Energy, which features the face of Che Guevara, and last year a German bank offered several different designs for their credit cards, among them with the figure of Karl Marx (a Marxtercard). But the inverse also occurs. Dissidence and activism create visual elements (via appropriation or Photoshop), which are much easier to manipulate when you talk about the appropriation of images, texts or languages printed in the public imagination through massive advertising campaigns.

One of my favorite examples happened after the rescue of the miners in 2012. President Piñera didn’t hesitate to continually show himself as part of the scene, which found juxtaposition with the message wrote by one of the miners saying “we are alive, the 33 ones” and printed in the newspapers. Soon people reinterpreted this image in very sardonic and funny ways. There are mostly anonymous people who, with very basic understanding of Photoshop and a dose of ingenuity, were able to channel criticism and discontent towards not only the president, but everything that he represented, the figure of a businessman and a politician.

Appropriation of narratives from the mainstream

In February 2010, a group of Palestinian

peasants, activists, and members of the non-violent resistance, marched in the streets with their bodies painted blue. A pirated copy of the movie *Avatar* served the town of Bilin, near the Palestinian city of Ramallah, as a means to represent their demands against the Wall (of Apartheid), thus identifying themselves with the Na'vi people appearing in the movie. The protest drew attention from press in Israel and the world. Taken lightly, this strategy could be seen as a trivial parody. But it reclaimed a form of agency through an artistic procedure, understood not only as aestheticization of the political, but also a means to regain the relation between symbol and origin, between myth and history, between concept and action. Beyond criticism from any suspicious perspective we might have (the caricature of the aborigines – with their positive and negative discrimination; the idea of the hero, violence as the last resort), the appropriation of the film by this Palestinian community filled with historical sentiment transgresses the void that the current arts regime has created as it moved toward exclusively formal and aesthetic expression.

What happened in Palestine is something similar to what occurred throughout 2011 when Chilean students launched several protests loaded with creativity and imagination. One of the most memorable was a performance of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video in the middle of downtown Santiago. One of the last phrases of Salvador Allende was, "Much sooner than later, the broad avenues will open through which the free man will pass to build a better society." Allende probably never would have thought that 38 years after enunciating those words in his last public speech, a caravan of zombies marching along those streets would represent that free man.

On June 26th, 2011, more than 3,000 university and high school students dressed as apparitions in torn clothing and painted faces carried posters and signs explaining how much money they would end up owing upon finishing their studies. "We are the living dead." The action ended in a massive dance of zombies carried out to the choreography of the *Thriller* music video in the Plaza de la Ciudadanía in front of La Moneda.

Who also joined the student protests was Son Goku, main character of the series *Dragon Ball Z*. From virtual social

networks, through the official Spanish voice dub of the series of Japanese animation, a call was made to raise their hands and gather energy to create a Genkidama (a ball of spiritual power). The appropriation of visual images was both a collective and individual initiative. Nowadays we're used to see several characters of TV or folk culture marching on the streets: an old man dressed as Santa Claus, He Man, Caribbean pirate, Lady Gaga, and from 1996 the Che of Gays. These appear regularly on the streets in the service of social protest.

Conclusions

Before this explosion of revolutionary and creative energy, it is worth noting the small amount of artists who have taken a role in this agitated context. Or maybe we think they have dispersed into the masses? One thing seems certain: the power of conceptual actions performed during the 70s and 80s seems to live again in the superficiality of all that we live now.

One exception can be found in the action *Sala Invertida* [Inverted Room] in which students of art at the University of Valparaíso hung chairs from the ceiling and lights on the floor, writing on the whiteboard a phrase by Guy Debord: "in a world that has really been turned upside down, truth is a moment of falsehood."

The last actions that I participated in directly occurred in September 2013, for the 40th anniversary of the dictatorship. An actress made a call via facebook and twitter to commemorate this sad date. Over a thousand people lay down on the floor in the middle of Alameda, representing a scar left by the missing detainees, and all the tortured and executed people in the years of the dictatorship, a scar that crossed the face of Chile.

There has always been a danger that these subversive strategies can become exhausted, that the corrosive potential of the political message is neutralized by the force of repetition, or that the socio-political issues become an aesthetic or artistic act hosted by those institutions that regulate them, like museums, galleries, art publications, and academia (which may produce a certain guilt in the context of my own work). But we shouldn't feel too guilty, because the distribution in all these areas can serve as somewhat of a viral motor, disseminating

strategies and tactical resources that reconcile humor, creativity, and emotion, and inspire other groups and ourselves with what we will soon be living.

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Graffiti on the streets of Santiago, during student strikes, 2011.

Galal El-Behairy
A Letter from Tora Prison, Cairo
May 2018

Opening:

You, something
in the heart, unspoken,
something
in the throat, the last wish
of a man on the gallows
when the hour of hanging comes,
the great need
for oblivion; you, prison
and death, free of charge;
you, the truest meaning of man,
the word 'no'—
I kiss your hand
and, preparing for the trial,
put on a suit and pray
for your Eid to come.
I'm the one
who escaped from the Mamluks,
I'm the child
whose father's name is Zahran,
and I swim in your name, addiction.
I'm the companion of outlawed poets.
O my oblivion, I'm the clay
that precedes the law of concrete.
In the heart of this night
I own nothing
but my smile.
I take my country in my arms
and talk to her
about all the prisoners' lives... out there
beyond the prison's borders,
beyond the jailer's grasp,
and about man's need... for his fellow man,
about a dream
that was licit
and possible,
about a burden
that could be borne
if everyone took part in it.
I laugh at a song
they call 'criminal,'
which provoked them
to erect a hundred barricades.

On our account, they block out the sun
and the thoughts in the head.
They want to hide the past
behind locks and bolts,
preventing him from whispering
about how things once were.
They want to hide him
by appointing guards—
weak-minded foreigners
estranged from the people.
But what wonder is this?
His fate is written
in all the prison cells.
His cell has neither bricks
nor steel,
and he was not defeated
within it.
Outside... a squadron of slaves.
Inside... a crucified messiah.
The thorns above his brow
are witnesses: You betrayed his revolution
with your own hands.
With shame in your eyes, you
are the Judases of the past,
whatever your religion, whatever
miniscule vision you have.
We've come back
and we see you.
You who imprisoned
the light, that naked groaning.
The light doesn't care
how tall the fence is;
it's not hemmed in
by steel bars
or officers' uniforms.
It cannot be forgotten.
You can take a public square away from us,
but there are thousands and thousands of others,
and I'll be there, waiting for you.
Our land will not betray us.
With each olive branch
we're weaving your shrouds.
And the young man you killed
has come back, awake now
and angry.
He's got a bone to pick
with his killer.

He's got a bone to pick
 with the one who betrayed him,
 the one who, on that night of hope,
 acquiesced, fell silent, and slept.
 His wound has healed; he's come back,
 a knight
 without a bridle;
 he's setting up the trial
 while an imam prays among us
 and illumines the one who was blind;
 he's rolling up his sleeves, preparing
 for a fight;
 he was killed—yes, it's true—and yet
 he has his role in this epic;
 he stands there now
 and holds his ground.
 We've returned
 to call on God
 and proclaim it: 'We've come back,
 come back
 hand in hand.'
 Again we proclaim it: 'We've come back,
 and we vow
 to spread the light,
 the new dawn,
 the keen-sighted conscience.'
 We've come back, and we can smell
 the fear in your veins;
 and our cheers tonight
 are the sweetest of all:
 'We are not afraid.
 We are not afraid.'
 We saw a country
 rise from sleep
 to trample a pharaoh
 and cleanse the age
 of the cane and cudgel.
 We saw a country sing:
 those were no slave songs,
 no harbingers of doom, rather
 songs fitting
 for a new kind of steel.
 We saw it.
 We saw a country
 where no one is oppressed.

Galal El-Behairy is an Egyptian poet, lyricist, and activist who has been in detention in Tora Prison in Cairo since March 2018. Early this year he collaborated with musician Ramy Essam on the song "Balaha" and was planning to publish a book of poetry, both of which caused him to be detained, tortured, and imprisoned unjustly for several months awaiting a court indictment. El-Behairy was arrested five days after the release of "Balaha," disappeared for a week, and exhibited signs of torture when he appeared before the High State Security Prosecution. El-Behairy is currently being held in detention under the High State Security's charges of terrorist affiliation, dissemination of false news, abuse of social media networks, blasphemy, contempt of religion, and insulting the military. The verdict in his case was expected on May 16, but was then rescheduled to June 27, 2018, and again to July 28, 2018.

On July 31st, the Military Court of Cairo sentenced the poet Galal El-Behairy to three years of prison and 10,000 Egyptian Pounds (560 USD) for "insulting the military" and "spreading false news" on charges related to his latest book of poetry, *The Finest Women on Earth*. El-Behairy also faces additional charges in a separate case investigated by the High State Security Prosecution for writing the lyrics for artist Ramy Essam's song 'Balaha'.

The sentence will be carried out only after military chiefs ratify it, which means President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi and Minister of Defence, Mr. Mohamed Ahmed Zakiy have the power to release Galal.

Translated from Egyptian Colloquial Arabic.

One person's utopia is another's dystopia

Interview with Golo Föllmer and Georg Klein on the occasion of the DYSTOPIA Sound Art Festival, September 21 - 30, 2018, Berlin.

The DYSTOPIA Sound Art Festival brings together 20 sound-artistic positions on the essential questions regarding dystopian thought by exploring locations with unusual history and future potential. That art has always incorporated a utopian potential, and precisely in dystopian negativity, this has been a common thought even before Adorno. Its ability to criticize reality lies precisely in its perspective from the outside, being a U-Topia—from the Greek *ou-topos*—meaning “no place”, that is in its distance from societal reality (and ideally also remote from commercial art reality). However, this commentary is certainly only relevant for society if art “comprises and forms a reference to the world which may be fictional [...] but at the same time comprises the desire for a different life” (Frank Apunkt Schneider / monochrom: *The Present of the Future. Strategic considerations on paraflows*, 2008).

With the composition of “atmospheres” (Gernot Böhme) and the performance at “non-places” (Marc Augé), sound art has a particular potential to make this desire, this ambivalence of dystopia and utopia appear in a sensory, non-narrative form. A total of 26 international artists have created sound scenarios for the DYSTOPIA Festival, in which they examine technological, biological and political dystopias as dystopian atmospheres. With many guest performers from Istanbul, the Dystopia Festival culminates in a topical, political focus on Turkey.

Including works and presentations by: The Society for Nontrivial Pursuits (Alberto di Campo, Hannes Hoelzl et.al.), Selçuk Artut, Candaş Şişman, Steffi Weismann & Özgür Erkök Moroder, Jeremy Woodruff, Kirsten Reese, Antje Vowinckel, Peter Cusack & Katharina Bévand, Alessandra Eramo, Liping Ting, Sair Sinan Kestelli, Ipek Gorgun, Jacob Kirkegaard, Georg Klein, Gívan Belá & Geza Bobb, Laura Mello & Wolfgang Musil, Ines Lechleitner & Tuçe Erel, Georg Werner, Mario Asef, Nihad Sirees, Gregory Claeys.

In addition to public spaces, the DYSTOPIA Sound Art Festival brings together for the first time three neighboring sound art venues that have been in existence for many years: Kunsthaus Meinblau, Kleiner and Großer Wasserspeicher and Errant Sound Project Space. Organized by Errant Sound e.V., its project space functions as an information point for the festival, and hosts the Sound Bar, a collection of dystopian soundtracks from cinematic history.

Curators: Georg Klein, Golo Föllmer, Jeremy Woodruff, Ebru Yetişkin.

Brandon LaBelle: What motivated you to make a festival around the theme of dystopia?

Georg Klein: Of course, it was the impression that in the last five to ten years the political development all over the world has some dystopic elements. After the Millennium there was a great hope that a very democratic and social world would come together, and also with the internet bubble, which was very utopic element in this. And now, we have developments in this political sphere, in Russia, China, Turkey but also in the US with NSA and now with Trump, we start to lose our freedom and liberal democratic society. At the same time over the last ten years a lot of dystopic fantasies have been written, and also films, and you have Orwell and Huxley being read again, and even *Blade Runner* got a new version. So there is a lot of fascination with dystopic stories, toward a future in this way. And the question of the festival is: why is it so interesting for a lot of people today? And looking towards the AfD in Germany and Le Pen in France - what do we do if a majority want to realize their 'utopia'? We want to go into these questions with the festival and to consider the fear and fascination related to dystopia.

Golo Föllmer: I think especially for people working with media, such as sound artists who are aware of media, the disappointment of the internet was a big issue, because it started out as the major utopic element in the late 90s. There was so much talk about democratization, participation, non-hierarchical cooperation, accessibility to productive means and creative processes, because suddenly, in sound especially, sound tools were online and free, and knowledge about it was free – music became more accessible, you could delve into the history of music because things were online. So many things became possible and had this positive touch, and then consumerism took over. Not only that, the other part was surveillance through the once nice and sympathetic Google, which was a big disappointment. When Google came it was really exciting ...

Georg: The Rainbow – yeah, it was the colors of Google!

Golo: They had this saying, “don't be evil”, as the core of their code of conduct. It was one thing that went through the press, and then it changed. Maybe it's the same about ecological issues, I wonder. In the 80s you had Chernobyl, the “Waldsterben” (dying of the forest), so there were real, concrete ecological catastrophes, but the impression of dystopia was not as strong to me as today. Maybe it's stronger these days because of the climate change.

Georg: It's more global now, the climate change is a whole system. It's so big you really don't know how we should change it, because with every small step there is a resistance, economical for instance. That's a difference to the Waldsterben, such a single catastrophe like Chernobyl. It's also the

same thing with the plastic trash in the sea, now it's micro-particles, of that. Now we are discussing whether we can eat the fish, because the fish eat the plastic. So it's now such a big situation, maybe this is a new dimension.

Brandon: I was wondering if you see a connection between sound and the topic of dystopia? Or if there have been specific ways that sound art projects have addressed the topic?

Georg: We planned the festival as an opportunity for artists to produce new works. So we asked the artists if they are interested in dealing with this topic, because it's a relevant political topic and topic of society, and if they could do something in their sound work. We are ourselves curious what will happen, so it's not a specific sound art thing that you address dystopia. It could also be literature or film. But maybe one point to consider, in sound art it's often very important to generate a kind of atmosphere with sound, which can work to convey a dystopic quality. It could be something non-narrative, for example, and that gives a dystopic feeling. If artists work then with some concrete footage, political or environmental, we will see. It's a production festival, it's not that we look for sound art pieces and we chose them for the festival. It was more a challenge.

Golo: And one decision was that we organize the festival between a local scene in Berlin, and a local scene in Istanbul. That was a choice from the beginning because we had this good contact with Jeremy Woodruff in Istanbul, and it seemed so obvious given that Turkey is steering towards an autocratic political situation, and has for many people dystopic elements. It was a choice to not necessarily work with established artists, but to look towards this local scene and establish contact with a diversity of people and also media. Also to cover the different topics that you find in the theme of dystopia, so you have elements of biological, ecological, or political dystopia, technological elements such as surveillance, artificial intelligence, and threats that people may see in that.

Brandon: Will the festival here include artists from Istanbul?

Georg: We invited artists from Istanbul, and also artists from Turkey living in Berlin, who cooperate with non-Turkish artists as well. So we have some collaborations between artists. Also, some artists from Istanbul who have not exhibited in Berlin before.

Brandon: Coming back to this relation between dystopia and sound. It made me think a little bit about the history of punk music, and the way in which punk always had this relation to noise. Noise became a carrier of dissatisfaction, a certain kind of angst or frustration with the social reality. And which came to embody a sort of dystopic sensibility, a nihilistic sensibility. That came to mind, this relation to noise as a symbol of breakdown.

Georg: If I read critics on electronic concerts, there is sometimes the statement “this was very dystopic”, as a way of classifying the character of a performance, especially more experimental dark electronics. Our focus is on installation and not so much on performance, so it will be a difference to this kind of dark experience in a concert.

Golo: The only scientific article I could find online on the connection between music and dystopia was on punk music. There is certainly a connection, but I wonder how clear or precise it is. We have always been careful not to mix the concept of dystopia with the threat of violence, which is often in political dystopias a strong element, to realize the dystopic scenario. But Georg was always pointing out that in political dystopias maybe the most threatening element is seduction, and the sublime activation of power, and not violence. Violence plays a role, but the more dangerous part is seduction, or else one autocrat couldn't govern. That's why we were careful about focusing on something like punk music. And then also if you look at the other elements, there are maybe three different kinds of dystopias: the second is technological, where violence doesn't play a big role. It's more about the idea of a system that is everywhere, that a voice speaks from every corner, that it is everywhere and nowhere, ungraspable. It can even be quiet to a large extent. And then also, biological dystopia is very quiet, lifeless in a way, after the world has become a desert, it turns quiet, it is not violent. So in a large part dystopia could sound soft, quiet, and only very sublimely violent.

Georg: For myself I'm not so much interested in this dark side, destroyed worlds, for instance, but more in the new but bad order of society. Like Huxley described it in his *Brave New World*. The main phrase is “community, identity, stability.” If you look at these three words, it could be the program of the right wing states now, Hungary, Russia, China, they really make this kind of community, identity – “we want to make our own thing, and please all others keep out”, like in Hungary, maybe now in Italy a bit. And stability. I was really fascinated because this is not working with fear, it is working with your will: they bring you to want the right thing. Utopia is possible if all people want the same, so there's also some connection to the communist utopian ideas. And this only works if all people want the same thing, and then you have this community thing, and that's interesting that all utopian ideas may somehow change into a dystopia if you really want to realize it. I visited North Korea last fall and could get an impression how it works in every part of the society. That's why we have in our festival this leading phrase: One person's utopia is another's dystopia. Because for the Turkish leader Erdogan, he's building his utopia as a nationalistic state, to build this Turkish community, to keep out the Kurds and suppress them. But like in Huxley's novel, the modern autocratic leaders try to seduce people, that the people follow them. I am mostly fearful of this development, maybe like if we imagine it for Germany, that there are more

and more people wanting this kind of autocratic system, like with the AfD, and then what do you do if the majority of one country wants something like that. It's not just the violence aspect I fear, it's also this other aspect that they can seduce and bring your will toward this direction. There's also some development in technology, if we have Google who makes you some “recommended buys” or suggestions, and you get slowly led by such technologies. It's somehow a kind of soft power, also in surveillance. With Obama and NSA, it became clear. There's a lot possible now that you couldn't imagine 20 years earlier. For this reason, the festival is not focused on this dark aspect, as it was expressed in punk. It's more diverse.

Golo: Maybe one more thing regarding utopia and dystopia, Agnes Heller says they are both almost an identical thriving for a vision, both of course coming from the imagination brought out with all your will, but one guided by hope and the other by fear. That's the difference. They are really very close, as they both strive for alternatives, fighting for people's futures. Then Gregory Claeys explains, the problem with utopia is that it became too much of Sparta: regulated, strict, and not enough carnival, too much celibacy. Not enough festivity in society. Too much work and not enough play. From that view, dystopia became more powerful to develop fictions, because people can connect to the passion in it. And immediately see it's a bad fiction, and distance themselves from it. Instead of identifying with a utopia that you don't really want, because it's not enough play, you better look at the bad example and learn from it and to avoid the bad elements of that.

Georg: It's a question of art in general. Would we have art if we lived in a perfect society? It's an interesting question, whether art would really exist. So we need the dystopia in order to produce [laughing].

Brandon: Do we see dystopic qualities in Berlin? How might we map this onto our experiences being here?

Golo: One thing is of course there is a dystopic past because it could have happened in the Second World War. That's why Teufelsberg was chosen, in fact for two reasons: it was built on the debris of the Hitler Nazi regime, and all the deaths that happened there; and it was holding the spy systems of the cold war: listening into Russia as the proclaimed enemy, and swallowing a lot of money and being part of a cold war propaganda. And which could have also ended badly, that was the nuclear war dystopia. Then we have some performances in the festival that look more towards the future, for instance Laura Mello's performance on Kollwitzplatz, *Living Radio*, which has to do with surveillance and how we use radio.

Georg: And one at Tempelhofer Feld, because there are all these garden initiatives and DIY communities, and there will be a projection towards the future if the whole world is organized like these DIY movements. Of course, in locations we were a little bit restricted because we use the Wasserspeicher

in Prenzlauer Berg, it's somehow a dystopic place, and also somehow not, it's not such a symbolic location. In general, the topic dystopia has a very wide view concerning the whole society. It's not just one thing that is dystopic, it's always kind of a development and change in society that you try to imagine, through literature, for example, and so I wouldn't say there are a lot of things especially connected to Berlin.

Golo: I would say the Wasserspeicher, and also Teufelsberg, with this extreme reverberation, this is an element that you find used in moments of threat, in film soundtracks for instance. It stands for disorientation, it's this element where you don't know where a sound source is located. It's an aesthetic element that is strongly linked to threat, and thereby also to dystopic sceneries.

Georg: I was thinking that because it is not a topic like gentrification, not in this sense dystopic. Of course, this is a change and it's serious, and for many people it's bad, but I would say dystopia has a bigger view onto society.

Brandon: I was thinking about how Berlin has been functioning in the last 25 years as a rather utopic site for a certain kind of artistic community, with many people coming here who see it as an amazing situation for living and working still today. We know things are changing, but I was curious how we might consider this history and cultural condition from the point of view of dystopia – how we might pose this question to the artist community in the city, and how they might reflect upon that in terms of their own experiences of what Berlin as a city offers a certain artistic attitude or possibility.

Golo: Maybe a bit in this sense thinking about this community that has arrived in Kreuzkölln, which started a tremendous wave of gentrification there. Utopic experiences of this community might easily turn upside in the sense of the community being rather closed, how it might not connect to the greater neighborhood, or that it might effect the neighborhood negatively through tremendously rising rents, etc. This is not our focus so much. But in this sense, we can see how any utopic experience may contain, already from the beginning, a dystopic tendency.

Georg: It's interesting that now for some years if you compare to other cities, you know better what you can lose in Berlin. Maybe that has changed also, that a lot of people fear that they can lose this freedom or possibility of space, participation in public space also. Now with the political developments in other countries, on a different level we can understand that there are restrictions. We have one Turkish artist working in Berlin who has to avoid going back to Turkey, because he fears he could go to jail. And then for Berlin there is still that feeling of it being an island for free expression for artists. But you know better now that you can lose it. Maybe that's a little bit of a change in the situation. For us we all know that gentrification is quite serious regarding living and running project spaces. It depends on people supporting it, and here with the rent, or even with such

a festival we have a lot of problems to bring the festival to Istanbul because it's difficult to get money there. It's not like Berlin where you can apply for funding, and there is quite a neutral jury making decisions. Compared to Istanbul we also see what's possible here in Berlin still.

Brandon: Maybe dystopia teaches us what we might lose?

Georg: And what we should fight for, to keep it, and to be aware in which situation we are in, and what we should invest ourselves in.

Brandon: You are both members of Errant Sound. What do you feel is important about running a project space, and organizing such a festival as this? Is it important to initiate cultural activities – why do you do this?

Georg: First of all, there is a strong self-organized practice in Berlin, that you have these grass roots movements in the artist scene. I think that's very special in Berlin, because it is very elaborated now. You have a funding structure for that, so the city government really knows it's somehow important for the city. I know it from other cities in Germany, they are all a little bit jealous about this. That's interesting in Berlin, the whole project space scene in the city. It's really incredible.

Golo: And maybe that's a strong byproduct of the fact of many people coming here. Obviously the city has realized that a lot of new Berliners and large numbers of visitors really come for independent art and culture, so it's an economic element; it's income for the city, so that's one reason why they decided to take a part of the city tax to fund this free scene.

Georg: Of course, it's a very special situation. After the fall of the wall, with all these voids that were in the city, sometimes because of the Second World War still, but also this change in society and not having fixed ownership of properties and houses. I know in the 90s we expected that this would all be over by 2000. We saw all these investors coming to Berlin, but it was not like that – there was not this economic rise in Berlin in the 90s, like they expected it. But now it's going in this direction more and more, and the voids are disappearing. But if I go to Paris or Vienna, for instance, I always have a feeling it's already fixed, and coming back to Berlin there is this feeling of there still being possibility for what could happen here. That's still attractive for artists, because you are not dependent on institutions, that they invite you or give you a little space. You just do your own thing, and it could work for some years. That's quite important. For us, that's important with Errant Sound, that there is a non-institutional open space for sound artists. That this can act as a meeting point, as a small center where something could happen in this area of art. I'm happy it still exists!

and the territorial dispute
and the language on the tongue
and the break he tries to hold
and the whispers that never end
and the going nowhere, anywhere
this imaginary republic
and the arrival that he witnesses
and that is never his own
and the falling
and the rooms where they gather
and the staying as if
and the holding on
and the falling
and the day that passes by
and the shadows that do not move
and the floating like a plan mapped by anxious light
and the coming, the going
and the passing away, again
and the soft minutes
and the missing, the missing

and the terrible joy
and the power of the heart
and the held breath
and the dogs outside
and the vibrating earth that sends him adrift
and the listening he and they perform



Contemporary Albanian Folk Music

Frans Jacobi

17.7.2018

Another hot day in Berlin. All museums are closed. We take a taxi to Kollwitz Platz and eat a late breakfast. From there another taxi to Treptow and the swimmingpool in the river Spree. Badeschiff. Drinks and swimming. The hipsters of Berlin. A surrealistic effect of the pool and people passing by on their boogie-boards emerges – as if they are walking on water. As if gravitation has taken a new hip turn. Swimming, I contemplate the line of former storage buildings on the other side of the river.

Back in the 90s, when I was living just a few hundred meters up the river, in Cuvry-straße, these buildings were still remnants of the former East Berlin. They were empty and grey, but they carried a promise of a potential future. We would sit in the apartment on the former-west-side of the Spree and look over into that former-east-side, contemplating the becoming of a new Berlin. The storage buildings and Friedrichshain/Ostkreuz/Lichtenberg behind them were still an open landscape, constituted by cheap rent, empty industrial structures and urban imaginaries.

Now, the storage buildings on the other side of the river are transformed into luxury apartments and high-profile business-centers. The elegant, innovative architecture is a brazen signifier of the process from communist ruin to neo-liberal rule.

After swimming we eat at a charming restaurant installed on a pier in the Flutgraben canal close to Badeschiff. Here, the aesthetics of temporal autonomous zones have been transformed into a perfect, vegan-style eatery. Next to us, a Norwegian family enjoys their first day as tourists and a crowd of middle-aged cultural-class academics are lining up outside to get a table.

Berlin is still pleasant, in fact, über-pleasant in the summer heat, but the unknown, imaginary territories are long gone. Everything is compartmentalized; absorbed into quantifiable units. Innovative in exact, normative measures.

Contemporary Albanian Folk Music

The freedom of car rides. Missing an exit off the highway we change plans and head for a different spot on the map. Spille is a ramschackle Albanian beach, with a few hotels and a main street that looks like a market in rural Mexico. We find a hotel – expensive, but hopelessly shabby.

At the moment we are ready to relax, the music starts. From a nearby, outdoor disco an immense roar of cheap techno-pop blares out, covering the whole town in a tiresome, endless techno-beat. The music lasts for hours and there is no rest inside or outside. We give up sleeping, we give up reading, we give up having sex.

A long walk by the evening beach clears the heads and we decide to investigate the disco: Situated inside a small forest on the edge of the beach, it is actually two different out door discos, placed between the trees as a strange forest-tivoli. Each playing extremely high Albanian techno, competing for loudness. The first is a circular platform placed in front of a series of benches amid the trees. Here, a good crowd of 50-80 youngsters are dancing and drinking. The second one a bit further into the forest is empty, apart from a few guys hanging around. The DJ plays a hardcore set without audience, maybe just to stir up the frenzy between the two discos.

We find a spot right in the middle between the trees. The center of a forest mayhem of cheap techno. The double attack of sound creating a hysterical barrage of rhythm noise. Contemporary Albanian folk music.

At exactly 23.30 both discos shut down and we can go to sleep, relaxed, purified of all pretence.

Tirana

We went on vacation to Albania in search of something. Maybe, it was those unknown, imaginary territories we were dreaming about. I have met them in other former communist cities – Murmansk, Arkhangelsk. From the distance Albania seems just like that; a poor, ruined topography brimming with in-between emptiness.

Albania 2018 is completely different. It is a country in construction. Finally, out of almost 100 years of political disasters, things are shaping up. The central square is being redesigned – large open stretches and fragments of urban forest injected into the former Italian-fascist city space. The communist ruin is hard to recognise. Relational aesthetics taking over.

‘Blokki’ is a block where an amazing concentration of restaurants, cafes and clubs are crammed together on what used to be the administrative head-quarters of the communist dictatorship. Everything seems new and shiny and there is a total energy of youth and buzz. Trendy and very smart. Frenzy.

Edi

The Albanian premier-minister is a contemporary artist, Edi Rama. In parallel with his political career he is still active as an artist, exhibiting on an international level. His most well-known act was to paint large parts of Tirana city-center in strong, bright, color compositions. This was back in the early 2000s when he was the mayor of Tirana, but he also uses artists like Anri Sala, Phillippe Parreno and Carsten Höller in various details of the reconfiguration of Albanian public and political space. Part of our fascination with Albania comes from speculations on the fact that the country is led by an artist – does that make anything different?

We visit the The Center for Openness and Dialogue in the front part of the administration buildings of the Premier-minister. When Edi Rama was still an art-student under the communist dictatorship, modernism was illegal, and it was impossible to get even a glimpse of reproductions of i.e. Picasso or Matisse. As a service to new generations of artists Rama has installed an open-access library of art-history and political theory, here at The Center for Openness and Dialogue. The Center also makes available all communication in and out of the department of the premier-minister. A transparent archive of political acts. The Center houses a contemporary art exhibition space. Phillippe Parreno has designed the entrance and Carsten Höller has donated a large mushroom sculpture in front of the building.

A strong exhibition of photo-journalist Michel Setboun, describing the dark years 1982-92, the last decade of communist dictatorship. Social-realism at its most intimate and dramatic. The faces of the oppressed. Poverty. Hopelessness. Staged happiness. The cult of Enver Hoxsa.

As it is written in the concept part of the Center’s website, www.cod.al

“How it can turn from a historic building with high security measures, isolated from contact with the citizens who daily pass by, into an open space of dialogue and exchanges? How can a space that until now has been seen by the public as a stately center of power, turn into a space that invites for inclusion in the study, design and implementation of public policies? How it can be reframed in sign of transparency, openness and transformation, bringing something new and unique for the Albanian citizens?”

To me the interesting question is not so much if Rama will actually be able to transform Albanian society from a corrupt drug-trafficking mafia-state into transparent open democracy. Even if he is clean, it is a process that will take years and years. The really interesting fact is that he as an artist took the



Unfinished building on Shaqari island, Lake Shkodra.

decision to go into politics. Not activist politics, nor political art – but real pragmatic, parliamentary politics. A pragmatic claim for power. Power to change something. It is a dirty version of art and politics; he is still an artist, even with a considerable international career, but he has gone into pragmatic politics full force.

As any other parliamentarian democracy, Albanian democracy is not pure. But as right-wing governance spread all over Europe, as fascism lurks in the shadows, someone has to try seizing power, someone has to fight for democracy, also in the parliaments, in the governments, in the de facto political systems.

Edi Rama seems like such a person. The fact that he is also an artist is interesting. It might open up a different kind of governance – in his case it seems like an open, relational, visionary style.

To me though, the really, interesting thing is not even Edi Rama as a politician or his results, but just the fact that he, by his example, opens up the possibility; the possibility of an artist as pragmatic and visionary politician.

& Edi

We visit the National Gallery of Arts. In the entrance area hangs a large Matisse-like painting, 'Planting of Trees'. A group of young people planting trees under a poetic blue sky. It is a wonderful painting, green ground and both the figures and the brush-strokes seems to be dancing into the blue that in a surreal manner invades the crowns of the trees from the sky above. It merges realism with a poetic, surreal sensibility that is completely inciting. I just want more of this; the light of summer.

The painting proves to be the entry into a retrospective exhibition by the Albanian painter Edi Hila. In all its joyful optimism 'Planting of Trees' became a dramatic turning point in the career of Hila. Made in 1972 by the then young and aspiring artist as a public commission for the People's Assembly (the parliament), the painting was conceived within the social realist style, that was accepted by the communist regime of Enver Hoxsa. But, since it did not display any of the obligatory communist regalia – banners with slogans, flags or the like – it was banned by the regime and as a punishment Hila was sent to be 're-educated' in a poultry-plant far off in the countryside for 10 years.

The exhibition focuses mainly on the paintings Hila has made after the fall of the communist regime in 1991. In large series of paintings dominated by tones of grey, he updates the realist style. Following and depicting the transformation of Albania into capitalism, from austerity to ill-conceived, brazen figurations of new wealth. Penthouse apartments, parasols, tivolis. Buildings, beaches, roads. Cars, colors, grey skies. An intimate, disillusioned portrait of his mother with a remote control. Through the paintings and Hila's eye for all the colorful objects of cheap capitalism, we understand and see meaning in otherwise mundane details.

Hila even succeeds in creating a pictorial representation of the ongoing European refugee-crisis. In the series 'A Tent on the Roof of a Car', the paradoxically simple motif of a tent on the roof of a car becomes an emblematic figuration of the precarious nomadic exile millions of people are forced into. Or as Hila himself writes in the catalogue:

"We're living through a time of substantial population movements from south to north. Emigration is a great revealer of the contradictions and vast differences existing between the two worlds. The tent comes from the depths of the centuries to our time, so it can carry the same functions as a proper architectonic object, and in different case serves to stimulate discussions and challenge preconceived ideas."

I can't seem to remember another painter that represents the surrounding society and its conflicts so directly in painting. It is there as motives, but it is at the same time elevated to iconic signifiers of far

greater problematics. Seeing these paintings casts the journey around Albania in another light. The cities and the sub-cities. Hila's art is a political subject guide to understanding this country.

Edi or Edi

To go into real politics as an artist – and still exist as an artist in that role, as Rama.

or

To immerse oneself into the artistic work and take it to another depth, as Hila.

A day of forever

The hotel gives us free bikes and we spend the day biking out along the western shore of Lake Shkodra. It is hot and dry. Very hot. As we leave the city the lake opens up the horizon. The blue of the water and the blue of the sky melts into each other, and the mountains in the distance fades into a grey mist. The mind stretches into the heat.

We head down a stony slope to swim. As we sink into the water, it is full of various nature things; seaweed, insects, tiny fish. Not pleasant. It is as if nature owns this water and asks us to leave. It is not for humans and we give up. Sitting naked on a rock on the beach afterwards is something different. It is an image, the heat, the sun, the rocks, the evaporating sea and sky. A day of forever.

On our way back, we visit an abandoned house-structure built out onto the lake, connected by a small bridge. Four floors and an intricate system of stairs and balconies. A whole series of different views onto the lake and the mountains. Everything is concrete structure, abandoned before floors, walls and windows were installed. An open structure, ready for take-over.

15.8.2018

Back in Copenhagen the green party, Alternativet, launches a plan for a total reform of the state administration. They want to create a new, super department for environmental and social conversion. All other decisions will be prioritized according to this new agenda: How will it benefit the general environmental and social conversion? This new super department will overrule the financial department, that until now has had this generalizing power. Dealing with climate change and social inequality is formulated as intricately linked. Both are global problems and have to be countered by global visions.

For the first time in many, many years, I have the feeling of something loosening up in Danish politics. Real visions on how to engage on the real level of real problems are being discussed. I decide to register as a member of Alternativet. It takes 10 minutes and it is the first time I have been a member of a political party. I am still in shock, surprised by my sudden resolve.

It is time for a different kind of engagement.



Green Hijab Movement: 'Activists on Vacation', 2018.

Free Berlin No. 6
Errant Bodies Press
Kollwitzstr 97, PB - Berlin
www.errantbodies.org
September 2018

With contributions from:
Frans Jacobi / Golo Föllmer & Georg Klein /
Valentina Montero / Jelena Petrović /
Galal El-Behairy

Front cover photo: Utopia, Ohio, 2017.
Photo page 3: unofficial marker located at former location of The Time Store, established by
American anarchist Josiah Warren, 1827, Cincinnati, Ohio.
Back cover photo: Teufelsberg, Berlin.

Printing: Union Druckerei
Our publications are available through ProQM, Berlin
With warm gratitude to Elías Adasme, Soledad García Saavedra, PEN America,
Green Hijab Movement & the Josiah Warren Archive.
Produced in collaboration with the DYSTOPIA Sound Art Festival.

Free Berlin is free. Pass it on.

falling out / the settlement (house) as locality / for / with the self-built / the
project room

built from the exchange of labor and goods, and love
shared amongst / for & in

community / and held back, this military complex
according to principles of "mutualism" recovered / ... falling
apart ///

and recovered again / this urban imaginary - what someone called

the free scene / have you heard about the new wave

a netw of "attractive labor" /

home for the

small expressions,

libidinal work / the seas will turn to lemonade / can't taste the

lost in space /

the city of weak hours and

let us hope, let us hope

the transformation of labor into pleasure /

let us move, and settle the accounts / on the basis of mutual recognition
and ...the passion of working through / this disagreement

the dystopian machine /
and Paris /

F r e e e

down and out in London

down and out in Berlin ... the lost band

// and / the

freedom of friendship