

# 11 to 21

The Political Constitution of the Present

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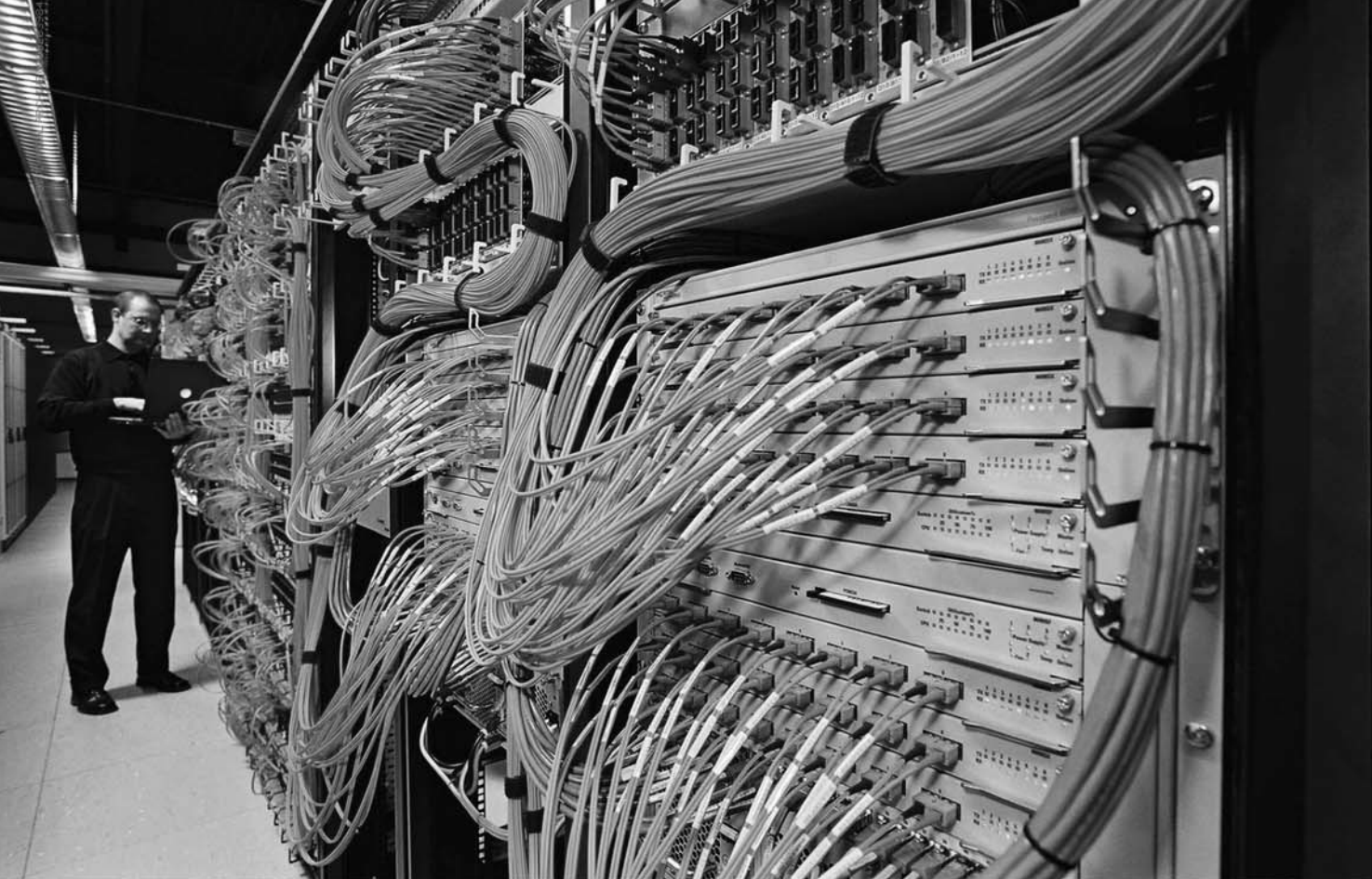




## ALPHABET OF THE CRISIS

This alphabet is an updated version of the “Abécédaire de la crise” which was originally published in the double issue 37-38 of the journal *Multitudes* (Paris, 2009. <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/>). On the occasion of this new publication, a selection on the original concepts has been made and two new ones – “Deficit” and “Wasted” – have been added.

It was collectively composed by Olivier Abel, Olivier Assouly, Quentin Badaire, Pedro Barbosa Mendes, Thierry Baudouin, Thomas Berns, Julien Bordier, Felipe Cavalcanti, Simon Chanson, Christiane Chauviré, Yves Citton, Goran Dahlberg, Estelle Ferrarese, Tristan Garcia, Jean-François Gava, Francini Guizardi, Samuel Hodler, John Holloway, Pascal Houba, Gaëlle Jeanmart, Amin Kassam, Ariel Kyrou, Arnaud Le Marchand, Dominique Lestel, Alexandre Mendes, Pascale Molinier, Yann Moulrier Boutang, Alexander Neumann, Frédéric Neyrat, Albert Ogien, Can Onaner, Anne Querrien, Damien Robert, Lucia Sagradini, Roman Schmidt, Barbara Szaniecki, Julia Taddéi, Jacques Valier, Marco Venturini, Daniel Veron, Nicolas Zellner.



**What are we talking about when we talk, as we  
so often do these days, about “the crisis”?**

**And above all, what *aren't* we talking about  
when we talk about “the crisis”?**

## Biopolitics

The indeterminacy of the current crisis of capitalism is clear. In different political readings, with the whole gamut of ideological nuances that characterize them, there exists a certain consensus about the fact there is no given solution to this crisis. Even those who are attached to the old certitudes – with a philosophy that resists the blows of hammers, masses of people and pickaxes – have not managed to propose the crisis as the decisive moment of a Socialist revolution. In what way might a biopolitical view of the crisis be a novelty?

There is no determination to get out of the crisis apart from the material nature of struggle. All of a sudden, on the back of the vagueness of government interventions aimed at controlling the crisis, there arises with a certain clarity the challenge of a politics of the Multitude. The watchword “we won’t pay for the crisis of the bosses” has been launched: how do we go further, towards a democratization of decision-making processes? How do we make the blows given to the “invisible hand” by the thousands of billions poured out by different States in credit, businesses and consumption irreversible? That is to say, how do we link state intervention to a new and radical democratic cycle?

In a way, saying “we won’t pay for their crisis” means attacking the sudden mobilization of an infinite number of resources aimed at curing the financial system, whereas before these same resources were both insufficient and unavailable for the advancing of social policies. In another way, this view must be deployed in a double perspective: towards a redefinition of the concept of social cost vis-à-vis that of “investment” and, at the same time, towards a democratization of the formulation and management of these strategies.

In Brazil, world champion of inequality, the installing of a public health system within reach of all is a success of the struggles of the 1980s for “re-democratization” (a way out of the authoritarian military regime). Under the attack of the neoliberal policies of the 1990s, the stabilizing of the precariousness of the financing of this system was combated, but at the beginning of the century the linking of this financing to the growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) resembled a victory for these movements and a consolidation of the single health system.

The effects of the crisis have obviously disturbed this dynamic. The moderate contraction of the Brazilian GDP since the end of 2008 immoderately reduces the outlay on public health and consequently the significant conquests of the Lula government in relation to a distribution of income and a valorization of the minimum wage. We have, here, the elements of a new conflict that relates to the very criteria of the calculation of income, work and thus institutional dynamics. The link between expenditure on health and the growth of the GDP has led to an improvement, but also to an internal mediation in terms of a developmental pact that restricts development to a process of national

industrialization: the health of the population is perceived, on both Right and Left, as the consequence of industrial growth. As it is, beyond the disarray of technocratic discourses on this dynamic, the crisis shows that contemporary capitalism, cognitive and global, turns the standard of living of the population – its health! – into the very dynamic of growth.

It is necessary to completely reverse this perspective: to no longer bind health to the growth of the GDP, but the GDP to the “growth” of health. The “growth” of health does not reside in the quantitative dimensions and criteria of valorization of industrial work. It is a question, then, of another GDP; that is to say, a process of valorization that is no longer separable from what Foucault calls a process of *veridiction* or the democratic radicalization of biopolitics. The universality of the health system is no longer the result of cooperation constrained by the discipline of the factory, but the common basis of a social cooperation that takes place independently of the wage relation. If public expenditure becomes *investment* in the production of the population, the horizon of a politics of the Multitude is defined in the conditions of practice of the governing of the population. The question of the crisis and its solution thus appears as a question of democracy: the expansion of social programmes is a concrete terrain of democratic innovation within the Lula government, notwithstanding its “developmentalist” contradictions.

### Blue-eyed white men

During a recent visit by Gordon Brown to Brazil, President Lula declared that, “This crisis has been caused by the irrational behaviour of blue-eyed white men who seemed to know everything and now demonstrate the opposite. [...] This isn’t an ideological matter, but a statement of fact. When observing the indexes of the economy and of unemployment, one comes to realize that once again the first victims will be the world’s poor, namely those who did not even participate in the development promoted by globalization.”

Gordon Brown was stunned, the media perplexed and the press railed at Lula, accusing him of racism... It didn’t work: 80% of the 180M Brazilians know their President isn’t racist.

Lula has decided not to make an economic analysis of the crisis. After all, the national and international media have loads of it to offer. And all knew that Brown’s stop-off in Brazil, in the midst of a tour of Europe, Latin America and the United States, just a few days before of the meeting of the G20 in London of 2 June 2009, had but one goal: to offer warmed-over economic recipes with a good pinch of Keynesianism. Including government interventions to support the financial markets and fiscal policies to relaunch internal demand. It was necessary to do something in order for this meeting not to turn, once again, into an old conflict of interests between the “South” and the “North” (and it matters little how one wishes to designate the old and new global hierarchizations).

Almost five centuries after the deglutition of Bishop Sardine (Bispo Sardinha) by the Caetés Indians, Lula, who is not British, has devoured his well-mannered guest and has turned the politically correct into a politics of trickery. In denouncing those responsible for the crisis, he was in fact indicating who should pay for it, and he did this with the recollection of those who have had, for many a year, to submit to the demands of the IMF and who now, with the authority of their accounts in order, say no to the socialization of losses. Moreover, Lula was not only referring to the blue-eyed men across the planet, but the blue-eyed men *from Brazil* who keep the interest rates high, even within a framework of falling inflation.

Lula, who is not a rich man, has converted the economic discourse of his colleague Gordon Brown into a political affirmation, thereby turning the world upside-down. No, the world's poor must not pay for the crisis of the rich. This carnivalization of the world order comes about because of the expanding relations between the Brazilian government and the countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia, at the economic and political levels – while at the same time embracing ecology – and at the symbolic level by increasing the presence of these countries in international organizations.

As regards internal politics, this is a huge headache that combines developmentalist acts (PAC, or Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento; the Growth Acceleration Programme) and environmental choices (clean and cheap ethanol), timid initiatives in the field of communications with the creation of an immense network of Culture Points (which coordinate Brazil's more diverse micro-experiments) of traditional economic management with an unheard-of distribution of income, which has seen to it that throughout this government the disgraceful inequality of Brazil (a rich country with a poor population) has finally begun to shrink.

In order to confront these contradictions, President Lula has had recourse to trickery: with it he has sidestepped the hegemonic groups of the more reactionary Right and the more corporatist Left. His trump card: a kind of speech that is monoglot (in contrast to his predecessor's, Fernando Henrique Cardoso) but polyphonic (the expression of the poor, in opposition to the monopolist media's). A voice that defies the sadness of the "free-marketeers" and a set of gestures that upsets the melancholy of protocol. A worker with little education, Lula has invested in the Brazilian university like none of the "princes" descended from its ranks has ever done. Policies like *ProUni* (for private universities), *ReUni*, and the quotas for black people, Indians and students from state schools are the first steps in the transformation of an elitist university into a more democratic one. Of him Obama has said, "He's my man!" From Latin American experiments, following centuries of colonization and decades of dictatorship, to North American audacity after the disaster of Bush – long live the time of the bastard offspring! A few days after the meeting with Brown, we find Lula, with his mischievous smile, sitting to the left of the Queen of England...

## Bubble/bulb

Today, anyone who evokes in a well-informed editorial an economic “bubble” (threatening to, or having just, burst), whether this bubble be financial, property-based, or otherwise, is duty bound to earnestly recall that the first known bubble concerned tulip bulbs in seventeenth-century Holland.

One speaks of a “bubble” when the price of goods exchanged on a market, whatever it may be, increases to the point that it has no more common measure with the so-called “intrinsic” or fundamental value of those goods. It may involve shares, as in the crisis of the 1920s or the affair of the assets of the South Sea Company in 1720; it may involve real estate, or land, as during the brief craze that took hold in Florida in 1925; of immovable assets, as in the case of the so-called subprimes crisis of last year; it may involve raw materials or even highly specific commodities, like those American comics that were the object of intense speculation in the 1980s.

The metaphor of the bubble, which inflates, but which is inflated with emptiness, before fatally bursting one day, is applied retroactively to certain emblematic crises, which gradually turn into commonplaces, almost reassuring images drawn from some distant past, assuring us of man’s eternal irrationality, of the *fatum* of speculation, relativizing our own lot, albeit not without a touch of irony. It is thus that the first bubble, regularly convoked by the specialists, and become more or less proverbial, has something incongruous about it that makes it bizarrely reassuring and capable of shedding on our misfortune the half-derisory, half-amusing light of the disappointment of Dutch tulip lovers in 1637.

The famous phrase “Tulip mania” refers to the incredible explosion in the price of tulip bulbs that affected the Dutch market in 1636. This flower, introduced a century earlier by a botanist who had ordered all kinds of examples of it from the Emperor’s ambassador to the Sultan of Turkey, became the darling of the wealthy population during the early years of the seventeenth century. The extremely colorful tulips, veined in bright tones, probably due to a “mosaic” virus linked to the plant’s introduction on Batavian soil, were given pompous names and became a social sign of luxury, a distinctive ornament of well-to-do merchants. The tulips, which grow from seeds or from buds, flower for up to a week in April or May, and thus happen to represent a market that is all the more limited and precise. The appearance of secondary buds after the week of flowering inaugurated the season of exchanges and of possible sales of the bulbs from June to September. During the rest of the year potential buyers had to be content with a contract drawn up before a notary, establishing in advance the conceding of a bulb by the seller, when the season had come around again, to the impatient purchaser.

According to the little precise information that actually exists, it would seem that during a relative lull in the Seven Years War a spreading of the demand for tulips to France began to cause a consequent rise in the price of the bulbs. A year

later speculators were flowering: meetings were arranged in the taverns, where the price of the veined tulip bulb quickly hit an all-time high. Obviously, the more expensive the bulb, the more the well-off were ready to pay for it, in the expectation that the bulbs in question would sooner become that much more expensive... At the height of the phenomenon, it is said that a single bulb of *Semper Augustus* (Olivier Bleys has, moreover, recently based a novel on this episode, with this title) cost twenty times the income of a qualified artisan. At the same time, the bulbs of common tulips also took on an inordinate value, virtually exchanged in Haarlem, while a severe epidemic of bubonic plague raged in the country.

Doing the rounds on the subject of this supposed tulip craze are a few anecdotes, often taken from the hugely popular (and contested) book by the journalist Charles Mackay, published in 1841, on the irrationality of economic crowds. There is, for instance, talk of a sailor returning from a long voyage, inadvertently taking the bulb of a tulip bought by a merchant for a common-or-garden onion, eating it, and being accused by the irate owner of the precious bulb – the sailor finally ending up in prison for munching the tulip.

Then, in the early days of February 1637, on the third to be exact, the price of tulips began to collapse, descending – on an index calculated by Earl Thompson – from two hundred guilders to less than ten, in May. Vendors no longer seduced purchasers at a price higher than that proposed, the bulbs suddenly found no more takers, and panicky speculators demanded the help of the Dutch government by attempting to negotiate the payment of compensatory taxes on non-honoured contracts. The attempts at negotiation would be unsuccessful and the collapse of the economic dream of the tulip was to leave its mark on peoples' minds for a long time: for religious reasons, numerous pamphlets opposed to the speculation condemned the madness that had taken hold of lovers of hugely expensive flowers. Those economists who, as Schumpeter remarked, would consider that up until the classical age economic crises were the outcome of errors of judgment, the indirect consequences of external causes, linked to wars or famines, began to conceive of models of economic crisis, soon replaced by theories of the cycle, in which the seemingly irrational bubble swelled for recurring reasons, burst, purged the economy, and permitted the following cycle to open like a flower.

Since the Internet bubble of the years 1995-2001, via the Asian financial bubble of 1997, and including the Argentinian monetary bubble, the tulip has become the emblem of the apparent irrationality of a boom enveloped in economic rationality. As it is, explanations are not lacking. The earliest popular theories speak of rudimentary psychology, evoking the anticipation by buyers paying for the tulip more than its price as buyers ready to pay still more than they had themselves, thus triggering a knock-on effect. For their part, the specialists who have since looked into the question again prefer to relativize the phenomenon. Thus, Anne Golgar explains in her studies that “tulip mania” was restricted to a small group of artisans and merchants, without affecting the



nobility, and probably caused the ruin of only half-a-dozen vendors, without it even being known if their cash problems are strictly imputable to the tulip bubble, which would in turn only be the sign of a deeper malaise within the apparently flourishing Dutch society of the period. For his part, Garber considers that there is nothing irrational in the Batavian bulb bubble, comparing this phenomenon with the sudden fashion for hyacinths at the beginning of the nineteenth century, rediscovering the same dynamic of mounting prices, of lassitude among consumers and then a tendential drop, defining the flower market by its volatility. Lastly, Earl Thompson has proposed a model for understanding the tulip crisis that depends on the sensitivity of the economic market to the legal frameworks in force. According to him, the hopes, for the speculators, of a decree examined by Parliament from February 1637 onwards, which would have transformed all the contracts concluded after 30 November 1636 into optional contracts, led to the formation of the bubble. First, in effect, the contracts concluded served as an obligation for the purchaser to buy the bulbs; the decree would have enabled buyers, if the price of the flowers happened to go down, to renounce their purchase and to pay in exchange a small penalty of 3.5% of the purchase price. For the investors, the perspective of such an optional contract resulted in an automatic explosion in prices. It inevitably became extremely advantageous to speculate on the tulip bulbs since, for an initial contract of a hundred guilders, the buyer pocketed, if prices climbed from fifty, the fifty-guilder difference and, if prices stagnated, could content himself with paying 3.50 guilders when renouncing his purchase. This juridical facility led to speculation being stopped short by the will of Parliament to abandon this decree at the beginning of February, on seeing prices shoot up.

### Catastrophe condition

Crisis, to be “plunged” into crisis, “to get out of” crisis... The conceptual minimum would consist, today, in *staging a crisis of the very concept of crisis*, opting to no longer use it or to do so with tremendous care; a conceptual minimum whose political consequences are nevertheless considerable. A veritable stopgap signifier, a lure meant to distract, this word in fact says much less and much more than is necessary, as in the case of the so-called “financial crisis.”

It says *too little* because it reduces the gravity of the events it is supposed to describe: we are not going through a “crisis of capitalism,” this expression really no longer makes anyone laugh – indeed, it may provoke the anger of those who find themselves without a home or without a job. We are actually going through a pre-announced – that is, constructed – collapse of our form of subsistence. Of our ways of living and continuing to live. This programmed collapse largely transcends the question of the financial sphere and involves the whole of the economy in its relations with raw materials, territories, housing, energy, water

and food; in other words, with global ecology. The physical and psychic ecology of the Globe, of the Hydroglobe with interconnecting flows, with panic, epidermic, viral and virulent communication. When the totality of a world and of the ways of being that relate to it is solicited by events susceptible of inscribing a *solution of continuity* therein, it is not of crisis that one ought to speak, but of “catastrophes.” Of catastrophes in progress, not only future ones but ones taking place right now: we are damaged. Each day we experience the limits of our plasticity. Each day we awake in the hope that our threshold of resilience will hold steadfastly on to the eternally inaccessible horizon. An immunological hope of transitory crises.

Yet the word “crisis” also says *more* than is necessary. It seems to say that something might really be on the point of changing, thus evoking its etymological meaning (the *krisis* as “judgment” or “decision”). As it is, it will soon be half a century since a new form of “governmentality,” of “political rationality” centred on the question of risks and of crises, began to gradually be put in place. Since the end of the last century this new governmentality has incorporated the management of catastrophes, of extreme phenomena – climactic, epidemic, “terrorist,” etc. – as a regular fact. The exception has not only become the norm, as is somnambulistically repeated today, quoting Walter Benjamin, for the norms and exceptions of not long ago have given way to a new System, which profoundly reconfigures them. One can – it is but a name, an attempt at description by naming – use the phrase the *biopolitics of catastrophe* to describe the governmentality which, going far beyond the “neoliberal” question of risks, makes catastrophe the starting point out of which the political order, the new global *nomos*, is arranged. For example, the *National Security and Homeland Security Presidential Directive* issued in the USA in May 2007, which would suspend the constitutional government in setting up far-reaching dictatorial powers under Martial Law in the event of a “catastrophic emergency” – namely, says the directive, any “incident” capable of “affecting the U.S. population, infrastructure, environment, or government functions.”

What remains to be done is to link up the *biopolitics of catastrophe* and a *solution of continuity*, the installation of a new *nomos* and the abolition of a form of subsistence. Here is a hypothesis. Today, numerous heads of government, international bodies and professed experts, as well, moreover, as so-called “progressive” intellectuals (the adjective doubtless explaining a lot of things), have clearly accepted the idea of the irreparable: climate change, future water wars, the irresistible increase of ecological and economic exile, etc. A new division and a new distribution – a *nomos*, then – are under way. This involves programmes of adaptation to the anticipated upheavals that are taking hold before our eyes. And it is within this framework that it is henceforth necessary to think about the setting up of so-called “anti-terrorist” laws and structures: their function is to arrange the surveillance, control and imprisonment of whole *populations under a condition of catastrophe*, be they remote exiles or starving people of the interior (these two categories being superimposable and reversible: in a globalized world, as on a Moebius strip, any interior element is at the same time an exterior element). The

aim of the global *nomos* is to try and cut privileged groups off from the “rest” of the population, to create pockets of immunity; a Green Zone as in Iraq.

However, it will finally be necessary to quit Iraq, Obama is going to do so, and right now one imagines quitting the earth – but, let it be said, this will clearly be more arduous. For one knows that the biopolitics of catastrophe are condemned to failure, that adaptation will be disastrous, that no “class” will get out of it, and that the show of disobedience is a common occurrence, to the point of making any effective control tendentially impossible. But there reigns, alas, *the antinomy of immunological judgment*: on the one hand we know that we are wholly part of the world, of the Hydroglobe, of the Flux Integral, and of the mimetic kinds of behaviour that it generates, we know and we also experience the fact that the transitory does not concern so-called “crises” so much as what occurs *between* crises; on the other, we believe we can exclude ourselves from it, and we secretly dream: “Nothing will happen to me, I’m safe, nothing will happen to me, after the tumult of the crisis everything will become solid once more.” Do we know, however, that the worst thing that can happen to us is that nothing happens to us any more? That this means to be, if not dead, at least *non-existent*?

The Tarnac people will thus have grudgingly experienced one of the aspects of this new *nomos*: they won’t be the last. As long as one continues to simply batten anti-terrorist laws onto repressive, liberticide, police laws without understanding the new immunoterritorial function of the police, one will remain incapable of changing them. What has to be fought is the *Catastrophe Condition*: at once the origin of economic and ecological disasters, their inadequate governmental responses, and the *immunological gulf* that *unconsciously* relates each to the other. In fact, it’s the same thing. The Environment Round Table is Chernobyl. Green capitalism is famine. Anti-terrorist laws are freedom on the lookout. Of course, it’s always risky to place phenomena that nevertheless seem very different in a conceptual relation. What confusion, it will be thought! Such a judgment can only reasonably be emitted by a hypersomniac who has got the history of the last four centuries wrong. We are the subjects, the receivers of these strange alloys, of this new *nomos*, and we will propagate it, we will favour it as long as we have not invented the political form of *demobilization* capable of dismantling the Catastrophe Condition. If we don’t invent it, it is not a “political crisis” that will loom up, nor even a virtuous revolution, which is only valid for the globally stable world around their edges, but a violent abreaction instead. A rejection, symbolic and physical; a vomiting.

## Consumption

During the course of the twentieth century, consumption experienced an increase marked by two periods: the first was characterized by the rapid expansion of marketing and design, the aim being, following the example of General Motors in the 1920s, to make mass-produced commodities alluring. The addressee



Manolo Quejido, *Por aquí pasa 5 (work)*, 2009

transformed into a consumer was at the centre of the operation by which objects were adapted to individuals and reciprocally individuals to objects. In the course of the second period in the 1980s, confronted by a saturation of the market, businesses have had to instigate the massive deployment of aesthetic artifice to add to the power of consumption by massively investing the territory with affects and sensibility, in favour of a developing of brand names. In its way the post-Fordist enterprise concentrates its production of wealth, no longer on the factory, relegated to the Asian confines of the world, but on tasks of the *conception* of merchandise and on the public's *reception* of it.

With regard to consumption, two options stand out on the horizon: in one instance, the crisis of consumption, a simple parenthesis, will soon end, once the economic upheavals are regulated; an hypothesis that is far from being totally excluded even if some elements are opposed to it. Besides, a certain resurgence in consumption has hardly anything to do with calls for “deconsumption” and for “degrowth,” which mark a difference in degree of consumption, but not in nature, to which bear witness, moreover, the abusive use of neologisms like *alterconsommation* (alterconsumption), *consommation équitable* (fair consumption), *consommation citoyenne* (citizen consumption), *consommacteur* (consumactor) and *consommauteur* (consumauthor). Such semantics testify to

the difficulty of thinking of issues other than a lowering of consumption, thereby dismissing the idea that the industrial model that sustained it has only been a period in industrial civilization.

In the other instance, the crisis is of benefit to a framework in which consumption is no longer central because of the disqualification of the conditions that had guaranteed its growth. Indeed, on the one hand, historically, consumption has obliged objects of use to be treated as destructible goods, with a chair or a table being consumed as rapidly as an item of clothing, and an item of clothing almost as rapidly as food. All of which involves “the threat that eventually no object in the world will be safe from consumption, from annihilation through consumption.”<sup>1</sup> If destruction concerns *a priori* any object, consumption programs destructibility as a source of surplus value. On the other hand, unlike practices that take shape over a period of time and by virtue of a maturing of skills, consumption tends to isolate individuals (if not to generate individualism), whose role is reduced to disposing of excessive production. The consumer does not enter into the products on the basis of his activity, it is they that are in him, as if adapted to his psychic framework and to his pulsional state of mind. Are the conditions for breaking with this secular apparatus brought together now?

With the development of technology and of networking, the dividing line between consumers and producers is called into question. Individuals have at their disposal a means of appreciation, evaluation, conception, production and reproduction that has no equivalent in history. And the hitherto unseen forms of production that emerge in the very interior of society, and no longer exclusively within the perimeter of firms, destabilize the foundations – the industrial property rights – of industrial capitalism. But the difficulty has less to do with the indisputably radical nature of this transformation than with its power of abrogation of the classic regime of consumption. It is therefore important to determine if the generalized digital tools are in a position to escape from traditional commercial captation.

Exemplarily, the rebellion in February 2009 of the users of Facebook having regard to the exclusive appropriation of the personal data concerning them was closely bound up in the downgrading of economic standards. An initially free, spontaneous and social activity was *de facto* on the way to becoming a source of economic valorization. Formerly, in a situation that is far from being completely over, companies developed products by undertaking to conceive them on the basis of R&D, marketing and market research. These future commodities were tested according to certain protocols – tests on subjects at a reduced scale – intended to reproduce the conditions of *enjoyment* of potential consumers.

Where once a costly economic organization, with its random results, was necessary, it is now possible to formalize marketing more effectively, thanks to the indexing of preferences stemming from social networks. The operation *can take place in situ*, at a much greater scale (millions of potential “consumers”), at a lower cost (with everyone indulging in the game of preferences for free), and above all with a new reliability that depends on a collection at once massive and

differentiated of data encompassing sexual, social, aesthetic, religious, professional, culture, affective or associative differences.

This system of market valorization is based on a sort of delayed impact: in order to alter the strategies of consumption, economic activity has to do no more than literally adhere to and envelop a social activity offered in real time. What's more, beyond the economic captation of tastes, individuals are invited and invite each other to join operations of co-production that serve the interests of companies who this time have at their disposal reservoirs of conception and imagination surpassing the very *opinions* of internautes.

Irrespective of the criticisms deploring the intrusion of the economy and the commodification of private existence, it is entire populations, reduced at times to the greatest precariousness, qualified or ingenious, who become, with the social networks and the transformations of co-production, the pivots indispensable to the organization of economic wealth. This calls for at least two observations: firstly, the leitmotif championing the principle of an extra job, in the guise of wage labour, for an extra income is shown to be awfully obsolete in economic terms; an ironical slogan for the benefit of those the crisis hurls more rapidly into the margins of an outmoded economic model. Secondly, all this obliges one to basically rethink the conception and distribution of wealth in taking into account these *active*, sometimes excluded, populations who produce – sometimes without consuming more – without being entered into the account book among the assets of the company or the wealth of the nation. Signs that the changes in production have for corollaries those in consumption.

## Crack-capitalism

We are the crisis of capital and we're proud of it. Enough of saying the capitalists are responsible for the crisis! That very thought is not only absurd but dangerous. It constitutes us as victims.

Capital designates a relation of domination. The crisis of Capital is a crisis of domination. The dominant ones are incapable of dominating effectively. And we descend into the streets to reproach them for it! What are we expressing by that, if not that they ought to dominate us more effectively?!

It seems simpler to admit that the relation of domination is in crisis, because the dominant ones do not submit sufficiently. The inadequacy of our subordination is the actual cause of the crisis. Such is Marx's argument in his analysis of the tendential fall in the rate of profit in *Capital*. He maintains there that even if the rate of exploitation remains constant, the rate of profit is affected by a tendential fall. This phenomenon is accompanied by a displacement in the organic composition of capital through the increased importance that mechanization takes on in the process of production. In other words, the most effective way capital has at its disposal for countering the fall in the rate of profit is in increasing the rate of exploitation, which means not only the intensification of work in the

factory, but especially the subordination of all aspects of life to the logic of capital. The reproduction of capital requires the ever-denser subordination of our lives to capital. A perpetual turn of the screw. The tendential fall in the rate of profit is a manifestation of the inadequacy of our subordination.

In this situation there are really only two solutions. We can apologize for our lack of subordination and ask for more work: "Please, exploit us more and we will work harder, like this we will submit all aspects of our lives to capital." Such is the logic of abstract labour, the ineffectual logic of labour's struggle against capital. The alternative lies in abandoning the struggle for work, and in the open, logical declaration that the struggle against capital is inevitably a struggle *against* work, *against* the abstract labour that produces capital. In that case we offer no apology – on the contrary we take great pride in our insubordination, in our refusal to bend to the logic that is literally responsible for the rapid destruction of humanity. We are proud to embody the crisis of the system that finishes us off.

The last option is, of course, the most difficult. Within capitalism, material survival depends on our subordination. If we don't do this, how will we survive? Without a material foundation our autonomy as regards capital is more than difficult. This seems to be tantamount to a logical impossibility, but it is, moreover, the impossibility in which we live, the impossibility we go on grappling with. Every single day we attempt to reconcile our opposition to capital with the need to survive. Some of us do this in a relatively comfortable way by finding a job (in the universities, for instance) that permits us to liberate spaces within which we combat capitalism while getting paid for it. Others take on other kinds of risk and sacrifice themselves for any kind of job (through choice or necessity), devoting all their energy to activities that go against and beyond the logic of capital, surviving one way or another, squatting or occupying land, cultivating it, or by selling anti-capitalist works, creating alternative structures of material support, and who knows what else besides? In one way or another, but always in a way that's contradictory, we attempt to make holes in capitalist domination, spaces or moments within which we say to capital "No, here you have no hold: here we act and live according to our own decisions, according to what we alone consider necessary and desirable." We all do this, all of the time: such is our humanity, such is our integrity (or our folly). We all do this, at every moment, but it nevertheless remains that we find ourselves at every moment on the edge of failure, at the limit of collapse. Such is the nature of the struggle: we deliberately run up against the flow of capital. We are never far from despair, but such is the place in which despair subsists: a neighbour across the hall of despair. The world which is ours is lacking in answers: a world of interrogative peregrination – "Asking we walk" – a world of experimentation.

The crisis, of which we're proud, brings us face to face with these two options. Either we take the highway of subordination to the logic of capital, in the awareness that this will lead us directly to the self-suppression of our humanity; or we follow the path strewn with the pitfalls of invention, hither and thither, through the holes we make in capitalist domination, towards a different world.

## Deficit (vs. excedence)

“There is no alternative.” So they say. “No-one can sustainably live above his means – and this applies to State budgets as well.” Hence we are given a choice, it seems: raise taxes or cut spending. But in fact, the choice is already made for us: raising taxes is not only “unpopular” (hence rejected by politicians mainly motivated by winning the next election cycle), it is also condemned by Science: “economic studies suggest that fiscal adjustments that rely on spending cuts do better than those based on tax rises.”<sup>2</sup> So, really, the current fiscal deficits, largely due to massive State interventions designed to prevent a general financial collapse at the end of 2008, leave us with no alternative: we have to slash public spending, amputate social services, push back retirement age.

What can we learn from the last two years in order to rebuke this commonplace argument? How can we turn the tables and reshape the debate, possibly to reach a different conclusion? At least five alternative paths can be explored in order to deal with public deficits.

1. *Unpopular bureaucracy.* It is easy to understand why tax increases do not generate spontaneous cheers. It is equally easy to see why high officials, who generally belong to the wealthiest portion of the population, would push towards lower taxes on the rich. It would be too easy (and deceptive), however, simply to dismiss the aversion against tax hikes. Even the most short-sighted and dumbest forms of anti-tax fanaticism demonstrated by Tea-Party activists in the US are fuelled by a “populist” feeling which everybody (starting with Leftist thinkers) should take seriously. Taxes drawn from Joe-the-plumber’s pocket tend to end up financing State apparatuses made painfully rigid by the disease of bureaucracy.

Of course, bureaucracy, with its oppressive weight and its irrationality, is in no way limited to the public sector: big corporations, most infamously (in recent history) banks, have their share of mindless operations and procedural blindness. But there is an archaic military top-down mode of operation which still permeates a great deal of the public sector, and this may explain the growing resentment against paying taxes, in an age where more and more “flexibility” is demanded from all of us. So it is not enough for Leftists simply to condemn “populist” opposition to tax hikes, as being a matter of stupidity or false consciousness which can be explained away and cured with proper political pedagogy (“Taxes are good for you”).

The traditional identification of the Left with the State needs to be broken down. While public institutions certainly need to be maintained and reinforced, the plague of bureaucracy must be seriously analyzed (as it was in the 1960s by thinkers like Cornelius Castoriadis and other members of the *Socialisme ou barbarie* collective), and alternatives have to be proposed. A good way to start would be to devise structures which disconnect top-down funding procedures (fuelled a steady flow of tax money) from the bottom-up organization of services.



Granting true organizational autonomy to small administrative units, while ensuring long-term funding (with a few light procedures of periodical evaluation), could go a long way to improve social services, and therefore undermine the anti-public-service rhetoric currently exploited by the populist Right.

2. *Fiscal scale.* The State's coffers are empty because they have been looted. Working people resent paying taxes because they feel a increasing fiscal burden resting on their shoulders. Countless tax cuts have been granted to the rich, while at the same time their income was shooting up: in the US, "in 1987 the top 1% of taxpayers received 12.3% of all pre-tax income. Twenty years later their share, at 23.5%, was nearly twice as large. The bottom half's share fell from 15.6% to 12.2% over the same period."<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, corporate tax across the OECD (excluding the US) came down from 50% in 1985 to about 30% nowadays – a huge 40% decrease! Contrary to the claims of deficit hawks, money abounds. The drought experienced by public finances in terms of fiscal deficit comes from the fact that this wealth has been diverted.

The official cause for this diversion has a name: *fiscal competition*. Ireland became suddenly rich (and suddenly poor again) by pushing down its corporate tax to just 12.5%, becoming wonderfully attracting for countless corporations eager to establish European headquarters in a friendly environment. Faced with such competition, what can the French, Spanish or Swedish governments do, but decrease their own corporate tax, in an endless race to the bottom? Even the Obama-led US, who had maintained a relatively high corporate tax until now (at around 40%), are about to cut it. They have no alternative. So we hear.

One of the most interesting consequences of the financial-fiscal-political crises which have visited European capitals over the last months (from Greece to Ireland, via Portugal and Spain) has been the dramatic acceleration in the processes of integration of national economic policies. The threats and pressures applied by financial markets over the emission of bonds by national governments generated a (badly) improvised common European response unthinkable only two years ago. It is by now clear that the Swedes must worry about Irish corporate tax, and that Germans are directly affected by Greek retirement age. It is true that, for the moment, this integration has pushed governments in the nefarious direction of more austerity, spending cuts in social services and overall privatization. The tree of the current narrow-minded policy should not hide the forest of a major potential progress: fiscal issues, in a globalizing world, are increasingly a matter of *scale*.

The competitive logic which has ruled international relations in the pre-Anthropocene<sup>4</sup> era is no longer sustainable: there is no alternative to coordinating a certain number of human behaviours across the planet. It is no longer possible to let one country indiscriminately waste water resources, recklessly practice nuclear proliferation or emit greenhouse gas. Similarly, it is no longer sustainable to let national governments undermine their own fiscal base by entering into a race to the bottom (in terms of corporate tax, for instance). European integration, as it is being currently practiced in the most chaotic manner, is only a first and



Carlos Motta, *Graffitis ideológicos*, 2005-08

clumsy step, but it is a significant one. The scale of fiscal policies is starting to adjust to the scale of the rest of our interconnected lives.

3. *Fiscal imagination*. With their tension between a “soak the rich” approach and an “attract capital” strategy, traditional political fights about the levels of corporate tax and income tax are certainly important, but here again, they may very well be the tree that hides the forest. What is most striking in our historical period may indeed be *a deficit* – not in public accounting though, but *in fiscal imagination*. Money abounds. It just takes some effort of the imagination and some technical scheming to devise new ways to capture it in a more effective manner than the traditional tools we have inherited from the previous centuries.

Consider for example the option of a Pollen Tax. It would consist of a nominally small percentage taken from *all types* of financial transactions (and not only from international transfers of capital, as promoted by the better known Tobin tax). Whenever you withdraw money from a cash machine or use your credit card, whenever a trader sells shares or a banker moves money from a portfolio of investment to another, whenever a corporation brings profits home from its offshore affiliate, a modest 1% of these sums would be automatically diverted

towards public finances. According to calculations made by René Montgranier, such a small (but reiterated) catch would be enough to replace all of our current personal income tax, corporate tax and other added-value tax. Bring it up to 2% (which is still less than what most banks currently charge as fees for routine operations), and public finances would no longer be pressed by deficit, but would be able to pursue the logical trend of growth which characterized their long-term development all along the past centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Plenty of other forms of taxation could be invented, starting with a (heavy) tax on this most common form of mental pollution known as “advertisement.” While the actual patterns of investment of rich individuals or corporations are “scientifically” (although often short-sightedly) analyzed by professional economists, it is up to all of us to try and imagine better forms of taxation, capable of providing our societies with the means needed for their collective development.

4. *New divides and common excedence.* In various countries, deficit hawks invite us to redesign the cartography of political divides. In a globalized, post-industrial, digitalized world, the dominant opposition between Capital and the working class is supposed to have all but vanished. Aren’t we all, more or less, “capitalists,” insofar as our pension plans are invested in shares? Aren’t half of us “rich,” as soon as they own or inherit real estate? Don’t most of those who are richer than others owe it to their “hard work,” as managers, entrepreneurs, venture capitalists?

Three new fault lines are proposed to replace the vetero-Marxist class division. First, most of these analyses acknowledge a *cognitive* divide based on the level of education. In the US, mean household income for those who did not go beyond high-school has remained stagnant from 1975 to 2009 (around 50 000 \$), while it climbed up significantly for those who enrolled in a university and hold a bachelor’s degree, from 75 000 \$ to 100 000 \$. A second *generational* divide opposes the young to the old: all over Europe, current retirees are portrayed as profiteering from an unsustainably generous system. They are responsible for today’s deficits and tomorrow’s public debt, so we hear. A third *sectorial* divide suggests a conflict of interest between civil servants (enjoying stable employment and a “protected” status) and workers of the private sector. Even if their salaries are often lower, State employees are portrayed as “profiteering” (in terms of pensions, working hours, working conditions) from their “privileged” status. Educational, generational and sectorial struggles are thus supposed to have replaced good-old class struggles.

Such analyses, driven by the holy mission to “reduce the public deficits,” are misleading for at least two reasons. While the educational divide is indeed one of the major problems and challenges our societies have to address,<sup>6</sup> the two other divides must be considered with great suspicion, insofar as they selectively mobilize (a phantom of) “equality” solely in order to dismantle social entitlements progressively acquired during the twentieth century. If we were really interested in denouncing unfair “privileges” and “profiteers,” there would

be many other, much more significant, issues to address – not only golden parachutes and bonuses, but, much more widely, inheritance of “undeserved” wealth, increasing impact of money on “buying” a good education, etc.

More fundamentally, the main blindness inherent to such arguments results from their common premise, which dominates all references to our current “deficits”: we can no longer afford the level of social services set in place during the 1970s-1980s. This is the erroneous premise which has to be refuted in priority.

Contrary to common wisdom, we do *not* live in a period of contraction and shortages. While our current abuse of environmental resources certainly threatens to lead us into dramatic shortages, our human societies have never been so “rich.” Considered at the global level and within a wide historical scope, mankind lives in an unprecedented regime of *excedence*.<sup>7</sup> We, in the Western world, may feel we are in a phase of decay because (a) the *control* over this exceeding wealth is starting to elude us (moving East), (b) the *sustainability* of this excedence seems dubious in light of countless environmental warning signs, and (c) the *inequality* with which this wealth is distributed, within our countries and worldwide, faces us with countless images of revolting (because unnecessary) deprivation and misery.<sup>8</sup>

Here is what should be opposed to the current policies pushed on us in the name of the economic crisis, public debt and fiscal deficits: *There is no deficit in wealth*, only problems of sharing control over it, of guaranteeing its environmental sustainability and of addressing the suicidal inequalities which currently command its distribution.<sup>9</sup>

5. *A deficit in care for the common.* Reframed within this context of excedence, questions of debt and deficit take a new shape. What is in deficit is *the service of the common* which is the source of the excedence. As technology allows us to delegate ever larger proportions of the material production of goods to machines, most forms of employments are shifting towards activities of *human inter-relations*: education, health, administration, information, communication, counselling, management, entertainment, etc. Such inter-relations can rarely be isolated from the social fabric of which they are a part. As it is the case with our relation to the planet on which we live, it is deceptive to consider such a fabric as an “environment”: this notion presupposes that we exist (as individuals) within a number of things constituting our environment, a view which implies that we could continue to exist (and remain the same) within a different environment. Ecosophic approaches developed by Arne Naess and his followers have made us aware of the delusion inherent in such views: we are not *in* relation to some (exterior) environment; we *are* (nothing but) the relations which constitute us.<sup>10</sup>

If there is indeed a worrying deficit within our current forms of social organization, it has to do with our insufficient awareness of this fact. The social services which all governments are currently cutting in the name of reducing public deficits (education, health services, social assistance, cultural competence) are devoted to caring for the common relational fabric which is simultaneously the result and the very basis of our common wealth.<sup>11</sup>

The previous considerations can thus be summarized in four slogans:

1. *Our lives have more worth than their profits!* Our regime of excedence is currently geared towards the maximization of financial profits, while it should be redirected towards the care of what sustains our common life-forms, in their diversity.

2. *Their lives have as much worth as ours!* Standards of living can no longer be considered within national or regional boundaries. If larger parts of our common excedence can pull millions of Indians out of utter deprivation, and therefore reduce global inequalities, we should not consider Western diminishing control over global wealth as a scandal.

3. *No liberty without equality!* Against several decades which, under the threat of “totalitarianism,” attempted to convince us that we had to *choose* between (more) freedom *or* (more) equality, we should redirect our political arguments around Etienne Balibar’s principle of *equaliberty*, according to which “politics is founded on the recognition that neither freedom nor equality can exist without the other, that is, that the suppression or even the limitation of one necessarily leads to the suppression or limitation of the other.”<sup>12</sup>

4. *No individuation without proper care for the common!* It is most significant that a crash triggered by defaults on private (subprime) debts should lead to a major crisis in public finances. What holds together the *private* (the individual) and the *public* (the State) is the *common* fabric of inter-relations which provide us with the means to exist as individuals, to produce goods and services – and to repay our debts. This common fabric should be our first (collective) object of care. It is currently the main victim of suicidal policies obsessed with deficit-reduction. *This* is what the long-lasting “crisis” of late capitalism is all about.

## Diversity

In living systems, *the loss of diversity* orientates the structures concerned towards a periodic behaviour that leads to pathologies. Our hypothesis is that this crisis is that of a neoclassic paradigm which, by refusing diversity in the name of its utopia, has impoverished the system, thus engendering an endogenous crisis. Now, a paradigm refusing diversity contains its own end.

Neoclassic thought is based on *a certain number of utopian hypotheses*, which can be summed up rapidly. To begin with, there is the neutrality of distribution on the Pareto optimum: an economy that would only consist of one billionaire and millions of poor people may equal, and even surpass, an economy in which revenues are shared out on an egalitarian basis. Although this result may be surprising, it is only a corollary of Jean Baptiste Say’s classic law: supply creates its own demand. In this instance, the non-solvency of part of the population does not run the risk of engendering problems of overproduction. The hypothesis of neutrality is also based on the idea that the agents inside the economy are of a like mind – and all perfectly rational. They all pursue their personal interest, which can

Communism  
never  
happened

only tally with the common interest in the Adam Smith version, and with the general equilibrium (which included an appraiser, something which is carefully left unsaid). Moreover, since this personal interest remains within the limits of fair play, it cannot involve fraud or of trickery. Endowed with rationality and quite legitimately egoists, our agents attain the status of “representatives.” Finally, in the worst of cases uncertainty is measurable, and in the best of worlds transferable, to agents less averse to risks, who being perfectly rational, can assume it... especially as they are perfectly informed.

Using these hypotheses, the condition *sine qua non* of regulation, one arrives at an optimal equilibrium. Although these hypotheses were obviously unrealistic, it seemed possible to pretend “that nothing was up.” As it is, *the crisis calls for a return to the real*: limited rationality, opportunism, asymmetric information, uncertainty: all that well and truly exists – and *it is this utopian homogenization, even, that was selected and sustained to the detriment of diversity*, the sole guarantee of dynamic equilibrium. The performative liberal utopia has managed to demonstrate its incoherence.

Once assumed, legitimated by a highly special conception of the behaviour of agents, this iniquity has permitted the conducting of *a systematic adverse selection in favour of stowaways* who will never encounter controllers and know it. The mechanisms of perverse incitation of credit rating agencies and of financiers, the absence of any control of the latter, have led to the selecting of a single type of economic behaviour: opportunism coupled with rational mimetism. As a matter of fact, for credit rating agencies, copying information costs less than producing it, which is also true of traders, who have only to buy like their neighbour in order to assure themselves of the same, albeit dubious, profits.

Consequently, the lack of behavioural diversity becomes a lack of diversity of the portfolio, and thus a speculative bubble. As for the banks, they are not without experience of the temporary incoherence of refinancing policies by the Central Banks which, *ex ante*, advocate prudence and, *ex post*, bail out the imprudent. They have, then, every interest in seeking profits by carefully forgetting that it is a question of risk premiums... The privatization of profits and the socialization of losses: a casino gambler’s fantasy!

With regard to the State, to each according to its means: social and ecological dumping, tax havens for some; unilateral protectionism for the developed countries, devaluations and solitary reflations, unilateralism of the US dollar. All this temporarily reinforces those stowaways to the detriment of cooperation and of diversity, thus contributing once more to weakening the system as a whole.

What solutions are conceivable? Let us rapidly pass over the false debate between regulation and reflation, which only aimed at preserving the pride of Anglo-American liberalism and of Franco-German austerity, and at provoking hype on the financial markets. The promises of a world regulation of finance (the end of bonuses, credit rating agencies, hedge funds, tax havens, the surveillance of credit rating agencies and of financial risks, transparency, etc.), even if they were kept, will be able to limit certain behaviour traits on the part of stowaways, but not

all, and they will only marginally improve the share-out. World reflation *a priori* limits the asymmetries and the behaviour traits of stowaways between countries, but the sums are still insufficient,<sup>13</sup> and then again one knows all too little about their distribution and their use.

The taking into consideration of diversity is not yet with us. The G20 dealt in 2009 with a financial crisis starting in 2007, two years late.<sup>14</sup> Only liberal economic and financial institutions are supposed to regulate the crisis, even though they are not exempt from responsibility in the current situation, as has been seen. For its part, the social dimension is totally concealed from view.

We are living through an economic and social, and soon to be a political, crisis. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization might have seen their role increase as regards the struggle against social and environmental dumping. In more general terms, the issue of the distribution of wealth and power within world governance, the real cause of the crisis, has not been addressed. And no cure can be expected if the treatment serves only to mask the symptoms.

In response to this crisis, we are convinced that it is necessary *to promulgate monetary, economic and political diversity* in order to reestablish the system's potential for dynamic balanced growth.

In order to guarantee *monetary diversity*, it is necessary to put on the table the increasing of the IMF's Special Drawing Rights on the basis of a basket of currencies. Chinese and Russian demands are going to favour a fairer, and therefore more robust, distribution of international monetary power. Like other monetary measures, consideration may be given to abolishing the independence of the Central Banks, to at least partly nationalizing the banks and/or clearing houses, and to developing microcredit at decent rates.

*Economic diversity* also calls for a new approach that favours alternative forms of development through fairer distribution and a reorientation of funds towards developing countries and the unemployed, that is to say towards those whose marginal propensity to consume is strongest. It is also advisable to favour alternative forms of production (cooperatives, fair trade) which guarantee greater respect for the environment and labour rights. Finally, it is a question of favouring education, re-conversion and research having ecological goals.

*Political diversity*, lastly, must deal with both content and decision-making. International politics must also be social: to ensure respect for labour rights in developing countries by obliging international financing to respect the Kyoto Accords and to have the approval of the ILO. Detectable on the horizon is the need for a more democratic distribution of voting rights in international organizations. It is the refusal or the incapacity to take such measures that pertain to utopian belief, according to which a system might perpetuate itself on the basis of self-destructive logics. The current crisis demonstrates that diversity does not pertain to the ideal, but to the condition of survival.



## Globalization

Most of the opponents of post-Fordist liberal capitalism consider globalization in a negative light and often even totally disparage it. This is particularly the case in France, where a visceral attachment to the State and its Jacobin structure has led the Left to gradually consider the word to be synonymous with “Americanization,” something which, moreover, has brought it in line with the Right in the same sovereignist logic.

Starting in 1973, the huge interest in the struggle of the LIP workers symbolized the beginning of this general “resistance” to the surmounting of a national industry. Relocating, a recurrent practice within capitalism, had been acceptable during *les Trente Glorieuses* – the thirty years of strong economic growth between 1945 and 1975 – because it respected the borders of France. Neither the Left nor the trade unions questioned the kind of State planning that was capable of moving the Lorraine steel industry to the ports, or of decentralizing the OS factories far from the worker strongholds of the *Ceinture Rouge* – the Communist-controlled group of towns around Paris – as long as this respected the “general,” that is to say national, interest.

On the other hand, once the refusal of labour had definitively shattered Fordism in the Western world, and forced capital to find new labour pools beyond its frontiers, the Left likened globalization to dispossession. So much so that capitalism’s geo-economic march towards the West, which ended up reaching Asia, has even been momentarily perceived by people like Attali as leaving desertified spaces behind it.

It is that the end of the industrial hegemony of the qualified, male white race is unthinkable, short of confusing this with the threat of its disappearance. And this is particularly the case in centralized States that gradually lose their prepotency in a global process of circulation in which new productive territories affirm themselves. Markets on a continental scale (the European Union, Nafta, Mercosur, Asean) as much as cities (metropolises, clusters, city regions) together revoke traditional sovereignist transcendence. One then sees the State, like the class, resist globalization.

As it is, globalization now also permits many other points of view to be expressed and acted upon with regard to capital. Analyses in terms of genders, *cultural* or *colonial*, that call into question the white universalism of past centuries originate in particular, moreover, in the USA, the first nation to have victoriously rebelled against the main colonial empire. However much it may pain French republicans, who still believe they are the ones who invented and definitively defined democracy, it is an ongoing innovation that has been considerably enriched today by forms stemming from young countries (Chiapas, Brazil) and young technologies (the internet, cellphones)!

In concrete terms, hundreds of millions of people in the former Third World

escape from the countryside and its potentates in order to go and work in the industry of the city and earn a wage. For the city always provides new forms of freedom, so that to content oneself with denouncing incomes and conditions of work that are obviously still much inferior to our own is only a sad refusal of history. Besides, who deplores the fact that their own great-grandfathers did exactly the same thing in Europe, by going to get taken on/exploited in the sinister factories of Zola? In the name of what does one believe that in Brazil or China in the last few years the new urbanized population regrets its native countryside? For not only do people accede to the freedom to move around and to spend their wages, but above all else they also learn to struggle for an increase in their income. Everywhere, and even in China, the struggles are already making themselves felt, as regards the current crisis too, to force the State to make a public investment in a new New Deal.

The globalized form of capitalism releases two-thirds of the human race from rural enslavement, brutally it's true, but one cannot understand why the Left subscribes to an ethnocentrism that would like to permanently restrict the capital-labour relation to the West. Especially as this refusal of globalization is even more intense in the Leninist ultra-Left which, in this particular instance, truly cuts itself off from its "emerging masses"! Obviously, the defence of the workers of the West cannot be founded on a confining of the rest of the world's to the old colonial relation. Certain Greens also announce with a straight face that the Chinese and their associates will never ever be able to attain our lifestyle – except by destroying it, and life too... The reception of non-whites as actors in the capital-labour relation is definitely reminiscent of extremely somber precedents for a Left that goes on being deeply involved in a still-powerful Western colonialism.

Capital is worldwide and labour, too, in struggling for its freedom of circulation. Even more than before, we have need of others, be they migrant or sedentary, for our future struggles, here and elsewhere, against global capital. We cannot constantly foreground the values of cooperation and of networking without understanding that globalization is a formidable terrain on which to confer *our* points of view as to living and producing differently.

## Krisis as in Kenya

France, Italy, Germany and the USA "are sinking into crisis," we hear it said on all sides. And people add that the crisis is "worldwide." Not without reason, of course. But what do we understand by this word "crisis" and by its "worldwide" nature? Is it really *the same crisis* that hits France and Kenya?

Prior to the end of 2007 the external economy of Kenya was performing well, despite a succession of lean rainy seasons. In 2007 the tourism sector experienced a boom, with a record 2M visitors. The production of tea and coffee fell and consequently the share of interior contribution produced an international

explosion in prices as an offset. The revenue from the horticulture sector represented 63% more than the 2006 figure. The remittances of expatriate Kenyans reached \$573.6M.

Then came the presidential elections of December 2007, in the course of which the winner, Mwai Kibaki, was accused of rigging the ballot, thus causing inter-ethnic riots in which 1,000 people died and at least 3,500 were injured in the space of a month. Hundreds of thousands of people, including small landowners producing the harvests meant for national consumption as well as for export, were evicted from their homes and remain refugees to this day, dependent on humanitarian aid. The turbulent effects on the economy generated by the violence have got worse following the serious drought throughout 2009, as a result of which 10M people suffer from hunger today, and the international economic crisis overtakes the price of fertilizers with an increase of 300% due to the general increase in the price of oil. In 2008, the receipts from tourism experienced a fall of 19% (\$280M). The production of tea fell by 7% and the quality of the harvest was affected by the drought in the first quarter of 2009, as was the production of coffee. Demand in connection with the production of luxury goods also fell following the recession. Horticulture has been affected in terms of demand as well as production. The global crisis has had an impact on the remittances of expatriates to the tune of \$39.5M in January 2009 as against \$61.1M in October 2008.

In the face of this emergency, the government has been paralyzed by internal confrontations within the coalition forged under international pressure. The agreement signed in 2008 by the rival parties – the Party of National Unity and Orange Democratic Movement – were formulated in such vague terms that it could be interpreted in whatever way suits one or other of the signatories. The result has been, predictably, a political stalemate.

The two parties are incapable of working together and their ministers hold separate decision-making meetings. Four weekly cabinet meetings of the coalition were cancelled in April 2009 and each party has attributed these cancellations to the other. The conflict has even paralyzed the parliament because of the disagreement by the parties about the issue of who to place at the head of the House Business Committee.

One of the main reasons from the bloodbath in 2008 has to do with landed property. Since the country's independence in 1963, the land seized by settlers has been bought by the emerging Kenyan elite, most of it returning to the Kikuyus, thus triggering the conflict. In many instances the new proprietors were of a different ethnic group to those who originally possessed the land and attempts to run off the "invaders" have been made. According to the Kenya Land Alliance, more than half of the arable land in the country is in the hands of only 20% of the population. A significant portion is in the possession of the families of the leaders of different ethnic groups, which became powerful when the Kenyan political equation changed.

There can be no stability in Kenya without the resolving of the land issue. However, only 20% of the total surface area of the country is suitable for

cultivation and the greater part held by the political elite is untouchable; the Minister of Agriculture, James Orengo, has announced that he would distribute government land to the dispossessed. Despite this, the government has recently accepted to cede 40,500 hectares of fertile river basin land to Qatar, which intends to produce fruit and vegetable there for its own domestic consumption. With more than a third of the Kenyan population on the edge of famine, all these elements have combined to revive the embers of the rioting in Kenya.

It is remarkable that at the moment President Kibaki announced measures to check the crisis on 1 June 2009 he did not consider the importance of the land issue. Nor did he seem to entertain plans to foster the relative independence of the economy.

Kibaki insisted, above all, on infrastructural projects, irrigation, support for agriculture and exportation. But even if these issues are burning ones, they have but little importance for the legions of domestic refugees living in hovels and surviving on meager rations and for peasants who have become incapable of feeding themselves because their subsistence harvests have come to grief, as well as for dwellers of the overfull shanty towns whose number has not stopped rising since before the crisis.

If the government ignores the land problem, it could soon find itself the target of violent protests, as was the case in the Mont Elgon District, which the militia of the Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF) dominated between 2006 and 2008. The SLDF was finally brought down with the help of tactics similar to those of the colonial crushing of the Mau Mau liberation movement in the 1950s. Different international NGOs have reported numerous cases of death by torture and other human rights violation by security forces in the Mont Elgon sector.

In February 2009, Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, stated that “widespread, systematic and carefully planned extrajudiciary executions are regularly perpetrated by the Kenyan police” and that “the investigation, pursuit and all judiciary processes are slow and subject to corruption.” A few days after Alston’s statements, Oscar Kamau Kingara, director of the Oscar Foundation, and John Paul Oulu, the Foundation’s head of communications, were gunned down in Nairobi. Kingara had confided to the media that the Foundation had accumulated documentation relating more than “eight thousand cases of abductions and executions,” and had informed Alston of this. Unless the government acts decisively, not only to secure its exports but also to take care of economic inequality and to reform the legal and security apparatus, it will not be able to avoid the bloodletting and human rights violations.

The crises that Kenya, the USA, Italy or France are living through are undoubtedly interlinked by the numerous effects of pressure, of communicating vessels and of the mutually imbricated play of politics. Is it not a delusion to speak of “the crisis,” however? There would, of course, be a lot to say about the resistance, hopes and activist movements that, against all opposition, inject dynamism into Kenyan society. But are not these few words on the (permanent)

crisis Kenya experiences, following decades of colonization and of post-colonialism, sufficient to let us assess the enormous *differentials of standards* that *nourish* “the crisis,” of course – but which the reference to “the crisis” *masks*?

## Liquidity

Liquidity has definitely become the cornerstone of the financial markets: people complain when it disappears, it is injected to save the system, one deplores the abundance of it, and those who are at the origin of it (China). Certain people, following the example of Zygmunt Bauman,<sup>15</sup> or of Pascal Michon,<sup>16</sup> see in it the very syndrome of modern life: a liquid life devoid of depth, verticality, materiality and solidarity, spreading forth in the fluid, flattened horizon of neoliberal globalization. At all events, our personal condition is liquidity, either because we are dependent upon it for the survival of capitalism (and therefore of the growth of our purchasing power), or because it is the symptom of the (post)modern era. To begin with, it has to be remembered that one of the obvious properties of liquidity is, as the regulationist Michel Aglietta points out, its *social* character. Its existence is due to a collective of permanent buyers and sellers. By extension, it describes the size and the ease of circulation within a space of exchange: the more sellers and buyers there are, the more a market is liquid, and therefore the more the shares are exchangeable on it without delay or cost of transaction. Here, liquidity is not the description of a state (according to definitions M1, M2 and M3 of the central banks),<sup>17</sup> but what collectively unites the group of participants in the financial market, what they believe in, what forms the basis of their adherence, what stops them from *liquidating* their accounts at any one moment. In its original meaning, liquidity is indebted to the process of “immanent transcendence” described by Frédéric Lordon and André Orléan.<sup>18</sup> It is imposed on all the players as the condition *sine qua non* of the existence of the market and as that to which the different agents are ready to submit – which can lead to losses as well as gains (each one having the right and the possibility to buy or sell). It is also a condition in the immanent social relations between the players: through my commitment to not withdrawing once and for all from the market (to which the different flows of dividend contribute) and to reinvesting the surpluses accumulated, I compensate for the selling movement created by my own gains (stemming from the sale of a particular asset).

In the strictest sense, liquidity is thus the *affirmation of a common fund* that links the agents of finance for better and, as of now, for worse. Moreover, no fundamental difference exists between the endogenous genetic properties of the process of formation of a financial belief and those that found the adherence to a monetary form. Furthermore, the two processes seem to be strictly articulated with each other: they set up a particular space in which the increasing lack of distinction between the latter liquidity (currency) and the different degrees of liquidities trace a continuum of financing that does not play the market of shares

and of by-products off *against* the market of credit, but mobilizes credit *for* the purchase of financial assets and mobilizes the derivatives *in order to* guarantee credits and assets. One speaks of a “marketization” of the banks in the sense in which they intervene more and more on the financial markets, of a “leverage” of the market to the extent in which the agents get into excessive debt with the banks.

To understand the power of finance, then, is first of all to abandon the traditional image of this world in which modern “heroes” tear themselves away from the ambient conformism and amass huge fortunes before becoming the oracles and exegetes of a universe in which the profane poor are completely incapable of understanding the mechanisms. On the contrary, wealth in the world of finance is only determined therein by the mimetic polarization of the agents around an opinion they believe to be the common (self-referential) one that they share! Because there, perhaps, is the aporia of the financial markets, namely the persistence of those agents who, while being the zealots of libertarian individualism, have built a veritable “*communism of capital*” (Negri), in the sense that its valorization is no longer the result of the A-M-A’ cycle that Marx had successfully identified, but emanates from the very real construction of a common imaginary welded around the myth of liquidity. Consequently, rather than deploring the casino-economy, let us note, with regard to the present collapse, the fragility of this common fund which, far from opening up the way to emancipation, involves operators in a state of servitude all but identical in its forms to those analyzed by Spinoza in *A Theologico-Political Treatise*. Sunk in the permanent fear of seeing the risks to their convictions materialize, the proliferation of by-products (and of by-products of by-products)<sup>19</sup> is thus analyzed as the domination of affects of fear over the positive affects of the hope of gains. The affective dynamic dominates the apparent rationality of finance, not that finance is irrational or demonstrates an irrational exuberance (Shiller) but because it is party to its inability to define itself actively in the sense of a “community of action.” Contrary to the image of the young trader perpetually moving in incessant activity, Spinozism performs *the most mutilating kind of* reversal: in the face of the permanent instability of the market, of the affective dynamics of propagation that characterize it, the individual is profoundly and almost wholly *passive*, always on the way to suffering the event that will be tragic for him and as a result for the others, who are equally ignorant. Incapable of inscribing itself within the optic of an “eventmental counter-effectuation,” to use a Deleuzian term, the financial community is incapable of becoming active because, as Philippe Zarifian reminds us, “to pass from passion to action poses a high-level demand particularly when a collective, a community of individuals, is evoked. It is not enough to be affected by joyful passions of mutual support and friendship, say, passions that like all passions remain unstable and fluctuating. It is necessary for this community to clearly understand the internal causes of its own power.”<sup>20</sup>

Faced with finance’s profound inability to get to know the causes that determine it, the crisis acts as a catalyst; it reveals *a posteriori* a common fund in

the process of breaking up, an institution in total decomposition. Sedition takes on the most predatory forms (the withdrawal of assets, massive selling, the freezing of inter-bank loans), while the anarchic disaggregation of the institution is produced by a process homologous to the constitutive aggregative process. Liquidity then passes through many states of crisis, during which the mimetic polarization that caused the bubble phenomenon is replaced by a multiplicity of candidates (gold, euros or dollars in the form of US Treasury bonds) seeking to embody liquidity (with all the correlative brutal imbalances and reorientations). One after the other these candidates fail to reconstruct an order of belief and adherence sufficiently strong to re-engage the process of accumulation (the collapse of a segment of the market for by-products, for example, then a collapse of the market for credit default swaps,<sup>21</sup> then of stock exchange rates, then excessive risk premiums on the government bonds of developing countries,<sup>22</sup> etc.).

If the analysis of finance must serve as a lesson, in the first instance it is, in fact, through the questions it raises as to the nature of the institution and of its ability to subsist over time (because of the relationships it regulates, the representation it imposes, the affects that are attached to it). On that score, regulation, far from denoting a set of measures capable of warning about risk or of limiting procyclic forces, ought to be understood as an intervention in the plural, complex and agonistic conjuncture of affects, so that the (financial) institution perpetuates itself. In effect, the idea that the world of finance could be a tranquil horizon without turmoil is a fiction. Even during the Fordist period permanent tensions were generated, only they materialized in problems of the rate of exchange and inflation. The governing bodies were in charge of creating institutions like those of Bretton Woods suited to taking over from them and to making them tenable by integrating the possibility of disaffection or of indignation.

Regulating all over again would thus be to turn towards new policies of empowerment in which, far from remaining in constitutive passivity, the financial community would intellectualize the relations it would sustain with other economic, social and political spheres and communities. The impression of a capitalism that brings about, as Deleuze said, a “surplus value of flows”<sup>23</sup> – flows that are intellectual and technological, that is to say *cognitive* – has long justified hopes of a dialectical moment of reversal by (yesterday) the proletariat in struggle, (today) the cognitariat of the nomadic multitudes. This hope could give way to a more limited, but nevertheless emancipatory horizon. Indeed, neither the proposal for an integral or partial nationalization of the banking sector nor the hypothetical alliance of multitudes will be sufficient. There again, it will be necessary to favour the imaginative and political concatenations suited to getting such a programme off the ground.<sup>24</sup> In short, we are *condemned to invent* – and this necessity, in the Spinozian meaning of the word, is already a stopping place on the road to an active future.<sup>25</sup>



Federico Guzmán, *Violento mercado*, 2006



## Masochist (economy)

“Man is the slave of what he possesses, whether it be his money,  
his wife or his homeland.”<sup>26</sup>

In his essay “The Economic problem of Masochism”<sup>27</sup> Freud discusses the origin of the libido which, according to him, dominates the psychic life of man. While the libido is a conservative economy of life, masochism hints at the presence of a destructive instinct at the centre of this libidinal economy: the masochist acts as if he were able to find an interest in extinguishing the life within him, an interest that would run counter to the economy of the species. A few decades before Freud, Sacher-Masoch put forward an economic and social reading of this tendency towards self-destruction. According to him, there is no opposition between the drive towards life and the destructive instinct; the intransigence of the one completes the violence of the other. On the other hand, this libidinal economy of a destructive kind is not in the least opposed to the cruelty of social and political economy. What rages within each person in the form of a vital individual instinct is in reality nothing other than the compulsive self-preservation of the species. This “will to life”<sup>28</sup> readily compromises with the egoistic interests of the modern individual and the economic structure the latter sets up.

From this Sacher-Masoch deduces a quantitative relationship between vital energy, property and death: the “richer” an individual is in vital energy, the more tendency he has to possess and to accumulate, and also the more subject he is to the anguish of losing this accumulated energy. According to the same logic, the larger the patrimony he is in possession of, the more he suffers because of the fear of dying. On the contrary, the lack of property and the extinction of his vital energy free him from the fear of losing.

The lesson Sacher-Masoch draws from this equation is very simple: in the face of this general “ecology” of the species, the individual, in touch with a self-destructive dynamic, struggles against the will to life that drives him and acts in a way that runs counter to all forms of material and financial appropriation.

The masochist economy, then, puts forward two possibilities when it comes to ridding itself of property and to reaffirming itself as an individual: casual expenditure and waste on the one hand, and the asceticism that prohibits any new possessions on the other. In both instances the principle of economy is driven by a destructive instinct that is against the accumulation of work, money and property. In the first instance we are close to the “unproductive spending” advanced by Georges Bataille: an economy based on the gift and sacrifice. In a society governed by such an economy, the individual or the valorized state is no longer the one that accumulates wealth but the one that spends and gives more. Work’s only value is as expended energy, and the product obtained by this work is only worth something insofar as it can be sacrificed or given away. Money is estimable, but only for spending, not for saving. The second masochistic strategy meets up with

the first, but by the opposite route: proceeding from a radical asceticism, it involves freeing itself of all goods and of eradicating material needs. In this view of things, man is only rich in the price of things he can do without. The value of money comes from the use that is made of it; in reducing the necessity of that use to the minimum, one eliminates that value.

In contemporary society the limit of these two strategies is, on the one hand, to lead to the economic suicide of the subject if they are taken to an extreme; and on the other, if they are not, to generate unfortunate compromises.

There exists, in fact, a third strategy proposed by Severin, the hero of Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*.<sup>29</sup> Far from all ascetic abstinence, the former spends his life, instead, in a state of intense sensuality. But it is in the aesthetic sublimation of his sensuality that Severin encounters the libidinal economy suited to his masochism. A dilettante artist, he produces ever-unfinished pictures; he defers the conclusion of his work in the same way as he retards his sexual pleasure through pain, and this so as to keep the mental and sexual tension involved in creativity and lovemaking on the rise. In this way, he prevents libidinal investment from reaching an outcome. From this point of view, it is no longer a question of expending with excess, nor refusing all expenditure, but of envisaging an intensive spending that thwarts political economy. The risk and the unique value of this libidinal economy based on incompleteness and suspension is the sudden awareness of oneself *qua* individual, in an unremitting resistance to the economy of the species. But is not this awareness of oneself the necessary foundation for all political action?

## Old hags

After the crisis there'll be plenty of old people, mainly old women, in a word. There are lots of them already, and there'll be more. Old women who won't consume and who'll spend everything. They'll blow their pension, they'll blow their house, they'll eat their kids out of house and home. They won't feel guilty, it'll be hard to be angry with them, they'll have gone off their heads. It'll be our parents, then us, our children, then their children. There'll be lots of women, African women, Caribbean women, North African women, Polish women, Colombian women to wash, wipe, feed these old women and make them sing songs. They'll laugh among themselves, the old women and the women from elsewhere, in a word they'll laugh when one lot is not choking through eating too fast and the other lot not busting a gut. There'll be families too, they'll be satisfied and collusive, or they'll be suspicious and hostile. Regal client families who'll treat the carers like their servants and their parents like the sacred vestiges of what they once were: "She'll have cream cheese, you'll put on her black shoes for her." You have to imagine yourself in the middle with no right in the matter.

Today, quality charters guarantee beneficence. A doubt lingers, all the same. Aren't they going to beat you, mistreat you, murder you at daybreak, all these

foreign women? You're right down inside your bed, you can't bat an eyelid (you're suffering from Parkinson's), you're quaking in your adult diapers, you're afraid and your teeth can't even chatter (your dentures have been confiscated and returned to your family, the establishment declining all responsibility in the event of loss). You have to get out of there, and double quick, the energy of despair drives you to the middle of the corridor. White shapes are moving all around you: "You have to get washed! You have to get dressed!" Each time a white shape comes towards you, you cry out... Chanthou is Cambodian, with a whole history you know nothing of. But she's been an auxiliary nurse for fifteen years, she sees you at a distance, then, coming down the corridor, naked, your buttocks not too clean. She's just finished her shift, she's no longer in uniform, that gives her an idea. She gently approaches, whispers in your ear, "You don't smell so good, you know." It's pleasant to follow her as far as the sink, to let oneself go, she gives no orders, you feel she's concerned about you and you're right. It's a shame because on Chanthou's evaluation day no one will ask you your opinion, moreover you'd be hard put to express it, and not only on account of your illness. How do you explain a smile, a touch of attention, a presence? This invaluable job of work. Chanthou doesn't really know how to speak of it, either. "Perhaps, it's bad," she says. "I wasn't proud, I pushed it a bit, and then I wasn't in uniform, it's not the procedure." And to use seduction and cunning is not, in fact, prescribed in the manuals of the "right behaviour." Thanks to her stratagem she has nevertheless succeeded where others had failed. It was about time! Your family arrives in a quarter of an hour. What would they have thought? "We'd still have been told we mistreat people." Chanthou's ruse has to do with real beneficence, not with its idealized representation. And the uniformed nurses, were they maleficent? They've respected your refusal, didn't force your consent. You haven't been scolded, soaped, rinsed like a plate.

To understand the art of geriatric care involves breaking with the prominent paradigm of "maleficence" defining carers as potential offenders. Geriatric work is made up only of "little victories," there's nothing glorious about it, or that can be exhibited in a glass case. The reality of old age resists, it is inscribed in the retracted body, in the multiple pains, in the anguish, the confusion, the cognitive problems. It is anguishing for families that they are reminded of this and undoubtedly everything cannot be said or shown. Thanks to Chanthou's expertise, at visiting time you will be calm and well-dressed, you will smell good. When it is done well, such a caring job effaces its own traces, nothing of it is seen. That's what respect is.

This caring job requires a particular kind of involvement, a certain form of sensitivity and of receptivity towards the other. One cannot do it correctly when nervy, overtired or vexed. The right material and organizational conditions are required. In promising (via quality charters) an ideal that the carers will not be able to keep to, one puts them at a disadvantage and one discredits them vis-à-vis the families. Problems that ought to be a subject for debate – in the organization of work, in the city – are obviated in favour of a pejorative judgment about the

caring staff. Everyone – colleagues, family – is called upon to “police” and to control everyone. So it becomes very difficult for carers to create solidary forms of action and even more so to converse as equals with the families. We are at a crossroads in geriatric life: it could be rather terrific or it could be a complete nightmare. Everything depends on our ability to listen to the women experts in caring for aged bodies and souls and to recognize that they are the ones who know what is the right thing to do so that this is the least insupportable.

### PAC (philosophie analytique continentale)

The “crisis” is not only financial and economic. Nor does it date to Autumn 2008 alone. Hatching for years beneath the “crisis” everyone is talking about are other crises, other vagaries, other bubbles – which doubtless partake of changes that are mutually related. Thus, the scientist fetishism of the GDP and of mathematical-economic modeling is perhaps relayed, within the philosophical world, by a scientism that might well now enter into crisis itself.

Originally British, then claimed in the 1980s by a group of French philosophers, the distinction *analytical philosophy* / *continental philosophy* is part-ideological, part-historiographical. It has mainly served as an instrument of polemic and of propaganda on the part of said group advocating the purely *argumentative* exercise of philosophy, as opposed to the *historic* use of philosophy practiced in continental Europe. Their position hardened on the appearance of the American post-analytic movement, formed by some preeminent philosophers, former analytics themselves, who sought to have done with a certain intellectual and academic dictatorship in the USA (Putnam, Rorty and Cavell, as well as their students, relayed in Europe by many Wittgensteinians). Analytical philosophy then went into crisis. Beyond the logical empiricism issuing from Vienna that had dominated American university philosophy from 1940 to 1960, these “Postists” set out to reactivate an autochthonous American philosophy (that of the Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau, who were Left-leaning thinkers, and of the Pragmatists, including Dewey, a theorist of democracy) and to revisit the œuvre of Wittgenstein, which had been all too often deformed by an analytical reading.

The boom in the cognitive sciences in France in the 1980s and 90s arrived just in time to back up the claim of European analytics to constitute “philosophy *tout court*,” employing the word *analytical* not in the old sense of the term, when it was a question of analyzing language (the era of the “linguistic turn” of Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein), but in the sense of a philosophy of “naturalized” cognition (as Quine put it), that is to say reincorporated in the “sciences of nature.” With a seductive (implicit) message: philosophy is solvable in science, above all in the cognitive sciences.

Party to the storming of the great French institutions, practicing an offensive academic policy coupled with an exceptional capacity for self-proclamation, this movement has sought to impose norms and a “politically correct” line on the

profession as a whole, while moralizing in the extreme about the cognitive norms it prides itself on, the better to establish its legitimacy and to personify a certain disciplinary ideal. Steeped in the critique of 1960s and 70s French philosophy, in the rejection of its “irrationalism,” deemed to be immoral, and in a relativism that is hardly consistent with cognitive norms – as demonstrated by its reactions a few years ago to the Sokal affair – French analytical philosophy has benefited from the relative philosophical vacuum caused by the deaths of Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida, from the centrist conformism that has succeeded the politicization and Leftist positioning in university circles, and by the decline of publishing, which currently favours little more than manuals and dictionaries. Basically, the philosophizing activity of the analytics is reduced to what might be called a work of “normal science” (to borrow Kuhn’s expression) within a “paradigm” (inspired by the cognitive sciences) the reasons for which defy all possible discussion. Argument is something they seek, but only with people already in agreement with them. Following from this is a formatting of minds at odds with what Europe, but also America prior to the Second World War, has always taken “philosophy” to be. Become a non-empirical branch of the cognitive sciences, philosophy is “naturalized” within Quine, but also moralized, professionalized and depersonalized: there are no more “authors,” nor philosophical passion (in the sense in which philosophy since Descartes and the Enlightenment has always been, as moreover has politics, a “French passion,” to borrow Zeldin’s expression). Like the science the analytics lay claim to, philosophy is a collective activity practiced in a lab, and not an intellectual job *à la française*. Philosophy will be scientist or it will not be...

This disillusioned, technocratic-theoretical, narrow philosophy, admittedly (let us recognize the fact) very serious, but often scholastic and mediocre as well, is at odds with the talent and tradition of philosopher-writers in the French style of the seventeenth to the twentieth century, announcing the end of the “French exception” in philosophy. It has spread throughout Europe, where it merits the designation *philosophie analytique continentale* (PAC), without however dominating (yet?), while priding itself on being the “mainstream” in philosophy, even “philosophy *tout court*.” Is this current’s intellectual and conceptual balance sheet equal to its stated claims? Has it proved itself in the prestigious institutions in which it has practiced entryism and infiltration, often by taking advantage of the trust of credulous colleagues? Can it really become integrated in the French philosophical field, instead of constituting a sectarian enclave therein (something which is the lesser of two evils, it is true)? Can it, does it deserve to, enjoy a prestige akin to intellectual formations of the past (phenomenology, structuralism)? What intellectual interactions is it able to have with partners stemming from other currents? What play space does this tightly corseted philosophy give over to the freedom of mind and to creativity, as well as to criticism, when it gets virtuously angry as soon as its intellectual productions are not praised to the skies? Closed as it is, can it open up to genuine debate (even though it claims to be argumentative) with people who do not share the same presuppositions? The concept of “analytic

philosophy,” or rather its French usage, is typically “reactive” in the Nietzsche sense, the product of the reactive forces of a group that seeks hegemony. In the past, analytic philosophy was a courageous and intellectually energizing programme of research, a philosophy on the rise; today it looks like a reactive ideology.

## Performance

The activity of quantification that organizes the life of different States is, after a quarter of a century of existence, placed in the service of a principle: efficiency. What does this principle say? It affirms that an allocation of resources (or a decision) can be optimal, that is to say the best possible relative to the conditions that define a state of the world and to the information available about that state. Being efficient means, then, having statistical data available that enable a measurable relation to be established between a result (of a political nature) and a cost (estimated in terms of public expenditure). The idea has slowly asserted itself that a government is efficient when it manages to yield the least expenditure it incurs exactly adjusted to the result this produces at the cheapest cost. And this is the role of evaluation, which now accompanies, both before and after, the political decision by fulfilling, for the non-market sector, its function as a substitute for what the market price is (as E. Monnier has shown).

The introduction of this efficiency principle in politics poses four problems. The first is the subjection of the decision-making process to quantification. Without statistics, the governing bodies can neither set objectives nor define performance indicators, nor measure the amount of success of a public policy measure, nor that of the productivity of administrations. *In short, without statistics, it is impossible for them to subject public action to the efficiency principle or to produce results to justify that it is so.* The wish to evaluate has engendered a sort of dependency: what governor in his right mind would today consider taking a decision that was not based on some statistical argument? Now, this dependency has its drawbacks. The first is to distort the judgment of the leaders, which tends more and more to be formulated on the basis of “informational realities” alone that create the systems for gathering and processing administrative data. Insofar as these realities are built on theoretical hypotheses, they do not necessarily correspond to those experienced by the man in the street; and it is regularly noted that a ditch is dug between the decisions of the governors and the expectations of those to whom they are addressed. The second drawback is the reduction of the field of the political [*le politique*]. Any sensible person in charge knows that he can be assured of attaining an objective assigned to him by subjecting to evaluation the actual promises about which he is sure in advance he will be able to establish that they have been kept. Which leads him to exclude other objectives, either because they cannot give rise to quantification, or because they would provide embarrassing information. And surveys show that these deviant uses are the norm.

The efficiency principle poses a second problem: that of the goals according to which it must be measured. It is by no means rare for a public action to pursue many equally legitimate goals at once; the question then arises of knowing whether the efficiency noted in one of its dimensions is not obtained to the detriment of the one that ought also to prevail in another. The third problem is of knowing if efficiency is measured, in politics, as a simple relation between an action and its budgetary cost. Replying to this question is tricky, because even those who admit the possibility of establishing such a relation know that many concurrent models for allocating resources exist in order to accomplish a single action in a just and economic way. It is necessary, therefore, to be decisive, and to do this with the help of ethical or ideological criteria – which amounts to challenging the neutrality of the statistic. The fourth problem concerns the relation between efficiency and the meaning of public action. Each area of public action (health, education, justice, defence, security, etc.) is directly linked to a collective political value, which is also a constitutional right the full exercise of which is, in a democratic regime, guaranteed by the State. Now, these types of value resist being cut up into variables and parameters nourishing a statistic, be it descriptive or of management. Why? Quite simply because to associate a success rate with life, freedom, democracy, health, knowledge or equality has hardly any meaning. It is of course possible to grasp these political values by considering the modalities in which they are conveyed on a financial plane within the framework of a public policy that updates civil and social rights (work, education, health, security, justice, dignity, etc.). What permits quantification is, then, a personalizing of the attribution of services determining who can receive what, in which conditions, at what level, for which reasons, with what effects. But this individualization contributes towards gradually eliminating the relevance of questions relating to what a public politics changes for the society as a whole.

The subjection of the political to the efficiency principle has a number of consequences that are observable today in the laws on the University, the Hospital and the School. It leads to justifying a public action founded on a criterion of equity (serving the most deserving people) while abandoning the principle of equality (in the name of its proven inefficiency); or to establishing a hierarchy of preferences by eliminating measures judged to be less cost-effective (politically or socially) in favour of those that are more so. What becomes blurred in these usages is the fact of envisaging the collectivity as an inevitable community. A further consequence is the following: when one governs by following detailed dashboards, the practice that installs itself is to keep an equal eye on each of the elements determining performance and the effects of a political decision in establishing a sort of equivalence between the whole (a collective value) and the parts that compose it (the provisions that update it). This equality of treatment of the whole and of each of its parts helps to free efficiency from all content other than an injunction to be efficient; and this injunction is itself reduced to the observation of the positive development of an indicator without it ever being necessary to know what this development might indicate.

Today the efficiency principle goes by another name: performance (measured in gains in productivity and in budgetary savings), borne by a much-trumpeted maxim: the State must change from a logic of means to a logic of results. But within this terminological change the same question always comes up: can public expenditure be reduced without reducing the political and restraining the practices of democracy? It is this question that the compulsive use made today of the word *performance* in the French administration allows one to ignore.

## Pyramid

There are certain (extremely) heterodox Egyptologists who claim that the pyramids in Giza have been built by starting at the top and constructing the intermediary levels in reverse order until reaching the bottom. If these archaeologists were right, the Pharaoh's architects would have anticipated by many a century the wily businessmen who, in order to swindle private individuals, utilized banks, investment funds and pyramid selling schemes sometimes known as "Ponzi chains" – after the famous promoter of international postal reply coupons who in the 1920s financed the return on investments of the first adherents to his speculative operation with the capital of the new arrivals to it.

Recently, a valiant reverse-pyramid architect has been the illustrious Bernard Madoff, a by now well-known ex-lifeguard, an alleged NASDAQ hot shot in the 90s, factotum of many of the world's rich and powerful, who promised guaranteed yearly profits of from between 8 and 12% (rising as high as 17%) over long periods. The confidence inspired by this talented builder of pyramids, perched atop his magnum opus, enabled him to recruit ever more numerous adherents from the 1960s onwards and to progressively enlarge the base of his financial monument by paying out to older members profits that were nothing other than the sums recently placed in his care by more recent ones, in the expectation of returns on their investments that were soon no longer able to flow except on the basis of future clients, ever on the increase. Economists claim that the limit of a Ponzi chain is quickly reached when, for the affair to be profitable and for new arrivals to receive their due, the base of the pyramid exceeds the size of the world population.

Bernie Madoff did not (fortunately) reach such proportions. His fine hedge fund, which was supposed to guarantee him the ownership, within the secret chamber of his pyramid, of enough liquid assets to be solvent, finally turned out to contain only empty cashboxes, already looted, when the pyramid tottered on high. For, unlike a true human pyramid of dancers, athletes or gymnasts, the upside-down pyramid of a financial setup collapses from the top, or really by the middle. If former clients suddenly pull out while claiming their dues, they violently short-circuit the beautiful construction, already threatened by the unstable base of no longer finding new adherents to finance earlier ones.



The pyramids of Ponzi, of Madoff, those of the Albanian banks which, in 1997, led to the murderous riots of gruesome memory, nourish a man on his own or a single enterprise at the summit, through the constant enlargement of their base. And when there is no more new ground floor to nourish the first floor which nourishes the second, and so on, everything comes crashing down, and nobody gets to eat.

If today the builders of reverse pyramids crystallize media anger, being described as villains, profiteers, stigmatized as the lame ducks of a normally valid and solid system, it would also be necessary to see these builders of castles in the air as the *artistes maudits* of the art that a capitalist economy always is. As Adam Smith already recognized: the enlarging of new markets, of developing countries, for example, to which enrichment is promised in order to pay for the more significant increase in the wealth of the preceding ones, who themselves pay for the old consumers haughtily lordling it at the cutting edge, with the result that everybody clambers upwards, but that the rising of the base is of use to the still more important loftiness of the summit. Because any market economy grows via the base and through its enlargement climbs to the very bounds, doubtless, of the world population, of the markets available, of the exploitable masses (if we reason like Marx) or (if we think like Schumpeter) of the technological innovations that are foreseeable. It remains to be seen if the whole thing has the solidity of the pyramids of Giza, which have not budged for many a long year in the sands of Egypt, or of Madoff's, which have quickly collapsed.

### Reflation (rejection)

To judge by what is being said all around us, living through a "crisis" would largely be tantamount to waiting for "a reflation" (the "Right-wing" version), to accelerating it, even, through state intervention (the "Left-wing" version). A *prime à la casse* – a trade-in bonus when scrapping your car – in order to reflate the French automobile industry; presidential trips to help our (national) industries "win contracts." Who can be opposed to these attempts at "reflation," seeing as they aim at "reducing unemployment," "increasing the GDP" and "purchasing power"?

And what if was necessary to learn to *reject* all this vocabulary of "reflation"? Just what is being sold by different presidents, yesterday the ("Right-wing") heralds of a free market, today peaceably converted into the ("Left-wing") heralds of state activism? Mainly nuclear power stations, planes, weapons... Who calls for an armed uprising against the absolute scandal of the all-out exporting of nuclear energy? Who rejects this reflation as a game of planetary Russian roulette? Who takes the trouble to state the obvious: that weapons do more harm to those who bear them and who are aimed at by them, that they only do good to those who export them and make their living from them? That nuclear energy only "reduces the greenhouse effect" by preparing absolutely *certain* catastrophes for us (on the

scale of the millions of years involved in their deadly life span) that are as dangerous as the rise in sea level?

Between the reflation of “the economy” and the rejection of death in our environment, it is at the same Russian roulette that Right and Left play in perfect unison. It is this consensus on reflation that we must reject. It is to the *throwing of new dice* that we must proceed, it is to *new risks* that we must learn to expose ourselves: no longer the certain risks of *ecological* roulette, but the risks we must assume of *political* roulette. To say what no one dares say without “committing political suicide.” It is from this suicide of an obsolete and suicidal politics that new perspectives for survival, action and emancipation will be born.

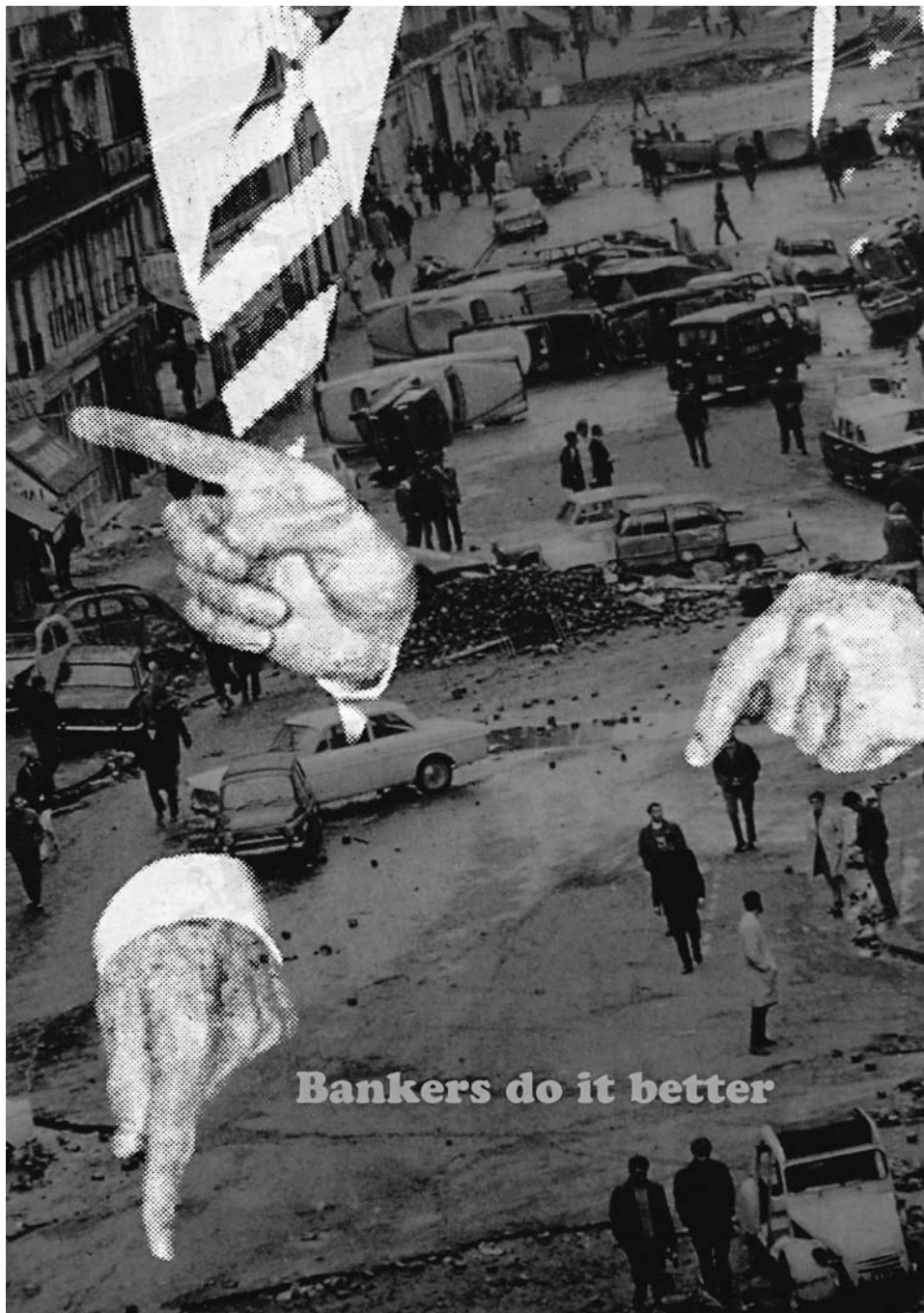
### Return (to the real)

“A return to the real via a disastrous square one?”<sup>30</sup> This headline in a *Le Monde* editorial on 12-13 October 2008, at the very time the speculative bombs deposited in the stock exchanges exploded in the midst of our societies, is the marvelous symbol of a strange malady of thought. In the minds of the news commentators the crisis reawakens nostalgia for a wondrous past, which they idealize even though they have not, or have not really, lived it.

The colossal illusion is to think that some “return to the real” is possible, as if there could be a good real, that of yesteryear for example, and a bad one, like the one soiled by the games of chance of our time and their virtual aspects. As if from our sticky contemporary reality we could extirpate a tangible, comprehensible real graspable via our intellect, one seizable, even, by our fingers or our toes!

Today’s real has nothing to do with yesterday’s. The *letter* of the real – namely its concrete expression – is ceaselessly reinvented with the aid of our imaginations. To “return” to it would be at best to rediscover a *spirit* there to orientate and participate in the reinvention, eternally recommenced, of a real more real than the real...

However, also in *Le Monde* in that same month of October 2008, the philosopher Alain Badiou writes: “The return to the real is essential.”<sup>31</sup> In his “heated” article he describes the financial crisis as a “disaster movie” with a happy end. Badiou describes as “real” the life of the spectators of this potboiler with disastrous consequences. He makes a separation between the unreality of the dominant figures, in their bubble of financial or political abstraction, and the reality of the “people,” confronted with the child’s raging toothache, with the breakdown of the car, or with the diet of pasta due to an empty purse. This romantic vision has something seductive about it, above all for the person who considers himself to be vaguely “Leftist.” At first glance it resembles that of a science fiction author like Philip K. Dick,<sup>32</sup> the great force behind films like *Blade Runner* and *Minority Report*, whose characters are nobodies. Against the overly servile agent of the administration or the boss of a multinational ruled by profit, he pits the figures of the sidereal tramp, the intuitive potter or the street kid who



Rogelio López Cuenca, *Bankers*, 2009

tinkers with his radio. Sometimes, even, he reverses the cliché that pits popular reality against the unreality of power. The man of the people has soon been transformed into a machine-man governed by a mechanics of some kind, while the company boss and the bounty hunter, through the workings of empathy, sometimes get involved in the complications of humanity, which seem damned real... Whereas Badiou's "return to the real" is posed as a sensible, even commonsensical, imperative, in the antiheroes of Philip K. Dick it is only an impossible dream.

Is this reality it is a question of returning to that of Cro-Magnon man? Or that of *Le Monde*, when it captions an image, "Hiroshima: what the world had hitherto not seen,"<sup>33</sup> before explaining three days later that this photo of the biggest nuclear hecatomb of all time was perhaps only a con? The photo, said to be true at first, then placed in doubt, was, it seems, just an image of the ravages of a 1923 earthquake in the Tokyo area. Issuing from a collection in the venerable Hoover Institution of Stanford University and validated by the publication of a book by an American historian before the institution and the historian reversed their opinion in the face of the reaction of their Japanese peers, it seemed not only credible but expected, and so in a certain way legitimate. It lived in the head of thousands, of millions, of potential readers. Over and above its tragic identity, of the name of the Japanese city blown up by history, this impossible photo becomes its blurred icon: not that of a definite disaster, but that of this "accident of knowledge" or this "integral accident" that Paul Virilio has described better than anyone else. To say of the image of Hiroshima, published by *Le Monde*, that it is not real would be absurd. On the contrary, its ghostly being turns it into the essence of the disaster.

This is why to me calls for a "return to the real" sound like the sirens of an armada of firemen. In imitation of *Le Monde*, the new firemen of the "revival" of good economic morals still believe, or make the pretence of believing, that it is possible to pilot our world of fictions by means of an identifiable, encompassable real our ten fingers can take the measure of. They act as if they could knock at the door of the noddle of each "trader," of each speculator, in order to explain to them, in their galaxy of stockmarket casinos, the benefits of an oh so worldly, ascetic virtue. Whether they are aware of it or not, the return that these dreary moralists go on about smacks of the insuperable happiness of the coalmine, the physical effort of the daily grind. These enemies of the imagination think they will be able to be understood by some untraceable individual responsible for the financial apocalypse. The idea that they might themselves work to reinvent the real completely escapes them. Against the formidable abstraction of the money which creates money, which creates money, which creates money, and so on, they seek to be wise men. Full of their own virtues, there they are, piling into a time machine. Their wish is to put the past on the "right track": that of the real, or rather of their vision of the real. And without realizing it, even, they add reactionary fictions to the pernicious fiction of the temple of the small-time speculator...

## Revolution

With each crisis the publishing business presents us with a whole variety of known solutions. It is understood that the changes to be made are of the first order, to paraphrase the psychotherapists of Palo Alto: to be eligible for solutions that are plausible, they must be entirely amenable to the range of *existing* solutions, or there again to be able to be carried out entirely within the coordinates defined by the system itself: to be suitable for its reproduction. “More of the same” defines the type of changes tolerable from the internal point of view. Now, the nature of these changes is to shift the problem, to make it worse instead of resolving it, even.

Crisis is the pulsation specific to capital. Market uncertainty and the failures resulting from this are its daily bread. The chronic falling off of profitability (the anomalous rise in the wage bill), like the exhaustion of money-spinning needs and consequently of the usages engendered by the capitalist disruption of *the conditions of production of ancient usages* (a crisis of demand), is a genetic feature of this system. Chronic over-accumulation is only the chronic want of *profitable accumulation*, to synthesize in a single formula the problem of final demand and that of the cost-pushed crisis. As it is, financial pathology is inherent to the crisis, of which it is but one aspect. There is not the real economy on the one hand, the monetary economy on the other; there’s no need to steer the economy once more along the ruts of production, as if the problem was to flog more shoddy goods in the context of the exhaustion of the biosphere. The malicious speculators are not a different race to the nice investors who provide good jobs. The reason, very simple to whosoever frequents *Capital* a little, particularly Chapter XV of Section IV of Book I devoted to relative surplus value, is that *in point of fact capital in person does not produce any wealth*, contrary to a lot of tittle-tattle, if by wealth one understands physical ability, technique, artful crafting and, eventually, artifact. Far from being itself technical, capital machinizes technical arrangements by *excorporating* them. Only the appropriate labour power in the service of its machine is suitable to it, as a series of interchangeable components (Sartre saw this clearly) and not the body of its producers, indispensable points of view in the world they constitute. Capital only produces value, that is to say monetarily controlled hours of work that are consequently the measure of its power. The insane, gimcrack accumulation that in the eyes of the helots passes for an exploit of this “civilization” appears as masses of *uses* only to whomsoever is incapable of penetrating appearance for essence to find in these supposed uses but *the reflection of value*.

The financial crisis is only one aspect of the *constitutive* crisis of capitalist functioning. There is no financial pathology of an otherwise *balanced* system, then. The “real” and the financial crisis are not linked together according to a well-ordered sequence. The generalized falling off of profitable accumulation is

accompanied by the swelling of the financial bubble. As Pierre-Noël Giraud has explained so well,<sup>34</sup> this bubble is the promise of collapse of the trade in promises. The market in movable securities is the market of *promises of future revenues*. The last to take off is the winner – that is to say the last agent  $n$  of the market in question has to persuade another speculator ( $n+1$ ) that he will himself be capable of persuading the following speculator ( $n+2$ ) to obtain increased fees on the revenues engendered by future activity: agent  $n$  withdraws his bills just before  $n+1$  realizes he's been acquiring funny money.

As the productive investment (of value and of surplus value) ceases to be profitable in general (the accumulation crisis), capital takes refuge as surely as the sun rises in the sphere of fictitious capital, the market of promises of future revenues. Except that for these promises to come true it is necessary for the commodities facilitating this future revenue to not only be produced but “realized,” that is to say sold. Now, *as productive investments flee precisely because the capacity for profitable absorption by the market diminishes*, there are not more but less reasonably discountable future revenues to be got out of current production, even. The bubble is the symptom of the incubation and premonitory sign of the acute phase, of the crisis in person. The latter takes place with the refusal by indirect creditors (the banking sector) to consolidate the debt; the refusal to go on holding securities with direct creditors (agents of the security markets) is concomitant. The hour of the crisis has sounded, the one which initiates the periodic purging of capital: all the effects instigated by credit money are interrupted in the prolonged absence of final demand. Lipietz has constant recourse to the image of the bird which, in the American cartoon film, pedals frantically in empty space before falling into the abyss: this image is the exact image of the crisis.

What makes the revolution therein? This is the other name for the crisis. As such, it is nothing more than a category of capital. There is still time to abandon the idea that the revolution will produce the end of revolution – that alienation added to alienation, to use a Lévinas-type phrase. *The revolution is something capital brings about every day under our very eyes by continually modifying, and even episodically overthrowing, the conditions of production*. Now, communism is the ensemble of local socializations, which are relational (*Beziehungen*) and not functional (*Verhältnisse*, or relations, precisely the famous *Produktionsverhältnisse* imputed by Marx himself to capital). If it has any chance of enduring through the catastrophe of the catastrophe (*sic*) that is the Agambenian camp as a modern *nomos* of politics, it is necessary to rid the imagination of all modern gewgaws. To these there will succeed notions of parasitic blossoming and of sabotage, even of the interruption of global megamachinism. Nothing awaits the fulfillment of communism less than the development of capitalism. One revolution more will never be the good one, but will certainly deprive *existing* communism of possibly still more chances of survival.

## Right to income

“*Quem vê cara não vê coração*” – The face is no index to the heart, or Appearances are deceptive – is a Brazilian saying that concerns the bulk of the analyses of the economic crisis.

To begin with, it has to be said that the crisis does not only concern the “financial world,” but the way in which capitalism has sought to attribute value and to produce the world itself. While Fordism tried to create the means of social life, post-Fordism invested *social life* itself through a new regime of accumulation measured and controlled by finance. It is precisely the difficulty of measuring the numerous flows that permeate social activity that puts capitalism in a situation of permanent crisis. In other words, the crisis is located right at the heart of capitalism, in value itself.

In Latin America neoliberalism has opened the way to this new regime of accumulation by breaking with the old oligarchical and neo-pro-slavery forces through the rapid insertion of different countries in globalization, the general privatization of services, and the creation of a market that is supposed to merge with social space. But contrary to neoliberal projects, the old and new struggles around citizenship have, since the 1990s, led to an economic and social crisis in the continent that has led to the emergence of new constituent governments and new policies. In Brazil, despite numerous conservative pacts, Lula’s government has inaugurated a series of measures that mobilize a productive society through the distribution of income and access to services and to knowledge. Blind to the old ideology, it is a question of a movement running counter to post-Fordist accumulation that seeks the valorization and not the expropriation of life and of social relations. Today the *Bolsa Família* (Family Allowance) scheme, the world’s biggest wealth distribution programme, involves more than 11M families throughout the towns and cities of Brazil. To a large extent it is responsible for the most important redistribution of income in the history of the country with a significant reduction to the Gini inequality coefficient.

To the economists the global crisis came as a big surprise. While the country’s elite accused Lula of ignorance in relation to the effects of this crisis and of racism vis-à-vis the blue-eyed white men responsible for the collapse, *the number of poor people has continued to fall considerably*. Despite the fall of the GDP between October 2008 and March 2009, more than 300,000 have exited the poverty threshold, leading the ILO to describe the programme as “anti-cyclical.” The same study has proved that, even under the crisis, the reduction of poverty also concerns the unemployed, notwithstanding the diminution of the offer of employment. Thus it is that Lula has not only avoided the reduction of the programme but announced its expansion to 1.8M beneficiaries. This means that in 2010 some 50M people will be affected, directly or indirectly, by the distribution of income.

These few facts confirm the vocation of the right to income to reinforce the networks of social and metropolitan work, far beyond subordination to the wage relation and independently of the dynamic of industrial growth. The Brazilian experience of the *Bolsa Família* shows that citizenship does not necessarily have to pass through the command of capital or through the quantitative increase of employment. What must be distributed are the very means of production of wealth and of rights, so as to make social mobilization possible. Legal and economic theories have long insisted on the separation of freedom and equality. Liberal rights were the “real” rights, while social rights were subordinate to economic policy and capitalist accumulation. Freedom was subordinate to the means of production and the struggle for equality blocked by the absence of freedom.

The radical aspect of the *Bolsa Família* and other programmes of the same kind, the meaning of which Latin American *gauchisme* has difficulty grasping, lies in the real calling into question of economic doxa and in the new opportunities of this break. The distribution of revenue independently of growth and citizenship further to the wage relation represent a strong constituent power that is disturbing and surprising, on both Left and Right, to the “analysts” of the economy. Here, the extent of the conflict becomes real: it involves choosing the destiny of the wealth produced by us all and of the rights that our existence calls for. In backing the *Bolsa Família*, Lula follows the popular saying in order to aim, whatever the distance, at the very heart of the regime of accumulation in crisis.

## Ruse

Defined as the art of deceiving, of dissimulating, the ruse is one of the means reason utilizes in economy, in the world that is ours. More precisely, we can say that reason utilizes ways that turn their back on reason. In that sense, “progress,” taking into account the capitalist relations of production into which it fits, is never progressive in itself, by nature, but has an ambivalent character. It is at once a potential source of freedom and emancipation for humanity, and a means of increasing exploitation and oppression.

Let us cite a few examples. The production of arms, which obviously cannot be said to be progressive for humanity, has, at the same time, been a tremendous impetus to the development of research and innovation. Radar, computers, the miniaturization of electronic equipment, automatic calculating machines – so many inventions of the military sector having eventually fetched up in the civilian. Likewise, military spending, a source of immense danger and destruction for humanity, elicits investments that can “develop employment.” In the USA in 1938, on the eve of the war, the level of unemployment was still 17%, after many years of the New Deal. It was the war that caused unemployment to disappear. The ruse of reason? The 1914-18 war, the source of appalling butchery, would at the same time result in the fall, a sign of “progress” in the exercise of power, of the Russian,



German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. The ruse of reason? The development of machinism in the nineteenth century has signified a potential source of wealth and emancipation for humanity, yet at the same time it led at first to working days of fourteen hours, for children as well. Moreover, this explains why the first workers' rebellions became famous for the smashing of machines. The ruse of reason?

The economic crises capitalism has regularly experienced have a certain number of effects that are conducive to "getting over the crisis." In effect they lead to an increase in profit margins, thanks in particular to the relations of forces that permit a development of exploitation, and a restructuring of capital itself conducive to the economic "upswing." At the same time, crises go hand in hand with layoffs, unemployment, attacks on wages and social services. The ruse of reason? And if we built a world without ruse, in which in order to triumph reason would use the ways of reason? Utopia? Perhaps, but isn't it worth taking the trouble to try?

### Saucepans (Argentina 2001)

If the sound of the drum has long been that of war, a sound meant to light the flame of courage in the hearts of soldiers and of future recruits so that they might go forth and meet the enemy and danger – a noise that so often hid the death awaiting at the end of the road – what might *the sound of the crisis* be?

The first noise that reaches our ears is the clanking of saucepans brandished in the streets for the *cacerolazos*, one of the features of the rumbling of revolt during the economic and political crisis in Argentina in December 2001. Occurring in that period were the country's most important *saqueos* (sackings), the flight of capital abroad, the loss of savings for the middle class, not to mention the closing of factories. If at that time the country went through a period of great instability, one of the more important events was that on the part of the citizens there was a radical questioning of the political class, summed up in the slogan, "*¡Que se vayan todos!*": *Away with the lot of them!* The political class was totally discredited: in most people's eyes it was better to leave the seat of power empty rather than to agree to see it occupied by the professionals of governance. None of the measures taken, such as the state of siege, managed to lessen the deep rupture between civil society and institutional sphere. Seven presidents followed one another at the head of the country in the space of a few months without the least success in restoring "calm" and appeasing a revolt that rejected politicians *tout court*.

Manifested simultaneously in the general refusal of the multitude to delegate its power to the political class was both the choice of the "non-identical," to use Adorno's term, and the political gesture of collective insubordination. La Boétie rightly remarked on this when he observed that power draws its strength from the subordination of some to the commands of others. In that period of "crisis"

politics was construed in the gesture of people emerging onto the street, where they loudly proclaimed their despair and their hopes, seeking to articulate these in terms of experiences and practices. As in the revolt of the *piqueteros*, the factory occupations, the demonstrations, the *escraches* extending to economic and social issues, the self-management, the neighbourhood committees, the invention of a currency local to Buenos Aires, the revival of barter, the free entertainment on offer: all the possibilities of resistance and of invention were mobilized in order to confront the collapse of the economic and political system. These uprisings were thus an inventive and political way of overturning a *de facto* situation, a means of refusing an accomplished fact. Since 2001, those who participated in the movement and in the social rebellions have in fact contributed to re-injecting dynamism into politics by inventing forms of action which draw on spontaneity, novelty and invention. In such a situation the more creative, indeed more eccentric, responses were put forward in an attempt to transcend the established order and the restrictions in force. Even if there has been no visible change to what founds *ensemble being*, all was not lost when the middle classes abandoned the spirit of revolt and its clanking of saucepans.

One of the long-term effects of this experience is to have led to an understanding at the international level of how the neoliberal model offers no guarantees in terms of the development of society. This experience has thus had repercussions on the dominant economic model by denouncing its phantasmagoric *mise en scène*. Long before the USA, Europe and the rest of the world “discovered” its limits in the summer of 2008 and afterwards, it was in Argentina – to the sound of saucepans – that this model first bit the dust in the most brutal kind of way. Today, in the midst of a new crisis, one hopes that in view of the current social situation the saucepans emerge once again onto the street – and that the sound of this crisis is indeed that of invention, of the break on the part of citizens from here and elsewhere with cynical political management. Because, alas, another sonority is readily deployed in the face of situations of capitalist crisis – that of the sirens of populism and of a hatred of others, which are far from offering the same possibilities of transcendence.

## Socializing losses

Are we really experiencing a *crisis* of capitalism, or is it business as usual? The unheard-of sums involved, the thousands of billions of euros atomized in the coffers of the banks, refinanced overnight by the State, evaporated two days later, with the nausea and the giddiness that this cannot fail to cause, all this resembles not only *a* crisis, but – as certain people say and hope – *the* crisis, the “mother of all crises,” the one that will rid us once and for all of the capitalist monster.

Reasonable minds may counter this with the argument that the oldest weapon in the armory of capital is to *socialize losses* after having *privatized profits* (and after having prudently stashed one’s money in Switzerland). That some

small shareholders get diddled in their dreams of small profits, that even huge fortunes get swindled by a highflying impostor, that States are called to the rescue in the name of the general interest to absorb the debts and plug the gaps that have nourished the banquet of the super rich – there, indeed, is the business as usual of capitalism, the way it has periodically renewed itself for many centuries now. You’d have to be exceedingly naive not to see what its theorists have been repeating for decades, namely that *the crisis is business as usual*, its way of developing (by trial and error), of endlessly reconfiguring and redeploying itself (by diastole and systole). There’s nothing new under the sun, the cynics will say.

Let’s go a step further. Can anyone recall a single year in the last three decades when our (rich) countries did not say and feel they were “in crisis”? The discourse of crisis has been permanent since the 1970s, even when the GDP was growing at a rate that might have justified a suspension of the state of economic siege. The business as usual of (recent?) capitalism does not only rest, then, on the alternation of victorious deployments (during which profits are privatized) and periodic contractions (in the course of which losses are socialized); it also rests on a *feeling of permanent crisis* that everyone retains under constant pressure – in order to prevent any form of redeployment based on a logic other than that of the reproduction of capital.

Far from depicting capital in a terminal phase, we might, on the contrary, find signs in it of an astonishing vitality, in that it has managed to rapidly mobilize extraordinary resources thanks to worldwide coordination and to come to the aid of a banking system which serves it as its oxygen intake. Is it not a sign of triumph to see not only the USA, Western Europe, Canada, Japan and Australia, but also Brazil, India, China and Russia quaking in fear in the face of its hiccups (instead of dancing for joy or pouring oil on the flames) and signing joint declarations in order to make sure of its continued existence? Who would have imagined it just twenty years ago?

Whatever the cynics say, there is always something new under the sun. The challenge is to pinpoint just what. The hypothesis of cognitive capitalism is meant to help us in this (tentative) location work. It prompts us to hazard the following intuition: *the socialization of losses is the symptom of the socialism of capital*.

Part of the thesis is hardly new: each time “society” (in the instituted form of the State) intervenes massively to save capitalism from its suicidal vagaries, new areas of productive activity are integrated under the aegis of explicit social control. The process of deployment evoked above in a unilateral way proves to be double-sided, then: on the one hand, of course, the power of the State helps capitalism to redeploy at a vaster scale by buying back (at a high price) its calamitous errors; on the other, capitalism thus finds itself in a position to pursue its exploration work on the amount of activity the State will be able to colonize during the next “crisis.” The gamble of the worsening conflicts that develop during a moment of crisis is to impose as much social control as possible on the captations effected by capital. From this point of view, the moment of the

socialization of losses appears as a moment in the socializing conquest of new productive horizons pioneered by the (eminently risky) expansion effected by the logic of capital.

But what the hypothesis of cognitive capitalism allows us to glimpse is yet different from this. To say that the socialization of losses is the symptom of the socialism of capital is to suggest that *the socialization is anterior to the social control* effected after the event by the State. Even if that has always been partly the case, the thing becomes more and more obvious as production rests increasingly on the production of services and of immaterial goods. What *produces* wealth (and not only what *regulates* or *appropriates it*) appears more and more clearly as pertaining to the *social relations* inherent in social life itself: knowing how to talk, to argue, to convince, to communicate, to learn, to please, to support emotional shocks, to sympathize, to assist, to care for, to comfort, to resolve problems, to organize, to invent, to create – all that partakes of multiple skills that neither a school, nor a university, nor a family, nor a local church, nor a hospital, nor a newspaper, nor an internet site can produce, skills that are built up over the totality of interactions that each individual has with other people within and through these different institutions. To be sure, in speaking of “human capital” the prevailing economism tends to reduce these impalpable and trans-individual multiple skills to those among them that can be individually measured and exchanged for financial revenue. But in recognizing the central role that this “human capital” plays in our current modes of production it simultaneously sanctions the *immediately* social nature of capital.

Such a “socialism of capital” does not by any means constitute the last word in a politics that would purport to be “Leftist.” On the contrary, its elucidation enables us to clarify a triple distinction within the different currents that still claim to be “on the Left.”

A first group, whom we will call *liberal socialists*, consisting of most of those who, since the Mitterrand years, have occupied positions of power in different governments, tries at best to manage the social production of the human within capitalist regimes of the captation and reproduction of wealth (regimes which are, we have seen, in constant evolution). This current tends to recognize that it is “human capital” that is decisive in current modes of production, but it only draws conclusions from this within the framework of the presuppositions of the dominant orthodox political economy, which constitutes the “spontaneous ideology” of the capitalist regime (individualization, productivism, consumerism, fetishism of the GDP, etc.).

A second group, whom we will call *state socialists*, can conceive of an alternative to the regime of capitalist captation only through an extension of the social control effected by the State (generally conceived in its national dimension). In this group we would find the bulk of the forces that mobilize themselves to reject a European constitution which is accused of being “liberal,” that is to say of weakening the powers of the (national) State. The socialization of losses demanded by the current “crisis” gives them the opportunity to promote

their cause, insofar as we are living through a moment of colonization by state power of the productive areas cleared by the wandering of capitalism. The complementarity between the explorations effected by capital and the conquests recouped by the State suggests that we relativize the “opposition” role this Leftist current seeks to play: the dynamics of deployment of the State and of capital have been so intimately interlinked during the twentieth century that their head-on “struggle” may, for that matter, seem like a *mutual dance*, admittedly lively but ultimately extremely harmonious. In restricting its thinking to the narrow framework furnished by the opposition State-Market, this current of “the Left” fits into a dynamic that often proves to be terribly conservative, above all when the modalities of action of the (national, “republican”) State are called into question.

A third group, whom we will call *autonomists*, attempts to escape the twin straitjacket constituted by, on the one hand, the economist presuppositions on which the conception and capitalistic captations of social productivity rest, and, on the other, an obligatory recourse to the State in order to counter the vagaries of the “Market.” On a different wavelength to these two attitudes, both of which largely remain the prisoners of obsolete frameworks, it is a question of pinpointing as precisely as possible what is new under the sun of the immediate socialization of the production of wealth. Difficult and inevitably tentative, the task involves recognizing (and imagining) the new political possibilities presented by the *autonomization* of a labour power that partakes more and more *directly* of a *collective* intelligence, that lets itself be more and more problematically harnessed by the individualizing and reifying logic of the capitalist regime, and which submits less and less willingly to forms of state control that uselessly limit its freedom of invention and association. Far beyond the socialism of capital, this current aspires to everything that can promote *the autonomization of sentient, intelligent life*.

## Spirit capitalism

To the question *What precisely has been in crisis in recent months and in recent years?* it would not be necessarily “idealist” or “mystical” or “reactionary” to reply: *the spirit*. In comparison to its “spiritualist” usages, the word “spirit(s)” has in fact long been used by “materialists” within the framework of investigations of a “scientific” kind. Eighteenth-century physiology gave the name *animal spirits* or *vital spirits* to what today we would consider the nervous impulse that transmits information between the different parts of the nervous system. The alchemists referred to the quintessence of a fluid, such as it could be extracted by distillation or other processes of purification, as *spirit*. Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopedia* sums up such usage by pointing out that “this word has been employed in its proper meaning, by Chemists as well by Philosophers and Physicians, to describe a subtle, fluid, invisible, impalpable body, a vapor, a breath of air, an almost immaterial being.” While the spiritualists turned the Spirit into something that



Phil Collins, *marxism today* (prologue), 2010

descends upon humanity from a transcendent and divine source, the materialists laid claim to the same term and turned it into something which *emanates from the organization* of material beings and which *causes information to circulate* within this organization, in order to get something *subtle, fluid* and *almost immaterial* out of their original coarseness.

After a century of Marxist tradition, which has turned “materialism” into the touchstone of all philosophical seriousness, and which has disqualified any reference to “the spirit” under the irremediable reproach of “idealism,” it is perhaps advisable to call for a return to this term, as well as to a certain tradition of thought that has undertaken the conceptualization of it. On the basis of the Spinozian theory of the *Mens*, of Tardean sociology, of the concept of individuation proposed by Gilbert Simondon, of the image of thought sketched out by Gilles Deleuze, of Anglo-American pragmatism and relationism, one may thus redefine *the spirit* – with Maurizio Lazzarato and Bernard Stiegler – as a regime of the circulation of flows of desire and of belief.<sup>35</sup> And it can be said that such flows of desire and belief constitute the actual (and “almost immaterial”) “substance” on which *power* feeds.

It appears, indeed, that what is now “in crisis” at many levels are, in point of fact, the regimes of circulation of the flows of desire and belief. Stock exchanges

collapse as soon as the flows of hope which animate them dry up. All the ups and down of recent months have turned obsessively around the urgent need to restore *the confidence* on which the entire banking system relies, and through it the entire regime of capitalist production. The index of consumer confidence has become the cornerstone of the entire consumerist edifice: everything has to be done so that households *desire* to buy something that can be sold to them and so that they *believe* they have the money to pay for it. Of course, the crucial role played by the *fiduciary relation* is by no means unique to our era: it is as old as the most ancient practices of lending (or even as the most “primitive” forms of religious faith). The role of desire and belief can only increase, however, as economies “take off” and “take wing” higher and higher above the thresholds of subsistence.

Behind recent crises to do with *finance*, it is necessary, then, to recognize a more fundamental crisis of *fiance*, promise or trust – a crisis of confidence [*confiance*], a crisis of *defiance*. How can we believe a trader who promises that *it* [ça] is going to pick up? How can we believe the evaluation of the specialized agencies? How can we believe the figures proposed by a business plan that calls for finance? How can we believe that the bank won’t go bankrupt tomorrow? These financial questions are, of course, but the tip of the iceberg of *fiance*, on which rests every one of our societies of control.

Now, one of the truths the current “crisis” reminds us of is that *we cannot not believe*. Fundamentalists Christians or fanatical Moslems are not the only ones who cling to their beliefs. We hand over thousands of billions of euros to financially support our own beliefs without however managing to really believe in them... Since we cannot not believe, *fiance* is thus always up for grabs. Capitalism, like Christian, Moslem or Hindu fundamentalism, is only a certain modality of the “magic spell,” of “witchcraft” and of “soul catching.”<sup>36</sup>

The most suitable way to characterize the mode of existence of economic objects in the spirit of capitalism (GDP, rate of unemployment, ratings) is undoubtedly to consider them as what Bruno Latour has called *faitiches* when referring to composite entities that partake of both the *fait* (fact) and the *fétiche* (fetish).<sup>37</sup> Something that human beings have fabricated, but which is endowed with an effectiveness of its own, which is beyond our ken and quickly ends up fascinating us.

The current “crisis” is therefore less a banking, financial or economic crisis than a *spiritual* one: what Alan Greenspan or Bernard Madoff have imprudently played with are our *faitiches*. What we have seen come apart (but which necessarily need to reconstitute themselves straightaway) are our *magic spells*. Rather than speaking of an “economy of knowledge” when trying to say what is central to the developments under way, it would be more worthwhile to speak, henceforth, of a *lack of knowledge of the economy of the spirit*. If the power struggles and developments of capitalism are indeed played out, today, around these questions of the flows of desire and belief, of magic spells, of *faitiches* and of *fiance*, then it is perhaps advisable to re-orientate the hypotheses of “cognitive” capitalism and to re-inscribe them that much closer to *spirit capitalism*.

## Undocumented workers

*"This foreign labour force is a labour force I really love."* The words are Francis Bouygues' and they date from 1970. Far from ceasing with the closing of the frontiers to worker immigration, such a love has managed to be enlivened by the situation of illegality in which the foreign labour force has been widely submerged. It is this insecurity as to their situation – the very vulnerability of their lives – that is the condition *sine qua non* of the ferocious exploitation to which those we call *"les sans-papiers,"* undocumented immigrants, have been subjected.

Deployed at the heart of the enterprise of subordination is an apparatus for the police management – to use the language of Foucault and Rancière – of immigration. Thus, above and beyond the historical comparisons it cannot fail to suggest, the Centre de rétention administrative, or CRA, seems to be wholly inclined towards the displaying of *radical inequality*. It is a question here of the most extreme form of this apparatus, however. Many other experiences come to signify the inequality of all "foreigners" on French soil: that of the visit to the police station where, arbitrariness having the force of law, the foreigner is immediately in the position of the "deferent subject";<sup>38</sup> all work situations under extreme conditions, and the daily round of humiliations and other racist insults they are subject to, ably described for us by Nicolas Jounin;<sup>39</sup> the permanent threat of displacement: "When you leave home in the morning, you don't know if you're going to arrive at work or find yourself in Mali again"; but also all those little things, insignificant when taken separately, but which, placed end to end in a life, seem to permanently intone to these people that their rightful place is not here. "You have to put up with it, you've no choice. You have to put up with the humiliations, all the humiliations. There's no choice, you've got no papers."

What does such an experience of being in the wrong involve? "There's no choice" is undoubtedly the expression that is most often on the tongues of illegal immigrants. The police apparatus reduces these men and women to the status of an *object* and plunges them into a vulnerability that is extreme. What, in these conditions, are the chances of constructing a political *subject*? How, then, can a particular polemical figure emerge that would permit the egalitarian principle to breathe sufficient energy into a negation of the police management of these immigrant populations? It must be understood that this experience of being in the wrong extends beyond those who are simply *"sans-papiers"* – a situation which, when all is said and done, is always contingent – and becomes the experience of an entire "community." Thus, in October 2005, at Château d'Eau Métro station, during a police roundup, the situation degenerated into a riot. Facing S.'s camera, Georges, an illegal immigrant, explained, "People are fed up to the back teeth! It's inhuman what the government do! It's unacceptable! Every time I hear politicians talking about humanity, things like that, I... I feel like bursting into tears! So that's why I'm ready to do anything! To go on hunger strike,



to rebel, to do no matter what to have... some dignity! That's why, I... I can't go on living like this! It's impossible... Impossible." A sudden spontaneous rebellion in the face of bottled-up, permanent pressure. In a way at once more radical, but also more desperate, the burning down of the CRA in Vincennes appears to be particularly meaningful, in view of the emergence of a controversy about the treatment that is reserved for these populations. Only the emergence of a political dimension has nothing mechanical about it. And the despair is also a response to the violence of police logic: self-mutilations, slashed wrists, swallowed razor blades, hangings... Anything goes when it comes to escaping expulsion, more especially as it's often death, if not physical at least social, which awaits them, anyway, if ever they're actually expelled.

This fine dividing line between dignity, violence, rage and despair, where at any one moment things can swing the other way and individuals can lose their heads, seems to be the critical space of politics. The latter comes together in a radical experience of being in the wrong. This involves the intersection of the experience of discrimination, of the unequal relation of North and South, of the thought processes and discourse that structure what has been called the "postcolonial experience," and which is nothing but "the experience of a *hierarchy of beings*."<sup>40</sup> But above all, it is the experience of that extreme vulnerability: in the street in the face of identity checks, at work, to do with health, with housing, the schooling of their children, family relations, etc.; in other words, to do with all forms of sociability. "You're not free. You can't go out. You can't have a drink. You can't move around. The girls don't want anything to do with you." And it is the reason why the experience of the strike, in the little bit of extra dignity work confers, is a fundamental contribution of the "15th of April Movement," launched more than a year ago now by a handful of CGT militants. If the occupation of Saint-Bernard Church in Paris had enabled the occupiers to go beyond their "clandestine" identity and to attain that of "*sans-papiers*," today we pass from *sans-papiers* to *travailleur sans-papiers*, undocumented worker. This new form of the "*sans-papiers* movement" renews trade union practices, and finally half opens up the possibility of its full inscription in the history of social struggles for emancipation.

And what about the crisis in all this? you will ask. In what is in effect a form of "delocalization *in situ*" (according to the phrase coined by E. Terray), the hiring of undocumented workers as a solution to the need to reduce the wage bill (who else can work 70 hours a week and get paid for 35?) could have a dazzling future. If such a phenomenon were actually to develop, it could, coupled with the million extra unemployed anticipated for 2009, only make a recomposition of the lines of fracture all the more imperative, not in terms of identity (French people/immigrants), but rather, to say it rapidly, in terms of the struggle against exploitation, and for emancipation.

## Wasted

One can miss an opportunity, an appointment, a take-off – but can one miss “a crash”? In 2010, it was not uncommon to hear, in France, that we had “missed” this crisis (*On a raté la crise*). Something central to the capitalist system had been shaken, was tottering, could have been made to collapse, if only one had kicked it in the right spot. In light of the billions of Euros spent to rescue banks, the impunity of the wrongdoers, the arrogance of their apologists, the patent absurdity of the system, the obscenity of the bonuses and quickly-recovered rates of corporate profit, juxtaposed with an ongoing surge in unemployment rates and eviction notices, indignation was ripe for a major social movement – which never came. We failed to make it happen. This crash was *a wasted opportunity*. So we hear...

It is true that, in many countries, the crash, its consequences and the reactions they generated, have taken us *backward* in the most worrying fashion. This crisis should have been a warning sign, pushing us radically to alter the course of our socio-economic development. Fear, stupidity, political short-sightedness and vested interests prevented even the most self-evident changes to be enacted. A number of promising governmental initiatives were starting to take shape, before the crash, in order to push towards greener forms of economic development and energy production. The blind obsession to see “the economy recover”, to push GDP to its highest possible level of growth, to make sure capital could flow (again) in the most unrestricted fashion have “suspended” even those timid and dramatically insufficient initiatives. In the name of fighting unemployment, most governments have incited us to purchase more cars (of all things) and to consider shopping as a form of civic duty, a laudable act of solidarity towards our unfortunate (unemployed) brothers. Between securing a few jobs in the car industry and curbing global warming which puts at risk the living conditions of billions of humans, our governments didn’t hesitate: they wisely chose to protect our money rather than our life. Thanks to the slowdown, our emissions of greenhouse gas did not increase (as much) for a few months. Thanks to the return of growth, they are now gleefully shooting up again. From this point of view, we *desperately* need another crash as soon as possible, a much more serious one, big and deep enough to make us finally (or terminally?) stop and think.

And yet, for all this disheartening waste of opportunity, this crisis helped make a few things clearer. First, it showed that the current system will not change by its own internal dynamic. Two years ago, everybody claimed to make sure that we would “never again” let the financial madness drive us to the abyss. One year later, the junk-bond market was more doped than ever before, returning a stunning 58% in 2009. In February 2011, the Dow Jones has recovered its pre-crash level (while millions of people remain unemployed, ruined, evicted).

Financial volatility and excesses are not an aberration of the system, but the standard fix the market needs in order to perform its function. With two possible implications. (a) This much needed more dramatic crisis *will* take place, sooner rather than later, since we're doing all the right things to fall straight into the same trap of 2008. So don't lose hope: just wait and see. (b) As much as we can despise the "greed" of traders and investors, the situation which led to the crash was not (only) a matter of immoral behaviour, but of systemic need for the type of services provided by the financial sector. It is only fitting that rating agencies would distribute their As and AAs with the wisdom of a drunk madman: we are chronically "wasted", "under the influence" (of irrational exuberance), ripe for enrolling in the A(lcoholics) A(nonymous).

Did anybody notice the irony of the dramatic turnaround which took place from 2009 to 2010? Over a matter of weeks, in the fall of 2008, the crash triggered the awakening of countless (long-time as well as newly enlightened) critics of financial markets: "The State is back" was the rallying cry of both vetero-socialists and repentant-neoliberals. Let's mobilize public authority and public money in order to bring order to the financial chaos – and, incidentally, in order to replenish the coffers of the banks recently emptied by corporate negligence. So billions were spent, and sovereign States proudly reinstated their dominant role.

A few months later, however, decision-makers discovered that the coffers of the State were even emptier than usual, and emptier than the banks'. So, with their tail between their legs, our proud sovereign States have had to bow down in front of the same financial markets they had so magnificently (and expensively) tamed, so that greedy investors would be kind enough to purchase the poor bonds emitted to prevent State bankruptcy. If one can speak of "the return of the State", it is only insofar as a wino returns to the bar, or a dog to the master who mistreats him.

This wasted opportunity of a crisis did produce at least one encouraging result. Significantly larger parts of our populations now realize that both financial markets and national States share one common feature: both are *wasted* – pathetically untrustworthy, delusional and dangerous. This was the widely shared feeling of the millions of people who took to the streets of France from September to November 2010. On the face of it, they were opposing a reform of the pension system rolling back retirement age. The slogans, posters and chanting which animated these almost weekly demonstrations expressed a much deeper indignation, which encompassed both the systemic aberrations of the capitalist economy and the hollow posturing of national governments.

It was to be expected that the financial crash would lead to an economic crisis, which would in its turn trigger socio-political turmoil. Even if, so far, we missed the (ecosophic) turn that such a crisis should have accelerated, one can see a pattern of (delayed) reactions emerging all around the Mediterranean, which can be more or less directly related to the crash of previous illusions. From the Greeks to the French, from Spain to Italy, occasionally or obstinately, people have taken to the streets over the past months in order to oppose the austerity

measures taken by national governments pretending to be strangled by the very financial logics they pretended to regulate.

Although in a very different political and economic context, other demonstrators, on the Southern coast of the Mediterranean sea, have recently provided us with an inspiring proof of the awesome power of multitudes investing and occupying the streets. It is probably from the South – here Tunisia and Egypt – that we will have to learn political lessons in the century ahead of us. In the meantime, this crisis has already had a most significant (if still discreet and underground) effect over wide segments of our populations: the sovereign States and their financial Masters may be more wasted than ever, but multitudes seem to be sobering up.

## Zeal

Zeal expresses an ardor, an eagerness, a fervor, even, for the task in hand, which can lead to the latter being done in a thoughtless way and to “making a show of zeal.” That is to say, not only *to do more than is being asked*, which is typical of *real work* (the opposite of which is working to rule), but on one’s own initiative to perform, without being explicitly forced to do so by a system of threat or intimidation, acts that are prejudicial to the interests of others. Zeal has a pejorative connotation, therefore. “In the case of certain holders of public office one had seen an odious zeal spread in the service of the invader,” De Gaulle writes in his *War Memories* of 1959. Today it would seem that zeal no longer poses a moral problem alone but a public health problem, too! Take care: zeal kills! If one is to believe the labour experts commenting on the wave of suicides in big companies in 2007, those who killed themselves at work were recruited from the men and women most committed to the job, the most involved, the most zealous, among the finest. Watch out: work is a killer for those who stick closest to the rules of the neoliberal game. The first affected were those who had an exacerbated professional conscience. The “finest elements,” those who believe in it: in performance, in quality, in the company of tomorrow... They believe in it contrary to all expectations, contrary to the word of the old guard, of the men and women who know a bit about work. They believe in it to the point of despair. But the real is tenacious – one day they get it smack in the teeth, they don’t sleep any more and wham! Exit the finest. We’ll have to make do with the worst. With the time-wasters, the ones who “can’t get out of bed,” have no sense of “merit” and who don’t like dosh. The “bad ones” in the world of work today are those who don’t draw attention to themselves, who continue in the midst of crisis to care for the mentally ill and the old, to open dossiers before signing them, not to lie to their clients, to put things together with real and not pretend quality, to receive students, to take care of others rather than to sell them or to sell themselves. Everyone comes a cropper, let’s admit it, but fortunately, if there’s only one left, it’ll be a bad one, male or female. Maybe we’re finally going to be able to work right.



1. Hannah Arendt, "Le travail," in *La condition de l'homme moderne*, Paris, Pocket, 1994, p. 174.
2. "Dealing with Budget Deficits," *The Economist*, March 4, 2010.
3. "A Special Report on Global Leaders," *The Economist*, January 22, 2011, p. 7.
4. The term *Anthropocene* was coined in 2000 by chemist Paul Crutzen to refer to our age insofar as human behaviour now has a significant global impact on the Earth's ecosystem, to the point of constituting a new geological era.
5. See Yann Moulier Boutang, "Taxe carbone ou taxe pollen," *Multitudes* 39 (2009), pp. 14-21 (available online at <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/>). The original calculations for such a tax had been proposed by René Montgranier at the end of the 1990s. The name *Pollen Tax* refers to the activity of pollinization accomplished by the bees, which is their most important (although invisible) contribution to our natural wealth. Similarly, the Pollen Tax is based on the idea that taxation in the global and informational age should be applied to *circulation* (rather than income, capital or consumption). See Yann Moulier Boutang, *L'abeille et l'économiste*, Paris, Carnets Nord, 2010.
6. On the cognitization of capitalism and its consequences, see Yann Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism* (forthcoming at Polity Press, 2011).
7. "In aggregate, our analysis shows that, despite the financial crisis, the past decade has in fact been a relatively benign period for household wealth accumulation. Global net worth per adult rose 43% from USD 30,700 in the year 2000 to USD 43,800 by mid-2010. Since the number of adults increased from 3.6 billion to 4.4 billion over this period, aggregate household wealth rose by 72%." Adjusted for the depreciation of the USD, "average net worth still increased by 24% when exchange rates are held constant" (Crédit Suisse, *Global Wealth Report*, 2010, p. 6).
8. "The global wealth pyramid has a very wide base and a sharp point. The richest 1% of adults control 43% of the world's assets; the wealthiest 10% have 83%. The bottom 50% have only 2% (*The Economist*, Jan. 22, 2011, Special report, p. 6).
9. On this issue of inequality and its consequences, see Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, London, Allen Lane, 2009.
10. Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle. Outline of an Ecosophy*, Cambridge UP, 1993.
11. On this conception of the common, as well as on the notion of excedence, see Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009.
12. Etienne Balibar, "What is a Politics of the Rights of Man?" in *Masses, Classes and Ideas*, New York, Routledge, 1994, pp. 211-212, available online at <http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpbalibar1.htm>.
13. Galbraith shows that Roosevelt spent \$2,500 billion on American reflation alone. The \$1,000 billion on world reflation seems a rather paltry sum by comparison.
14. Symptomatically, the risk to do with exchange rates has only been examined superficially.
15. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000.
16. Pascal Michon, *Les rythmes du politique, Démocratie et capitalisme mondialisé*, Paris, Les prairies ordinaires, 2007.
17. The central banks define the total amount of liquid assets according to the M3 monetary base. M3 includes coins and banknotes, deposits, savings accounts (savings account type A) and mortgage saving accounts, thus everything that has to do with currency or which akin to it because of its extreme liquidity.
18. See their contribution "Genèse de l'État et genèse de la monnaie," in Frédéric Lordon and Yves Citton, *Spinoza et les sciences sociales. De la puissance de la multitude à l'économie des affects*, Paris, Éditions Amsterdam, 2008.

19. By-products (like collateralized debt obligations or asset-backed securities) are the financial tools deriving from classic financial securities (such as debts) and which depend on them. Thus, securities stemming from the securitization of mortgage credits (a transformation into exchangeable securities) depended on the repayment of these credits. The interest of the by-products was that they theoretically permitted the risks to be reduced by disseminating them.

20. Philippe Zarifian, "Puissance et communauté d'action," in *Spinoza et les sciences sociales*, *op. cit.*, p.178.

21. Credit default swaps (CDS) are financial instruments used to protect a creditor from the risk of default by his debtor. If the debtor defaults, the reciprocal banker/insurer of the CDS buys back the debt security at its initial value, with the risk of bankruptcy if the insurer has not foreseen having to buy back so many securities (as in the case of the US insurer AIG, which had to be nationalized).

22. The risk premium on government bonds is supposed to measure the risk of default by the debtor, here the State. The higher it is, the more the holder of the debt has the right to demand high rates of interest on these bonds.

23. See Deleuze's Vincennes course on *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* of 22/02/1972, available at <http://www.webdeleuze.com>

24. See Frederic Lordon's proposal for a socialized system of credit or the proposals of André Gorz and the partisans of cognitive capitalism for an unconditional income and another way of organizing free time, the first stages in a reflection of this type.

25. See Pascal Sévérac, *Le devenir actif chez Spinoza*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2006.

26. Sacher Masoch, "Basil Hymen," in *Das Eigenthum*, Vol. II, p. 286. Cited by Torben Lohmüller in "The Economic Problem of Sacher-Masochism," in Peter Weibel (ed.), *Phantom of Desire*, Graz, Belleville, 2003, p. 70.

27. Sigmund Freud, "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924), in *The Penguin Freud*

*Library 11. On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, London, Penguin Books, 1991, pp. 409-426.

28. Let us not forget that for Schopenhauer and Sacher-Masoch this "will to life" does not belong to the individual but to the human race as a whole and that no autonomous individuality, free of the will to life, can exist.

29. Gilles Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher Masoch*, followed by *La Vénus à la fourrure* by Léopold Von Sacher-Masoch, Fr. tr. Aude Willm, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1967.

30. The unsigned *Le Monde* editorial, "Retour au réel par la case désastre," plays on the phrase *la case départ*, meaning square one on a board game, to which a losing player has to return prior to starting all over again. [Trans.]

31. *Le Monde*, 18 October 2008, "De quel réel cette crise est-elle le spectacle," by Alain Badiou in the paper's "Débats" pages.

32. The reference to Philip K. Dick is justified, particularly as this text is a "remix" of the preamble of the book by Ariel Kyrrou, *ABC-Dick*, subtitled "We live in the words of a science fiction writer" (Inculte, 2009).

33. *Le Monde*, 10 May 2008, "Hiroshima: ce que le monde n'avait jamais vu," then *Le Monde*, 14 May 2008, "Three suspect photos of Hiroshima," by Sylvain Cypel.

34. Pierre-Noël Giraud, *Le commerce des promesses*, Paris, Seuil, 2001.

35. See, in particular, Maurizio Lazzarato, *Puissances de l'invention. La psychologie économique de Gabriel Tarde contre l'économie politique*, Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2002 and *Les Révolutions du capitalisme*, Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2004, as well as Bernard Stiegler, *Mécréance et Discrédit : Tome 3. L'esprit perdu du capitalisme*, Paris, Galilée, 2006 and *Économie de l'hypermatériel et psychopouvoir* (with Philippe Petit and Vincent Bontens), Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2008.

36. On these points, see Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, *La sorcellerie capitaliste - Pratiques de désenvoûtement*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005 and Frédéric Neyrat,

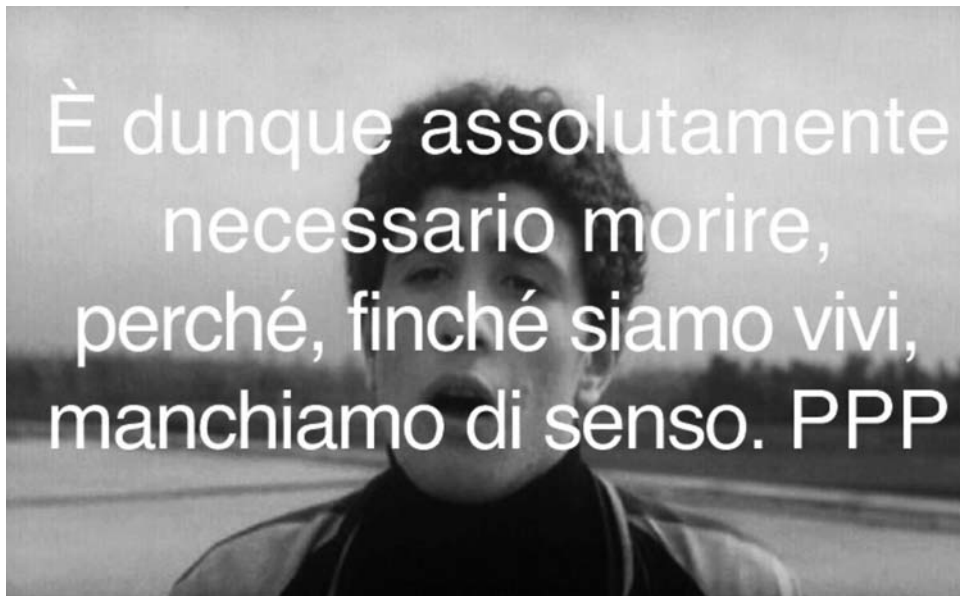
*Instructions pour une prise d'âmes. Artaud et l'envoûtement occidental*, Strasbourg, Éditions de la Phocide, 2009.

37. See Bruno Latour, *L'Espoir de Pandore*, Paris, La Découverte, 2001 (chapter 9), as well as *Petite réflexion sur le culte moderne des dieux faitiches*, Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1996.

38. Alexis Spire, *Accueillir ou reconduire*, Paris, Raisons d'agir, 2008.

39. Nicolas Jounin, *Chantier interdit au public*, Paris, La Découverte, 2008.

40. Patrick Cingolani, *La République, les sociologues et la question politique*, Paris, La Dispute, 2003.



Alfredo Jaar, *Le ceneri di Pasolini*, 2009





Optimismo contra la crisis El oro, un valor seguro ante la crisis

¿Qué hay de positivo en una crisis? Los ricos se ríen de la crisis

*Grandes crisis, grandes oportunidades* *La crisis vuelve al pasado*

Ante la crisis, todos al centro YA ESTAMOS EN CRISIS, ¿QUÉ PODEMOS HACER?

Los independientes, en tiempos de crisis 'La cultura siempre ha vivido en crisis'

Cultura se escribe con 'c' de crisis "En tiempos de crisis, el arte sobrevive"

*La cultura de la crisis* Arte contra la crisis El arte es la única cultura que sobrevive

El arte moderno resiste la crisis Cómo vender una crisis que no tiene precio

Contra la crisis? "Buen precio e imaginación" Una muestra bajo el signo de la crisis

Pack anticrisis "Para superar la crisis, pasión"

*La crisis no es como el juego de la oca* *Las enseñanzas de la crisis*

CONTRA LA CRISIS... grava la pornografía para afrontar la crisis económica

## Thinking the Present: The End of Utopia as a Problem

Alicia Murriá, Mariano Navarro and Juan Antonio Álvarez Reyes

What's behind *Without Reality There Is No Utopia*, the title of the main collective exhibition in *The Political Constitution of the Present* cycle? Behind it are two philosophers of different implications and relevance: Jean Baudrillard and Andreas Huyssen. The former, with his theory of the replacement of the real by the simulacrum, has ended up being perhaps the French philosopher of his generation with the best approach to the analysis of the present, at least for now. Baudrillard has pointed out that simulation is the generation "of something real with no origin or reality." The dissolution of the real in the virtual is not only a good diagnostic of the present, but also a conclusion which demands to be, in turn, overcome. Thus, the interpretation and meaning of *Without Reality There Is No Utopia* follows the argument of Andreas Huyssen in "Memories of Utopia," an article published in Spanish in his book *En busca del futuro perdido*. In stating that once the real has been lost and supplanted by the simulacrum, utopia can no longer exist, since it is intricately related to the superation and improvement of reality, Huyssen premises his argument on, precisely, Baudrillard. This is the meaning implied in the title of the exhibition: Without Reality There Is No Utopia. That is to say, in the age of simulacra and virtuality, the disappearance of the real also drags along the utopian. This is why it is urgent and necessary to reset the real, to return to reality, or, at least, to its analysis, in order to attempt to apprehend a new utopian thought. The current situation demands it.

The project *The Political Constitution of the Present* – which takes up its title from the first chapter of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's *Empire* – has, therefore, in *Without Reality There Is No Utopia* the first stop in its journey, since it is necessary to think the present on the basis of what is available, trying to find a way to set one's feet on the ground. The second part of this project, to be produced soon, will attempt to rethink the future, and will be called *What Is To Come Has Already Arrived*, since it will consist in the research of the utopian signs that are already here, among us, within the previous analysis of the real.

*Without Reality There Is No Utopia* consists of two asymmetric sections. The first section is "Description of the Lie," a kind of incredulous prologue to the systems of production of the simulacra of the real. In that section, there are two pieces, two videos, which engage human scepticism and its current drift. On the

one hand, we have William S. Burroughs, reciting Bertolt Brecht. On the other, Alfredo Jaar, who recovers the analysis on Pier Paolo Pasolini.

The second, broader section, is entitled "Collapses," although it could just as well have borrowed Baudrillard's term "Implosions," since contemporaneity can be described as an implosive situation. This second section is in turn divided into four collapses: the collapse of Communism, the collapse of Capitalism, that of democracy, and that of the geo-political. That is to say – according to Huyssen – "Utopia never dies alone: it drags along its counter-utopia." Therefore, the fall of Communism drags along its counter-utopia – Capitalism – which in turn drags along democracy, since the latter linked its destiny to it. The likely collapse of the expansive system typical of Capitalism – Colonialism – would, in turn, involve a geo-political "implosion." For these reasons, we should seriously consider the end of Utopia as "our problem," the problem of our times, since, as Huyssen points out, its scope "is much greater than we would like to admit." We should, therefore, urgently rethink and recalibrate the real, since, Without Reality There Is No Utopia.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE LIE

Philosophers such as Christian Salmon – member of the Centre for Research in the Arts and Language – have described and analysed a contemporary phenomenon which goes beyond, and is different from media manipulation and censorship as defined since the first decades of the twentieth century: *storytelling*, or the machine to fabricate stories. A system to impose ideas, generate sense and control the behaviour born in the U.S.

Art hasn't been, and isn't unrelated to the narrative operations of *storytelling*. In a deliberate ambiguity, it both denounces the excess of publicity or propaganda marketing, and deploys similar formulae in its production of meaning. "We all need our own story. This is the vulnerability that *storytelling* bases its strategy on." And, by force of its strength, it also builds itself an imaginary.

The section borrows its title from the sixth poetry book by Antonio Gamoneda, dated between 1975 and 1976, *Descripción de la mentira*. A decrying, and a warning, of the deceit and fraud through which



El Roto, cartoon published at *El País* newspaper

representation (or its more common formulation, the word) weaves the real of the reality it covers up. The lie as will and as a tool for the representation of the world, extended like oil and multiplied by the media of reality constitution of the truth of all there is.

A reality that has become more and more evident, both in the resources used in Communist political systems, which have almost vanished in Europe with the turn of the century, and in the multiplicity of false narratives constructed in order to endorse the Iraq War, or, more recently, in the inflation of economic stories which take over the informational horizon and, at the same time, dilute realities and responsibilities.

The irruption of pieces of information provided by Wikileaks has not only made evident the known facts of double standards, covert operations, protection of certain crimes, and other similar miseries of the relationship between the powerful and their more or less legitimate representatives. It has also established,

more or less clearly, the nature of the rules of conspiracy for the elaboration of the deceitful stories spread through public opinion, and, also although collaterally, how communication media are, really, filtering systems for the information to be disseminated, hidden, and, above all, the information that certain interests want to skew.

German artist Wolfgang Tillmans simulates contemporary encyclopaedic knowledge in a series of works that reproduce the information reproduced in print media on diverse issues under the common umbrella of "the truth." The works of Spanish artist Pello Irazu and Argentinian-Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija allude to the capacity of modification and propaganda content of the news published in print media, however different the topics covered, be it the War in Lebanon or the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers.

Spanish artist Dora García penetrates the offices of the sinister Stasi, the ideological police of the German Democratic Republic, which had become a society within society, with its own internal rules. Danish artist Lene Berg, in turn, deconstructs the happy image of a free and educated society, revealing how many of the actions we consider intellectually nevertheless respond to plans laid out by the powers that be in order to ensure their supremacy. Finally, Argentinian artist Judi Werthein explores the anomalous construction of identities in the Renacer Colony, founded in Chile's Araucana by Germans connected to National Socialism, who fled the German war defeat.

## COLLAPSES

### 1. Communism

The final leg of the decade of the 1980s was an involved witness of how the spectre that had haunted it since 1848, with the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels, and had been a solid and dominant figure in the Soviet Union, in Eastern Europe and part of Asia after the end of World War II and the Korean War, would vanish from the Russian and Western horizons – except for the shadow of some lonely spectre – and would only continue to howl in some parts of the Far East, where it has either entrenched in famine and horror, or where, on

the contrary, it has experimented one of its most extraordinary and contradictory transformations: that mix of political Communism and economic Capitalism that characterizes China.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Soviet Union, the Reunification of Germany, and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, with the subsequent progressive inclusion of some of its countries to the European Union, not only accounted for first-class geostrategic and economic changes, whose consequences are still being paid by the citizens of these countries, and those of Western countries in general, but which also involved, ideological and programmatic changes of extraordinary depth, the final structure of which has been definitely consolidated, while simultaneously positioned in its appropriate perverse and damaging perspective by the ferocious crisis triggered, only two decades later, in the very sustainability of the Capitalist system and its single thought discourse.

The political situation derived from these events has experienced different narratives, according to circumstances, vantage points and distance from the extinct USSR. Currently, some democracies, almost comparable to the de facto pre-existing ones, combine this with authentic autocracies, countries submerged in criminal structures, and other that could hardly be considered autonomous entities. But both remain equally silent in terms of autonomous political thought.

The Russian collective Chto Delat? (What Is To Be Done?), with its Leninist historical resonance, makes the viewer critically engage the events during the presidency of Mikhail Gorbachev and the beginning of the 1990s that lead to the demise of the Soviet system. The video of British artist Phil Collins delves into the personal experience of those who, as is the case of his three teachers from the German Democratic Republic, saw themselves obliged to replace all their social structures, historical systems, political conventions and civil assumptions with those that up until that moment had been considered the wrong enemy, and subject to bourgeois Capitalism. On the other hand, Ciprian Muresan shows a false silent story with which he convinces us of something as impossible to believe as is the statement that Communism, in fact, never existed, allowing a double reading of that very sentence. Finally, Manolo Quejido explores his

personal feelings regarding Cuba, in a manner in which the clarity of thought regarding the current situation doesn't preclude his empathy with Cuban citizens, the recognition of their dignity and the Revolution they encouraged and in the circumstances of which they live.

## 2. Capitalism

The economic crisis triggered between 2007 and 2008 caught the governments and a good number of economic analysts unaware, as if it were a case of a strange, illogical, unforeseeable fact, independent from the economic policies adopted during the past three decades. "The crisis is interpreted not as the inevitable result of the instability of the unregulated financial markets themselves, but as the effect of the lack of honesty and the irresponsibility of a few financial agents out of the control of public powers," as is pointed out in the book *Manifesto of Terrified Economists*. Many voices are raised against these policies, that underscore the urgent need to reset economic thought, and powerful social movements are born that demand a kind of sustainable development, not premised on consumerism, waste and the depletion of the planet's resources.

Nevertheless, in order to amend this crisis, those responsible for triggering it are called upon, as indicated by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, "(...) looking for its solution in the very ideas and behaviours that fostered it." A new terminology is being put in place, and concepts such as "to calm the markets," the translation of which is no other but the reduction of gains for the workers, their precariousness and the general retreat in their social benefits, measures that, paradoxically, don't seem to help in alleviating the situation. "Much as you downsize, you won't wake up with a job," stated a sticker worn by participants in the demonstrations that took place in Madrid in autumn 2010 against the plans for economic cuts on workers.

The project, produced jointly by Antoni Muntadas and Rogelio López Cuenca speaks of the crisis with irony, starting out with an adaptation of language and of its configurations to musical scales. On the other hand, Rirkrit Tiravanija, an artist engaged in weaving socialization connections opposed to those imposed by Capitalism, based on unbridled consumerism – what Ulrich Beck summarizes in the concept of

“organized irresponsibility” – with *Fear Eats Away at the Soul*, a series of canvases where he continues with the set of ideas already postulated in *The Days of This Society Are Numbered*, uses news articles published in German newspapers between September and October 2008, that reflect on the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, a decisive fact in the triggering of the current economic crisis. In the meantime, Daniel García Andújar, in *Timeline*, brings together a wide range of images from media and advertising in order to configure a subjective chronology where different events from the post-Capitalist period are narrated.

From a different vantage point, in *The Financial Crisis*, the Superflex collective parodies this situation with humour. Through a fictional narrative, it describes the situation as if it were an illness that could be cured through hypnosis, a healing that, finally, will only be possible if we leave the establishment. Also through fiction, Jan Peter Hammer, with his piece *The Anarchist Banker*, explores, in a narrative plot that follows the structure of a TV interview, the ultra-liberal positions of the financial workers that turns individualism into the foundation of human behaviour. Andrés Rábago, hidden behind his pseudonym El Roto, offers a clear answer to this question with his cartoons and his telegraph-like comments, which mix irony, dark humour and sarcasm, in order to compose a start portrait of our present. From a different point of view, Katya Sander seeks to engage the spectator, involving them along with the characters that burst onto the screen, in order to answer, over and over again, the same question: “What is Capitalism?”

### 3. The Geopolitical

The tide of popular rebellions that have spread throughout the Maghreb and the Middle East in the last few weeks have caught the West so off guard, that they have plunged it into the greatest confusion. First Tunisia and then Egypt saw how the peaceful popular pressure, headed by the youth, brought down the governments of Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak. The riots in Morocco, Argelia, Bahrain, Yemen and Oman take place with different degrees of intensity, and, in all cases, are violently repressed. In these first days of March, Libya is the scenario where repression adopts its most unbridled brutality. In the meantime, the paralysis affects the democracy of the developed

countries who are witnessing these projects by turning a blind eye, and appear surprised that their own good allies, suppliers of raw materials and great business, could be so tyrannical with their own people.

How are we to understand this confusion and this extreme slowness in reacting on behalf of Western democracies? It is obvious that the weight of economic interests is key. But, intertwined with these interests, we have the ignorance and prejudices that identify the Arabic world with radical Islam, the lines of thought according to which, in those contexts, the weight of religion makes it impossible for them to develop democratic forms of coexistence. All these attitudes are permeated by a set of prejudices that perpetuate the shadow of the colonial heritage, as well as the belief that the rights, freedoms and welfare of societies can only come from the experience of the West. In opposition to this exclusionary and totalizing nature of modern rationality, we have the statements of Walter Mignolo, when he refers to the fact that the “unfinished project of Modernity,” can only be realized when the “unfinished project of decoloniality” has taken place, understanding the idea of coloniality as the “cultural logic” of colonialism and its heritage; a heritage which survives, and multiplies, even when the domination of colonial power has disappeared.

The goal is to focus the spotlight on certain realities that shape the resent; to map, describe, analyse, expose power configurations, decode, deconstruct, re-read, discover what lies behind the inherited images, behind History as it is being narrated, and to explore the geopolitical reconfigurations generated by the new relationships of global domination. It is a case, finally, of “opening up the code the visual frame, showing its reverse, exhibiting its entrails,” as pointed out by García Andújar. Some of these questions feed the work of Fernando Bryce, who engages representations of colonial practices and their “civilizing” discourses. Through a collection of posters, Lebanese artist Zeina Maastrí, researches the different narratives between text, image and transmission of discourse among the groups participating in the civil war in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990. Meanwhile, Ignasi Aballí traces a cartography of international conflicts through the cold operation of accounting their media presence, and Zhou Xiaohu produces a

critical discourse on media and their capacity of manipulation and concealment. On the other hand, Federico Guzmán points out how the consequences of the FTAs, a new form of global coloniality, affect the everyday practice of citizens.

#### 4. Democracy

While broad movements arise that demand access to political systems based on rights and freedoms which they have been refused for decades, the signs of decline in these conquests are obvious. “Democracy – the formal and substantive, representative and participatory, procedural and material – is not currently going through its finest hour,” states Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, who points out how “After September the 11th 2001, there has been a shift (...) which tends to give democracies a huge discretion to downsize freedoms and apply enforcement policies.” The excuse of terrorism is effectively exploited by the U.S. while developed Europe wields immigration in its “defensive” strategy, strengthening its frontiers and cutting minority rights within, all that with the agreement, in both cases, of large sectors of the population.

In the face of these dynamics, there are other voices, that question the democratic model premised on highly structured traditional political parties, and their alternation in government and in voting as a simple act of citizen participation. Technological development allows a global-scale control which was unimaginable only a few decades ago, but which, once an almost absolute surveillance and control have been made possible, where the notion of privacy has been eroded, has opened up the doors to a new phase in terms of information transmission, communication and unmediated relationship among individuals, which is revealed, in an extraordinary manner, in the deployment of new forms of organization.

Ed Hall, with his banners, builds a kind of micro-history of social struggles of the recent decades in England; and Artur Żmijewski, in his work *Democracies*, shows concentrations of people in different parts of the world (Belfast, Berlin, the West Bank, Gaza, Warsaw, Strasbourg) collected both in anti-war protests or repression, as playful and celebratory events, where the human body becomes the centre of attention.

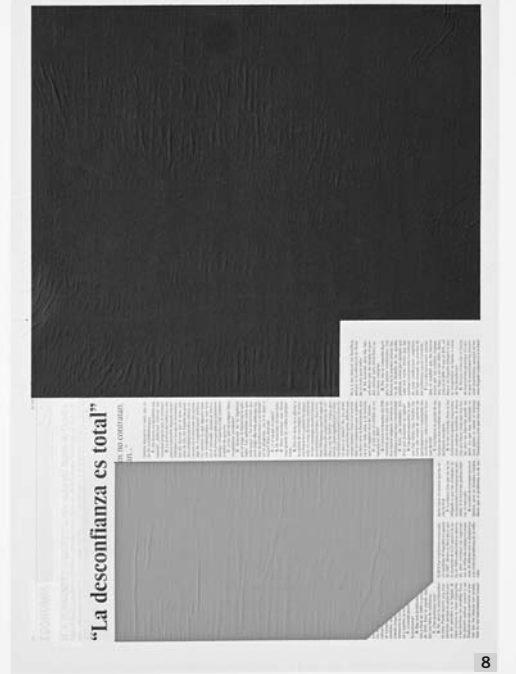
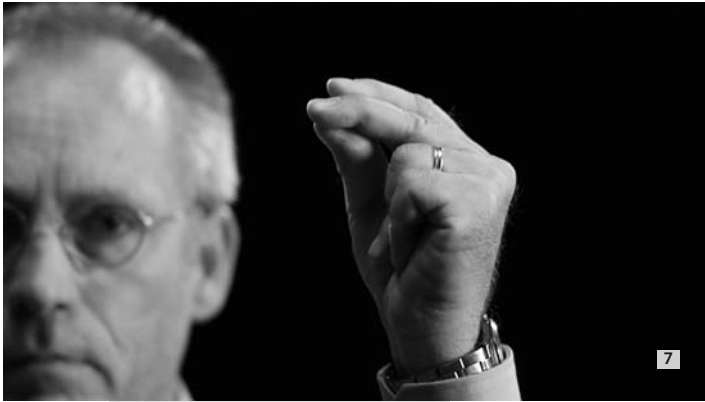
Sometimes it is simply a case of compelling and collecting the voices of citizens, as does Carlos Motta in his analysis of what is democracy and what it means today, a research project that has lasted for four years and which is titled *The Good Life*. His inquiry is not far from the one raised by Oliver Ressler, determined to note that there are other ways of understanding, of deepening, of extending what we understand as democratic systems. In *What is Democracy?* Ressler interviews philosophers, politicians, activists and concerned citizens in order to delineate other forms of economic and political intervention, of individual and collective development. In one of these interviews, German sociologist Heinz Dieterich points out that “the objective conditions are much more prone to a truly participatory democracy. I think there has never been a better chance of having a truly direct democracy than the one we have today.”



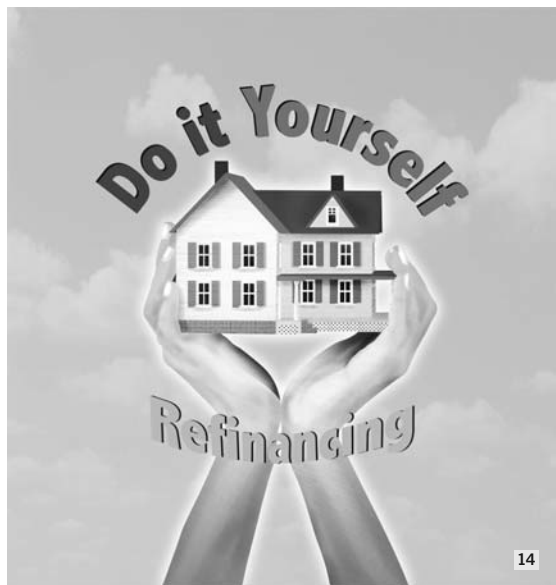
EL DINERO TIENE QUERENCIAS, LO ENVÍAS A ÁFRICA PERO ACABARÁ EN SUIZA

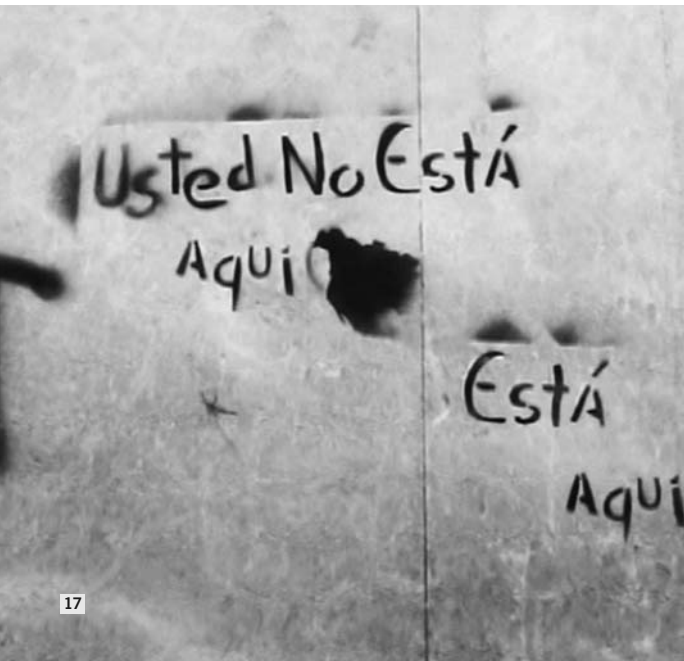






1. Lene Berg, *The Man in the Background*, 2006 2. Federico Guzmán, *La bella embalada*, 2007 3. El Roto, cartoon published at *El País* newspaper 4. Phil Collins, *marxism today (prologue)*, 2010 5. Jan Peter Hammer, *The Anarchist Banker*, 2010 6. Daniel García Andújar, *Postcapital 1989-2001. Timeline*, 2004 7. Superflex, *The Financial Crisis*, 2009 8. Pello Irazu, *La desconfianza es total*, 2009 9. Fernando Bryce, *Kolonial Post*, 2006 10. Dora García, *Rooms Conversations*, 2006 11. Ed Hall, *Poets for Peace*, 2003 12. William Burroughs, *What Keeps Mankind Alive?*





13. Nikolay Oleynikov & Chto Delat?, *Perestroika Timeline*, 2009 14. Muntadas, *Do It Yourself*, 2009 15. Wolfgang Tillmans, *Kepler Venice Tables*, 2009 (detail)  
16. Katya Sander, *What is Capitalism?*, 2003 17. Carlos Motta, *Graffitis ideológicos*, 2005-2008 18. Zeina Maasri, *Signs of Conflict: Political Posters of Lebanon's Civil War (1975 -1990)*, 2008 19. Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Angst essen Seele auf*, 2010 20. Artur Żmijewski, *Democracies*, 2009



## Without Reality There Is No Utopia. Works in Exhibition

**Ignasi Aballí**

### ***Listados (World Map, 2010)***

(List – World Map, 2010 – )  
2011, collage on paper, 110  
panels, 32 x 23 cm each  
Courtesy of the artist and Galería  
Estrany-De la Motta

Exploring what time builds and mapping the world through the images, words and figures through which we codify it is one of the main points of interest of Ignasi Aballí's work.

A labour in which the unfolding of events and the process of collecting and archiving that the artist must go through for the compiling of the materials making up each piece are put at the same level.

*World Map* is integrated within a project whose first part was created in 2009, which collates the names of all the countries appearing in the headlines of news items published in the daily *El País* during the course of that year in any of the newspaper's sections. It is the ones from 2010 that are now compiled and quantitatively ordered. A map in figures whose analysis provides a few surprises and measures the appearance and disappearance, the mass or exceptional presence, of the countries and the events in them according to their notoriety and their liking for news. Only the size of the letters gives a hint of the importance of the news from which it proceeds. (Mariano Navarro, MN)

**Lene Berg**

### ***The Man in the Background***

2006, video-installation, 20'  
Courtesy of the artist

For almost twenty years (1950-1967), Michael Josselson and his wife Diana were one of the most famous and well-received American couples in Europe. He was organizer in chief of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an institution that published books and magazines, programmed conferences, and carried out many other cultural and artistic activities on which eminent European intellectuals of the day collaborated.

In actual fact Michael was an agent of the CIA and Diana his accomplice in one of the agency's most unlikely and at the same time effective undercover operations. From intellectual positions that were on many occasions openly American they consolidated the idea that the Communist world was a danger to, and fearsome enemy of, freedom, art and thought.

Lene Berg's video – a single sequence of private images of a trip by the Josselsons to Western Europe in 1958 repeated seven times, with various voiceovers that narrate different events to do with the life of the couple – is more interested in their personal position and their convictions, in the value judgment merited by their behaviour, and which Diana Josselson describes in an interview filmed in 2003. (MN)

### ***Encounter: Gentlemen and Arseholes***

2006, book

The second part of the project is the reprinting, in the form of an altered facsimile, of the first number of the magazine *Encounter*, published in 1953, in which intercalated alongside the original

texts are others, collected over a long period of time, that address questions, events and matters that were never clarified in the publication itself. Just as it was never revealed until 1967 that *Encounter* was in fact financed by the CIA.

"Lene Berg seeks to raise a critical awareness of history as a source of knowledge," writes Caroline Ugelstad. "Through creating puzzles of narratives, she questions how 'official history' relates to subjectivity as well as how and on what grounds we can assess the consequences of art, literature, philosophy and research? Did the CIA use artists and intellectuals for their own good, or was it in fact, just as much the other way around? Was the CIA immoral or not? Is an artist under any obligation to be honest?" (MN)

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**Fernando Bryce**

### ***Kolonial Post***

2006, installation, 111 drawings,  
ink on paper  
MUSAC Collection

The work of Fernando Bryce (Lima, 1966) takes the form of different thematic series of black-and-white drawings done in ink. The artist carries out an exhaustive amount of research in archives and newspaper libraries, salvaging forgotten images and graphic materials, which he minutely reproduces by means of what he calls his "mimetic method of analysis." On being selected, reproduced and reorganized, this immense wealth of forgotten documentation acquires a new

eloquence. The 111 drawings that go to form *Kolonial Post* focus on the colonial practices pursued by Europe and the United States in Asia and Africa, practices which, notwithstanding their “civilizing” and modernizing discourse, have merely sought to obtain cheap natural and human resources there. Wearing different masks, such political, economic and financial interests have perpetuated themselves after the triumph of the movements that brought independence to those countries, thus strangling their development. With this sort of exercise in rewriting Bryce radically questions the manner in which history has been narrated, thus shedding new light that helps us re-read not only the past but also the present. (Alicia Murria, AM)

### William Burroughs

#### *What Keeps Mankind Alive?*

Video, 2'45"

Writer William Burroughs (St. Louis, Missouri, 1914 – Lawrence, Kansas, 1997) recites the famous “What Keeps Mankind Alive?” from the song “Denn wovon lebt der Mensch?” that closes the second act of *The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht (Augsburg, 1898 – Berlin, 1956), accompanied by the music of Kurt Weill (Dessau, 1900 – New York, 1950), which was given its première in 1928, a year before the onset of the Great Depression, and became a huge theatrical success in Berlin before the arrival in power of the Nazis.

*What keeps mankind alive? The fact that millions are daily tortured, stifled, punished, silenced and*

*oppressed. Mankind can keep alive thanks to its brilliance in keeping its humanity repressed. And for once you must try not to shriek the facts. Mankind is kept alive by bestial acts.*

Première two years later, with the crisis now under way, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* was a prolongation of the above, in which Brecht made another terrifying statement:

*Brutal is the hurricane, more brutal still the typhoon. But worst of all is the human being.* (MN)

### Phil Collins

#### *marxism today (prologue)*

2010, HD video projection, 35'

Courtesy Shady Lane Productions

The audiovisual work of British artist Phil Collins questions the supposed impartiality of the documentary tradition, using this as a point of departure for dissecting the power of the mediated gaze.

Combining contemporary documentary-style interviews with archival film material from the time of the German Democratic Republic, *marxism today (prologue)* (2010) reflects upon the lives of three former teachers of Marxism-Leninism who saw their knowledge devalued and professions desist with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. (Luisa Espino, LE)

### Chto Delat?

#### *Perestroika Timeline*

2009, acrylic painting on wall realised by Nikolay Oleynikov

Chto delat? / What is to be done? is a Russian collective made up of

artists, sociologists, critics, philosophers and writers who take their name from the novel of the same name by Russian writer Nikolai Chernyshevsky, which in turn inspired Lenin for his 1902 political pamphlet *What Is to Be Done?* Chto delat? move in the space that exists between political theory, art and political activism, and use the iconography, terminology and slogan style typical of Communism.

*Perestroika Timeline* is a chronology based on a study made by three of the members of the group – Thomas Campbell, Dmitry Vilensky and Nikolay Oleynikov – in which the most important events of the 1980s and 90s in the USSR are presented. To do this they fall back on a mural painting in which they combine text, maps and portraits of both historical and anonymous figures. (LE)

### El Roto

#### *Original cartoons published at El País newspaper*

Ink on paper, 33.5 x 30.5 cm and 37 x 30 cm

Andrés Rábago uses the pseudonym “El Roto” – in the past he has had others, Ops, Jonás, Ubú, each with a different objective – to address the immediate events of life, those which concern us as individual subjects in society, without for all that ever restricting himself to observations or comments about a piece of news or people in particular. His characters are the collectives which through their conduct and objectives go to form the world we know. El Roto's way

of looking at things is, as he himself says, an oblique view that clarifies areas of confusion, thus helping us to decide what is truth and what lie. Satire, and not humour, is an aid to upsetting the grey areas of human behaviour. His drawings in black and white, in which the clarity of the drawing and the forcefulness of an assertion, phrase or simple exclamations of anger or astonishment predominate, are inseparable in the mind of the reader from his lucid description of the horror of contemporary existence. (MN)

#### **Daniel García Andújar**

##### ***Postcapital 1989-2001.***

##### ***Timeline***

2004, 114 digital prints, 50 x 70 cm each

*Timeline* forms part of *Postcapital Archive (1989-2001)*, an ambitious project that Daniel García Andújar (Almoradí, Valencia, 1966) has developed through different lines of research, media and formats (photography, video, installations, Internet). In it he explores the media imagery and ideological stereotypes generated between two extraordinarily resonant moments in recent history. Alongside this, the work reflects on the very nature of the archive, on the mechanisms of ordering, compilation and representation that are used to categorize knowledge.

*Timeline* brings together a series of images proceeding from the media and advertising that configure a subjective chronology in which diverse events pertaining to the postcapitalist phase are narrated. This kind of visual diary is rounded off with an advertising

image taken from a South African magazine in which we read "The world can change in a day," a slogan that is confronted with two photographs, one of the Berlin Wall taken on 8 November 1989, and another of the World Trade Center taken on 10 September 2001. (AM)

#### **Dora García**

##### ***Rooms Conversations***

2006, video, 28'

Fundación ARCO Collection  
CGAC, Santiago de Compostela

The work of Dora García (Valladolid, 1956) is characterized by its ongoing attention to two fundamental concepts, alterity and control. In relation to the first, in her recognition and exploration of the idea of the Other she includes the actual spectator, invited or obliged to interact with the work. From this and from control are derived other motifs such as fear, authority and the use of information.

*Rooms Conversations*, a piece produced entirely in Germany and largely shot in the original offices of the Stasi, portrays the paranoid state of surveillance generated in East Germany by the Communist authorities and their political police force. To the conversations and actual shots created by the artist are added others realized by some of the non-official collaborators of that police State, which, removed from their historical context, nevertheless reveal the routines by which hostility, supervision and spying instituted. (MN)

#### **Federico Guzmán**

##### ***La bella embalada***

(The Hurtling Beauty)

2007, fibreglass, polyester resin and steel, 425 x 175 x 175 cm  
CAAC Collection

Created for the exhibition *Los límites del crecimiento* (Madrid, 2007), this sculpture project returns to images and ideas from some of Federico Guzmán's earlier projects, such as *Copilandia* (Copyland). More specifically, it is based on a performance carried out in Cali (Colombia) and entitled *Violento mercado* (Violent Market), in which he juxtaposed two allegorical elements – fruit and a steamroller – in a social context where the Free Trade Agreement with the United States was being debated.

Fruit can be understood as a symbol of local natural wealth, and in the performance it is threatened by the machine, by the supposed modernity and domineering wealth that comes from the North (from the United States), imposing its devastating logic. However, in *La bella embalada* the pile of fruit continues to grow and ends up covering the steamroller, in what could be interpreted as an act of natural resistance.

This piece addresses questions of geopolitics and contemporary colonialism, but other issues – especially economic and environmental ones – are also present. Ulrich Beck once pointed out that "the dogmatic free-market economics imposed throughout the 1980s (...) has exacerbated environmental risks and problems." In other words, in a globally interconnected world, the expansion of ultra-liberalism



creates geopolitical tensions in what Walter Mignolo has described as a state of “global coloniality”

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### Ed Hall

#### **ASLEF Arnos Grove**

2001, applique and fabric dyes painted on cotton, 2 x 2m

#### **Lambeth NALGO Womens' Group**

1987, painted with fabric dyes on cotton, 2 x 2m

#### **Poets for Peace**

2003, painted with fabric dyes on cotton, 1,5 x 2,5m

#### **Jean Charles de Menezes**

2005, applique and fabric dyes painted on cotton, 2 x 2m. Protest banner

#### **Just Peace**

2008, applique, 2 x 1,5m

Courtesy of the artist

The banners Ed Hall devises have a utilitarian and functional value, but also go back to a historical tradition that has been interrupted. Through carefully and imaginatively constructed images he identifies certain moments of social protest, creating a sort of iconography of resistance. Hall is a London-based activist who for twenty years has been creating these sorts of handcrafted banners which preserve the style and aesthetic of those that accompanied demonstrators throughout the nineteenth century and up to the Second World War, a moment in which they ceased being made due to their extreme laboriousness. Hall is an architect who, since his

retirement in 1997, has centred his activity on the disinterested manufacture of these banners for all the social and political movements he sympathizes with (pro-Palestinian movements, sex workers' rights, trade unionists against company closures, feminist or anti-Nazi groups, etc). Through them a micro-history can be traced of the struggles waged during the last two decades in the UK. (AM)

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### Jan Peter Hammer

#### **The Anarchist Banker**

2010, HD installation, stereo, 30' Courtesy of the artist

This work draws its inspiration from a short story by the Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa. Published in 1922, the tale deals with a fraud that shook the economy of Portugal around that time. This event undermined the credibility of the currency and sapped the confidence of the Portuguese in the First Republic, thus becoming the breeding ground for the military coup of 1933 that would usher in fifty years of Salazarist dictatorship. Pessoa's story is structured as a conversation between a banker with anarchistic ideas and his secretary. Jan Peter Hammer adopts the same schema, but the conversation reproduces a talk show programme between a banker and a TV presenter, who questions him about his take on the financial crisis of 2008. The radical defence of capitalist logic undertaken by the financier emphasizes how neoliberalism undermines any possibility of democratic cohesion and takes individualism to be an axiom of human behaviour. (AM)

### Pello Irazu

#### **Vivir sin destruir**

(Living Without Destroying) 2009, painting and tape on printed paper, 65 x 50 cm Courtesy of Galería Soledad Lorenzo

#### **La unión hace la fuerza I y II**

(Unity Makes Strength) 2009, painting and tape on printed paper, 65 x 50 cm (each) Courtesy of Galería Soledad Lorenzo

#### **Cambiaremos el mundo**

(We'll Change the World) 2009, painting on printed paper, 65 x 50 cm Private collection, Bilbao

#### **La desconfianza es total**

(The Distrust is Complete) 2009, painting on printed paper, 65 x 50 cm Courtesy of Galería Soledad Lorenzo

#### **Summer Rain**

2006, 3 paintings on printed paper, 132.5 x 124.5 cm (each) Courtesy of Galería Moisés Pérez de Albéniz

These four paintings by Pello Irazu (Andoain, Guipuzcoa, 1963) form part of a larger group entitled, like the first picture in this series, *Vivir sin destruir* [Living Without Destroying], which is rounded off with *Summer Rain* (2006), the code name of the military operations conducted by the Israeli Army in the Gaza Strip during the summer and autumn of that same year. In *Summer Rain*, Irazu uses paint to obliterate the texts on the newspaper page, leaving just the photographs of



ruins and rubble as an ultimate trace of the inflation of identical images that are repeated ad nauseam in various media, and which conceal the actual reality of things. "The fact is we don't remember through photographs, or else we only remember the photographs." In the paintings, on the other hand, it is both image and text that remain hidden, apart from phrases akin to civil outbursts that lose all meaning or else slither off in unpredictable directions, turning, paradoxically, into images which condemn the ideology that gives them birth. (MN)

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#### Alfredo Jaar

##### *Le ceneri di Pasolini*

(The Ashes of Pasolini)  
2009, video, sound, 38'  
Courtesy of the artist

Using a documentary structure, Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar (1956) produces an homage to the figure of Italian filmmaker and poet Pier Paolo Pasolini, murdered in 1975 in circumstances that have never been explained.

Through material taken from Italian public television, clips from his movies and various documentary sources, Jaar creates an extraordinary collage-portrait of an intellectual committed to his times, whose radically critical analyses of the society in which he lived still have extraordinary resonance today. The title alludes to *The Ashes of Gramsci*, a poem in which Pasolini alludes to the Marxist theorist and speaks of the "politics of ashes" in relation to the conflict between memory and the politico-ideological obfuscation

practiced by power. The documentary also recoups the editorial Pasolini published in 1975 in the newspaper *Il Mondo*, in which he pointed to the responsibility of the Italian political class in the delirium of the citizenry, a historic document that in the opinion of various analysts gave rise to the murder of one of the intellectuals who was most bothersome for the political class of his time. In this video Jaar, whose work has been characterized by its ethical commitment, creates a moving account and reflects on the commitment of an artist whose stature has only increased with the passing of time. (AM)

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#### Rogelio López Cuenca / Muntadas

##### *En tiempos de crisis...*

(In Times of Crisis)  
2009, vinyl signs on wall, photographs, serigraphy on paper  
Courtesy of Palma Dotze Galeria d'Art

The collaboration during 2009 of artists Rogelio López Cuenca (Málaga, 1959) and Antoni Muntadas (Barcelona, 1942) gave rise to the project *En tiempos de crisis...* (In Times of Crisis), formed, in the first instance, by a panel consisting of 36 phrases taken from newspapers and other print media which contain the word "crisis," highlighted in red, and are to do with statements and contexts specific to the sectors of the economy, the world of culture and the social sphere.

The artists emphasize those relating to art, on account of their optimistic forms of expression, belied by reality, which point to a

desperate hope of survival, whatever the circumstances: "Art paints well with the crisis" and "Modern art resists the crisis." A note informs the spectator of the original source and date of publication of each quote.

A bit further on, a no less important group of individual Muntadas images – all of them, barring one painted in the past, created specifically for the project – which contain advertising slogans that inspire consumer confidence, and others by López Cuenca that on various occasions reproduce earlier works with a social and political content. (MN)

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#### Zeina Maasri

##### *Signs of Conflict: Political Posters of Lebanon's Civil War (1975-1990)*

2008, posters installation,  
5 x 16 x 1 m  
Courtesy of the artist

Zeina Maasri is Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Graphic Design Programme at Beirut University. Over the years she has compiled, studied and analyzed the posters – in the exhibition there is a selection of more than fifty of these – produced by the different factions fighting the long civil war in Lebanon from 1975 to 1990.

Her interest does not in the least bit lie in elucidating who was right or who ought to have come out on top in the conflict, but how the distinctive narratives of the different parties and factions were composed, and what the relationships between text, image and transmissible discourse are. Similarly, suggestions and messages reveal the social and

ideological background of their authors. These aspects are applicable to the analysis of other productions of a similar kind in circumstances that may be radically different to those of a war. (MN)

#### Carlos Motta

##### *Graffiti ideológicos*

(Ideological Graffiti)  
2005-2008, 20 inkjet prints,  
35.56 x 27.94 cm (each)  
Courtesy of the artist

In 2005, Carlos Motta (Bogotá, 1978) embarked on a piece of work whose objective was to create a huge archive with the opinions of the citizens of twelve Latin American capitals (Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Ciudad de Guatemala, La Paz, Managua, Mexico City, Panama City, Santiago, San Salvador, São Paulo and Tegucigalpa) as to the perception in different contexts of the continent of the interventionist policies of the United States, about social inequalities, leadership, democracy and above all about what it means to be a citizen and an active subject in society. *La buena vida* [The Good Life] is the result of a compilation of almost 400 interviews and documents that adopt different formats (an installation, video recordings, photographs, the publishing of a newspaper and of two books with analyses by different authors, as well as a website that offers all these materials: [www.la-buena-vida.info](http://www.la-buena-vida.info)).

Presented here is the visual archive, which includes photographs and video stills of a wide range of social aspects (street

art with political slogans, graffiti, scenes of religious practices, photos of monuments to failed revolutions, demonstrations, etc.). Grouped geographically and thematically, they constitute a reflection of different Latin American societies and their contexts. (AM)

#### Ciprian Muresan

##### *Communism Never Happened*

2006, text, vinyl from propaganda records, dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist and Plan B Cluj / Berlin

Ciprian Muresan (Cluj, Romania, 1977) grew up in Eastern Europe in the years immediately prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall. By employing a slogan as emphatic as "Communism never happened," Muresan appropriates the techniques typical of dictatorial regimes, which make use of authoritarian discourses capable, even, of eliminating from history all trace of the individuals and events that are awkward for them.

The installation-phrase consists of twenty-two letters created from gramophone records of political propaganda. In this way, and without losing their original function, they go from being sound objects to become something visual capable of starting a chain reaction of revisionism. (LE)

#### Manolo Quejido

*Por aquí pasa 1*  
(*de Las Américas*), 2008

*Por aquí pasa 2*  
(*Osama*), 2009

*Por aquí pasa 3*  
(*El Gran teatro*), 2008

*Por aquí pasa 4*  
(*Es pa ná*), 2009

*Por aquí pasa 6*  
(*Se vi yá*), 2009

*Por aquí pasa 7*  
(*no es un sueño*), 2009

*Por aquí pasa 8*  
(*reír jugar danzar*), 2009

*Por aquí pasa 9*  
(*bla bla bla*), 2010

Acrylic on canvas, 130 x 195 cm

##### *Por aquí pasa 5 (work)*

2009, print on paper

##### *PorCubAndo*

2008, print on paper. Series of 12

Courtesy of the artist

During his long artistic career Manolo Quejido has alternated between different concerns and interests, which have nevertheless remained continually present in his oeuvre. These include a preoccupation with self-referential painting and potential replies to the question, Can one paint at this precise moment of History? Or the variants and language games that construct specific images of the ideas behind them. Or, finally, the contradictions existing in dominant political and civil systems in various parts of the world.

Since 6 January 1990, when he embarked on the now abundant series of works of different kinds that make up the *Papeles de la Guerra* [War Papers], the latter aspect has been prevalent in his labours, as a way of not turning a blind eye to what Politics

represents today in the disorder of the world.

In varying techniques and formats, the canvases, digital prints and postcard series – the works that go to form *PorCubAndo* – were conceived on a January 2008 trip to Cuba and its emotional impact on the artist, who expressed his desire to take away with him a “wad” of small versions of the Cuban flag in order to work on top of them, and, playing with the letters of a concrete poem, to ponder the reply to the question, What can we do right now with our desire for revolution?

Contrary to the pressure and the urgency it is subject to, and above and beyond the disgraceful things that happen there, the dignity of the Cuban people and its capacity for growth in time and space is recognizable here. (MN)

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**Oliver Ressler**

***What is Democracy?***

2009, 8 channel video-installation, 2h30'

Courtesy of the artist

The piece of work Oliver Ressler presents in *What is Democracy?* consists of interviews done in fifteen cities (Amsterdam, Berkeley, Berlin, Berne, Budapest, Copenhagen, Moscow, New York, Rostock, San Francisco, Sydney, Taipei, Tel Aviv, Thessalonica and Warsaw) with political activists and analysts. To all of these he poses the same question, yet in practically every instance this question takes on a different nuance and conveys to us the unsatisfactory nature of the Western democratic model, a model

which continues, however, to represent an ideal for dozens of countries and hundreds of millions of people. The video is divided into eight chapters in which from different perspectives an analysis is made of the principles that governed the modern idea of democracy dependent on the notion of development, the parliamentary system, and the political crisis of the current Western democratic model. While some of the interviewees underline how the neoliberal tendency in politics and economics – prevalent since the 1980s – has led to a regression in democracy, other voices posit the need to articulate forms of direct democracy. (AM)

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**Katya Sander**

***What is Capitalism?***

2003, projection, mirrors, 10'14"

Courtesy of the artist

*What is Capitalism?*, by Katya Sander (Denmark, 1970), consists of a film back-projected onto a screen situated between two mirrors placed at ninety degrees to it, a setup in which the spectator plays his part as a further protagonist. A stage-like space is thus formed in which there appears a desolate rural landscape that given its extended horizon evokes the landscapes of the winning of the American West by the pioneers. In it there appears a succession of people who irrupt without warning onto the screen and who, approaching a microphone, respond to the same question: “What is capitalism?”

Articulated in everyday language, their replies reveal that it is difficult, not to say impossible, to define the economic structure and ethic in which we have decided to live in a discourse based on experience. (MN)

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**Superflex**

***The Financial Crisis***

2009, video, 12'25"

Courtesy of the artists and Nils Staerk Gallery Copenhagen

Superflex is a collective of Danish artists comprising Bjørnstjerne Christiansen, Jakob Fenger and Rasmus Nielsen, which since 1993 has created projects that explore themes to do with democratization, consumerism and the environment.

In *The Financial Crisis (I-IV)* they approach the economic crisis as if it were an illness or a psychosis that can be cured with hypnosis. And so a hypnotist installs himself in the darkened room the video occupies and invites us to accompany him on a journey through different potential scenarios. In the first session, *The Invisible Hand*, he provides an introduction to the spinal column of capitalism. In the second, *George Soros*, a major investor's fascination for speculation is described. Irrupting into the third, *You*, is the feeling of fear when one loses job and home. And arriving in the last, *Old Friends*, is the tranquility produced by exiting the system. It is here that the lights come on again, indicating that the session has ended. (LE)

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**Wolfgang Tillmans*****Kepler Venice Tables***

2009, 3 tables, wood, glass, C-prints, photocopies, ink jet prints, off-set prints, polaroid, paper, aluminium foil, 93.3 x 405 x 252 cm

***New Year Table***

2009, wood, glass, C-prints, 83.3 x 45.3 x 197.2 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Andrea Rosen Gallery Inc., New York

An insatiable consumer and collector of images, in *Truth Study Center* Tillmans has brought together dozens upon dozens of visual documents from different sources that address a wide variety of themes of differing depth and profundity, from those of major importance to others that come close to banality. Among other aspects, this display-case installation itemizes the fragility and random origin of our convictions.

Using printed paper and photographs, the *Kepler Venice Tables* explore the universe. The *New Year Table* is closer, a neighbour almost, cheek by jowl with the near future existing on Earth.

"Only by accepting the unsolvable nature of certain questions, while investigation continues despite everything, without respite, is how the tackling of reality seems feasible to me," the artist has stated. (MN)

**Rirkrit Tiravanija*****Angst essen Seele auf***

(Fear Eats Away at the Soul)  
2010, canvas, newspaper, acrylic, 58.5 x 82 cm each. Series of 21

Courtesy of the artist, private collections and neugerriemschneider, Berlin

Intent on creating social ties contrary to those imposed by capitalism, which are based on unbridled consumerism, and an activist against development based on the depletion of planetary resources – what Ulrich Beck sums up in the concept of "organized irresponsibility" – Rirkrit

Tiravanija, whose name has become popular due to his open events around food that he himself cooks, mounted, at the beginning of the last decade in the Thai city of Chiang Mai, a transdisciplinary communal project called *The Land*, a laboratory of self-sustaining development in which to test new models of living and relating to the land. One of the Thai-Argentinian artist's most recent projects is a series of canvases entitled *Los días de esta sociedad están contados* (This Society's Days Are Numbered), which analyze the news-gathering models of the newspaper industry, and whose continuation is the series presented in this exhibition. In it Tiravanija uses news items published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in September and October 2008 featuring the collapse of Lehman Brothers (the fourth largest investment bank in the United States), whose influence was decisive in unleashing the current economic crisis, and which he has called *Angst essen Seele auf* (Fear Eats the Soul). (AM)

**Judi Werthein*****Secure Paradise***

2008, video, 15'

Courtesy of the artist and Figge von Rosen Galerie

The work of Judi Werthein explores the process of construction of individual and collective subjects, paying particular attention to the dynamic origin of identities. Through the language of mass culture she presents the stereotypes of Western capitalism from a different perspective.

In the video *Secure Paradise*, Werthein portrays life in Colonia Renacer, a settlement in the Chilean region of La Araucanía peopled entirely by Germans exiled from their country after the Second World War. Despite their exile and their relocation, they preserve intact their European customs and their physical look, all this in manifest dissonance with their immediate surroundings. The Argentinian artist draws her inspiration from *Nazi Literature in the Americas* by Chilean writer and poet Roberto Bolaño, a novel written in the form of a literary dictionary in which each chapter corresponds to the biography of a fictitious American writer with a relation to Nazism, in this instance Willy Schürholz. (LE)

**Zhou Xiaohu*****The Crowd of Bystanders***

2003-05, mixed media, sculpture, video  
CAAC collection

Originating in graphic design and computer animation, the most famous works of Zhou Xiaohu

(Changzhou, China, 1968) are ceramic miniatures modeled by the artist himself that combine space with their animated versions for projection in video, which “dramatically” represent news items and international events that depend for their media repercussion on such staging and dramaturgy or are themselves images censored or suppressed in the media.

*The Crowd of Bystanders* brings together ten informatively distinct scenes, extending from a boxing match to the electrocution of a condemned man, or from a court in session to the birth by Caesarian section of various babies to a single woman. As in others in the exhibition, Zhou Xiaohu’s works are deeply critical of the media and their manifest capacity for the manipulation and concealment of real events. (MN)

football championships and military parades to funerals of public figures, war victory commemorations, and protests against wars or territorial invasions. By capturing human multitudes on film, Żmijewski’s work focuses on analysing the political use of public space, the dominant social conditioning in each situation, or the form that public opinion and freedom of expression take in these mass meetings. It is an empirical work on group behaviour where one of the most significant elements is the soundtrack, which captures what we might call the deafening roar of the human race. (AM)

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## Artur Żmijewski

### *Democracies*

2009, 20 video films, 2h26’  
Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Peter  
Kilchmann, Zurich, Foksal Gallery  
Foundation, Warsaw

The series of monitors that comprise the video installation *Democracies* shows crowds of people who came together for a wide variety of reasons and purposes. The 23 documentary shorts were filmed by the Polish artist Artur Żmijewski (Warsaw, 1966) in different places around the world, including his own hometown, Berlin, Strasbourg, Belfast, the West Bank and Gaza. The reasons for these gatherings are remarkably disparate, from

- Windsurf
  - Kitesurf
  - Wakeboard
  - Diving
  - Land speculation
  - Political corruption
- and more!



Rogelio López Cuenca. *Holidays in the Sun*, 2008

## Memory for an Imperfect Future

### Alfredo Rubio Díaz

As I begin writing this text in mid-December 2010, what we call reality creates a feeling of revulsion. In the name of the inevitable we are being led towards another world. One composed of a viscous flow of words that, all but unanimously accepted, construct us. All of them refer to inevitable issues. Pronounced by academics, teachers, politicians, journalists and a notable variety of “experts,” they form a dense mass that suffocates us.

Europe hopes to shelve its strange, labyrinthine and agonizing construction of the ideal city (M. Zambrano) and to remove its mask once and for all: as occurred with certain categories in the old *polis* of ancient Greece, immigrants will not be citizens – just a pure, naked workforce with no other quality. Old Europe seems to break up as the last, precarious basis of something “better,” something different and impossible. As I write this essay different emails arrive, sent by the deeply concerned. In one of them it says, “Moody’s threatens to lower Spain’s rating (...) they introduce labour reform and prepare that of pensions (...) an unemployed man kills a local bank manager (...) The Government wants to put AENA, the Lottery and the few sticks of furniture that remain on the market (...) Berlusconi laughs at Italy (...) 100 demonstrators hurt in Rome in confrontations with the police (...) Portugal receives the IMF Inquisitors (...) Ireland taken into administration (...) The markets begin to be suspicious of Belgium (...) Eighth general strike in Greece (...)”.

We talk, among ourselves, about refusing. About the power of saying no. But this doesn’t mean a hesitant and even rhetorical negative that goes on awaiting consensus. It’s a no with the radical power of refusal. Intransigent. I shall write about an oeuvre that emerges, precisely, from the power of saying no. About an artist who incriminates himself through holding certain positions.

I believe there’s a primordial soup, the site of whichever issue Rogelio López Cuenca brings up: the city. Dissolved, it’s true. But the imagination and the persistence to go on making its possibilities visible remains (to us). And so, what he announces as a resource is to make the common and community emerge. He literally confesses to dreaming of modes of resistance in the company of others. He does not, of course, plan to create the city through physical intervention. It remains reiterated, as if crystallized forever, immovable since those first formulated

statements: the practice of city planning is illusory. Now, as a new bit of information, we might maintain that it is simply cynical.

What his gaze reveals is the pairing of order and disorder. Within the city, order and disorder are indistinguishable. Actually, in the capitalism of yesterday and today disorder is nothing but a further expression of order. No order exists in the Tres Mil Viviendas in Seville, or in Málaga’s La Palma-Palmilla District, or in the Atunara de La Línea (Cadiz), to name but a few Andalusian examples. They are the inevitable outcome of mechanisms that impose exclusion and its ever more marked extension. But there’s no need to let oneself be dominated by the obvious. Ghettos are but a single, symptomatic expression of a much broader process of the accelerated destruction of the social. In that sense the interesting thing is not an analysis of certain apparent anomalies but of the spaces of also apparent normality. The interesting thing is not to go as explorers to the ghetto but to the middle-class residential areas. It’s true that there exclusion seemingly does not reign but the dissolution dominates of social ties, the absence of relational capital, urban funambulism as an everyday practice, barrenness. In the metropolis the normal state is isolation, an outcome, perhaps, of the social adoption of a first phase of the scientific position, the “as if,” from which derives the habit we’ve acquired of living “as if” we were not in the world. A profound state of absence or somnolence.

The desert one alludes to here forms part of the meaning of capitalism as a process of destruction. It affects all fields and leads to the progressive desiccation, now of ecosystems, now of everything to do with social ties. Methodical destruction holds sway. In that sense the general environment surrounding us is a desert, experienced as a spectacle of progressive desiccation. What dominates is the poverty of the world, a result of the lack of experience, of the loss of the ability to interpret the signs of nature and of ecosystems, but also of those emitted by actual individuals (Tiqqun).

I felt tempted to write an academic text but I gave up on the idea, albeit finally, and inevitably, with regret. I was hoping to reveal something like the ground and the atmosphere out of which Rogelio López Cuenca creates things. Or in other words: about what transfixes him. What is his background?

Who has influenced him? What does he read and what has he read? But I abandoned the idea of a perfect report on the artist.

I'm relatively familiar with his genealogy; his techniques for manipulating the icons of our society, his associations, decontextualizations, parodies, reutilizations and experiments. I'm not forgetting the Situationist aspect, one that's more than orthodox, even. All the same, to me a quick glance at his immense body of work (precise, meticulous and hardly rhetorical) made me think of Walter Benjamin at his most decisive. I ask López Cuenca about the "Angelus Novus" and he replies, "it's the overall idea more than the motive," and, he adds, "'The Arcades Project' is my bedside book". This reply reassures me since it allows me an overall idea of my own, which I take to be fundamental in his work: memory. There is a rejection to be situated on the plane of the conventionally historical and, although there are references to history and the use of its set of tools, what is visible is precisely that art interrogates such conventional history. On the other hand, in his works there is nothing akin to conformist allusions to heritage, or to the historically artistic or to that terrible expression, the promoting of it.

It has been long since that Benjamin, one of the most brilliant culture critics of the twentieth century, posed, with regard to historicity and historiography, the problem of the meaning of history as process and the limits of the practice of History. In a context it is perhaps inconvenient to dwell on right now, the operation he made use of consisted in introducing memory in such a way that both fields were rendered problematic. By doing so he hoped to shatter hegemonic discourses on the orientation of the historical process. What in all probability he was proposing was in fact a new theory of history and not just something reduced to the field of memory.

It is well known that Benjamin (who used the word *Eingedenken*: remembrance, recollection or recall) directed his critique at historical materialism, which he sought to take elsewhere, to another founding origin. What interests us here about that project is the idea of the superiority of memory vis-à-vis historicist positivism, which contrives, at most, to consider memory as a supplement, a pure accompanying material, to which it will never grant an essential place. The critique of History as a discipline is confined to the moment in which it was put into effect

by Benjamin. Not to have done it this way would mean that History as a discipline had not undergone substantial changes since the 1940s, which does not invalidate Benjamin's idea that History is always a discourse of the victors.

In Benjamin, memory takes on a new value. If memory quits the realm of sentiment and turns into a specific method of knowledge, History, historicism (historicisms) and the meaning of History (the philosophy of history) are transformed into critical locations. Memory shatters its models; there is an implosion of the placid nature of the internal debates of historicism (and historians) and the security of those who attribute any meaning to the historical process, whatever it may be. Benjamin indulged in a polemic at the time with different kinds of historicism and with the Philosophy of History by attributing a dissolutive value to memory: as a locus that contains the suffering of the vanquished, it is radically opposed to the words of History which, in his analysis, would always be those of the victors. The suffering of each generation and the accumulated suffering of different generations get in the way of accepting the inevitable nature of the collateral damage that accompanies historical becoming.

We could speak about this term on many levels. On the one hand, on the hermeneutic level we would be referring to an activity that renders the invisible visible. On another level, we might refer to memory in terms of recognition.

If from Benjamin we have taken the idea of memory as that which causes a certain discourse to dissolve, it is precisely because it foregrounds a divergence: it calls for the idea of redemption as restitution, as freedom from pain and from a negative situation. We refer to what the "Angelus Novus" sees: the past, *tout court*, as a place of established destruction and pain (predictably). Thus, without the memory of injustice there is no possibility of justice. Maybe what it proposes to us is the relationship between truth and critical activity aimed at the cancellation of objectivity, impassiveness, apathy and neutrality.

What appears is not really the "duty of memory," but rather that new categorical imperative which consists in rethinking truth and politics. Rethinking the truth, watered down in postmodernity, which involves the parallel dissolution of the lie, means not reducing reality to facticity, means recognizing that



the nobodies, the nameless, the non-subjects, the victims and the vanquished form part of reality. One deduces that it is obligatory to rethink politics, since barbarism questions progress as the logic of politics (R. Maté).

An inevitable pathway unfurls: if one considers that the production of victims must be accepted as completely normal, as the mere collateral damage of an inevitable, ungovernable process, with its social, human and ecological costs (the latter are not usually added), it seems obligatory to think about the relationship between politics and violence, which is always difficult when we abandon the rhetoric of anti-violence, since it has to be recognized that violence is part and parcel of the human animal and, on the other hand, that containing it is the objective of becoming human.

And so, history reconsidered in terms of memory is presented to us in different ways: the deconstruction of constructions of the Moorish past without Moors (Al-Andalus) which inevitably makes reference in contemporary terms to the frontiers of today; the migrations and processes of fermentation in the cities of these new, disavowed citizens. Hanging in the wire mesh of a frontier zone are the trainers of those who tried to jump over. The internal frontiers of the cities, which break them up and prevent people from thinking about community, even. Identities as prisons with profound frontiers.

The list tells us restitution has no expiry date. There it is, ever in wait of someone to make it visible, with or without witnesses. Thus, it is possible to trace different routes (the flight of the people of Málaga along the Almería road in 1937) or streets or squares forty years later, until coming across the plaque recalling Giordana Masi, the Radical Party student killed by the police in Piazza Belli in the Transtevere district of Rome in May 1977. Those policemen, the military wing of others, killed the dream.

Although we may continue to be convinced that history is a book with blank pages that experts write in so as to bestow meaning, what art suggests to history are other possibilities. It has been claimed that



Málaga, Ciudad Picasso, 2011

Rogelio López Cuenca formulates hypotheses with the aim of breaking with unilateral discourse, proposing more histories, made up of documentation, witnesses, words, places and traces that have restitution and a recovery of the forgotten as their goal.

This focus has even more importance when he interrogates territories and landmarks swamped, today, by thematized pressure. More extensive territories laid waste by tourist experiments and turned into places for non-experience.

Piled up in the windows of souvenir shops for “low-cost tourists” are takeaway souvenirs. The forms are analyzed of the appropriation of differences on the part of capitalism in its search for monopolist income. We know that exceptionality and particularity are crucial in the defining of “special qualities,” and with but a few exceptions – “no product can be so exceptional or so special as to remain totally outside monetary calculation” – all that can be turned into a commercial product will be.

But capitalism has limits when it comes to the process of capturing differences: the contradiction, in this respect, is that the more commercial these products are, the less exceptional and special they

seem. In some cases commercialization itself tends to destroy any exceptional quality. In a more general way, the more easily they are commercialized and the more easily they are subject to duplication through falsifications, adulterations, imitations or simulacra, the less capacity they have for constituting the basis of a monopolistic income (D. Harvey).

The tourist who arrives in Timbuktu in search of the material nature of what was recounted in one of the tales that made of the city a legend will only find the urban route leading him to the different houses European travellers lived in during their stay there (Adams, R. Caillié, H. Barth y O. Lenz) and a threatening gesture of sorts pointing out the grand mosque. This tour is superimposed upon and conceals the history of the city and its past and current reality, including the “spatial” expressions of beliefs and their rituals; its architecture and landscape; the complexity of its local neighbourhoods, and doubtless the cultural function it had. As in travellers’ writings, in which no enthusiasm is noticeable since they perceive no physical expression (real estate) of the lavish that might find concrete form as a sign (monuments), the programmed experience of the tourist evaporates in the face of its absence, as one reads in the travel blogs that some people upload onto the Internet. The only important thing seems to be that the city was visited by those European travellers (M. Aime). These tales are a condition, as now are newspaper articles, guides, counter-guides and all that documentation that is generated in order to produce the urgent need to live through an experience. As a rule, a generalized embezzlement of meaning is produced by tourist practices.

López Cuenca’s gaze does not overlook the local concretions that are in the immediate vicinity: thematized Nerja; Málaga and its “Picassoization” and vice versa; Málaga’s candidature as European cultural capital for 2016 or the rhetorical construction of an Andalusian identity capable of performing as a political and tourist global image. In the aforesaid episode of the killing of the student Giordana Masi, the leading role belongs to the tourists of programmed ignorance who traipse around the Eternal City. All the same, his critical position at each moment in the process he is immersed in seems to deepen when he gives an account of the territories more immediate to him; for example, with regard to the candidature of the city of Málaga, he writes the following: “My

disagreement with the ‘cultural capital’ format is based on a rejection of the reduction of artistic experience to mere spectacle, its cannibalization by the logic of business, its subordination to city marketing, its dependence on geotourist strategies, and the concentration and squandering of public resources on grand cyclical events.”



*Bienvenidos, 1998*

Expropriation rules. Rogelio López Cuenca works in that endless supply of accentuated expropriations. He doesn't use the expression 'society of knowledge,' but rather 'cognitive capitalism.' In terms of the territory, his position implies the idea of territoriality; that is to say, the necessary consideration of the active condition of a population as a creative entity that, in certain cases, confronts the twin, normative and performative capacity of planning on different planes and, in others, the condemning of a territory to the unilaterality of its destiny as a tourist destination. The active conversion of the residential occupation of the territory involves a transferring of property (social

capital) and the legal regulation that is city planning.

The appeal to the expropriation of the community in relation to the managing of cities is no different. Memory usurped, re-elaborated and transferred as identity, a creator of frontiers, like the one in which the being of something ends, presupposes the elevation of the city to a subject. This being an impossible condition, it serves the objectives of power to speak in its name and to occupy it for whatever design. In the city-subject community is not only relegated – it is also dissolved.

The common is neither a logical concept, based on reason, nor an economic one (relating to production). It is essentially political: “The common is that in which one has a part or that in which one takes part” (F. Jullien). That which is shared and that in which one participates. It is precisely there that Rogelio López Cuenca seems to want to be, the idea being that it is sharing which forms the basis of our belonging to the same city.

The common may be a closure in which those concerned can believe they have their property. That is the permanent risk of closing oneself in by providing oneself with an identity and a frontier. Upon opening up from the sharing, the closing of those who are sharing may occur in a second, crystallizing moment. It is possible to go beyond this deceptive closure, however. But it may also be a deliberate option if what one desires is to consciously found (to create with others) a number of elements of the common in the city. According to Jullien it is possible to go beyond such closing if we proceed from the *munus*, the incumbent nature of the gift understood as duty. Hence a poetic acceptance of the original reciprocity of the debt which renders meaningless the supposition of being full (individualized) subjects capable of “arranging” their (our) biography. As has been said, for those full subjects “community would be nothing other than an excrescence, almost.”

Rogelio López Cuenca's work also coincides with Benjamin's definition of the experience of the aura as allowing humans and things to look up, to restore to them their right to a face. This is probably the reason why memory, here, is also of and for the future. It places the clues to our time before the eyes of future others. Information that could be stolen through the exercise of that history which does not warn of the gravity of collateral damage or which, at best, makes it banal.

We have always dealt with that tale of light and darkness; of night and day; of the opposed times of sun and moon and their intervals (daybreaks, nightfalls, auroras). A way of thinking that appears more cyclical than dialectical; which recalls a ladder more than a spiral. Something along the lines of: there was a time of light that became dark, or, also, we shuttle between days/times of light and days/times of shadow.

Historical time as a succession of splendours and periods of dark. I'm referring, of course, to a way of seeing ourselves and of inserting ourselves into reality, the evaluation of such insertion included. I believe it's not at all clear that we've had some effective daybreak available to us, which was inevitably followed by a light-filled morrow, an ambiguous dusk and a dark night. The Angel swept along by a strong wind only perceives devastating destruction and knows that there is nothing different to follow. I suppose we've always been in the dark and could not recognize it because we lack the reference needed for discerning the light. If we were really capable of seeing the luminous, its brightness would make us blind once more. Day would be the modality of the night we are in. So that, in conclusion, not knowing where we are is exactly our form of being somewhere, one typical of this work. Due to all this, the artist says he is in a process, somewhat unfinished, but one supplied with an ethic incapable of assuming the impossibility of the best as something already given.

There is no night of any kind or metaphor necessary to creative activity. Only that which passes and we it is who are making and interpreting ourselves (producing meaning).

## Apropos of *Cercanías*, a Reading of Representation

Helena Chávez Mac Gregor



The exhibition *Cercanías* (Outskirts) by the artist Rogelio López Cuenca that is on show at the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo is a work of criticism which, in various ways and via different works, permits us to reflect upon one of the most violent forms of domination of the West's civilizing logic: representation.

From a complex cartography of a territory consisting of symbolic centres and peripheries, López Cuenca puts together a route map of the region that relies on history, memory, Orientalism, migrations, tourism and iconic personalities to draw attention to a fabric created by policies of domination. *Cercanías* lets us focus on the territory, not as localism but as a way of exploring the epicentre of a political formation based on the epistemological and theological forms of Spanish modernity. Aesthetic and political formations that cannot extricate themselves from the Reconquest

and the Conquest, and which, as the philosopher Eduardo Subirats<sup>1</sup> claims, involve a series of political, linguistic, religious, intellectual and ethnic expulsions and exclusions that we cannot overlook.

In a *mélange* recalling the labours of the archaeologist and the archivist, the work of Rogelio López Cuenca permits us to encounter, in art, a device for cultural critique that at the same time as it analyzes the conditions of possibility that prop up the system of representation in the Western world, and in particular in the Spain of today, causes its real condition to vanish. By working, on the one hand, with the obsessive compilation of images and documents, and on the other, with the repetition of signs and signifiers, López Cuenca interferes with the index of representation in order to question the supposed correspondence between what is presented, the sign or the image and its meaning. *Cercanías* may be

thought of as a political act, not only due to the subject matter it addresses or the place the artist occupies as a producer, but because it works with the materials and signs of this politics in order to dismantle the logic of representation itself. It is in this space of tension that López Cuenca's work – in which art can still be used for political ends – situates us.

### I. Representation

Representation is undoubtedly a point of intersection in the logic of modernity, since at the same time as it constitutes a subject, and thus the forms of presentation of the object, it also determines their system of relations. As the philosopher Jacques Derrida suggests:

In the re-presentation, the present, the presentation of what is presented comes back, returns as double, effigy, image, copy, idea, as a frame of the thing available in future, in an absence of the thing, available, disposed and predisposed for, by and in the subject. "For," "by" and "in": the system of these "prepositions" marks the place of representation or of the *Vorstellung*. The "re"- marks the repetition "in," "for" and "by" the subject, *a parti subjecti*, of a presence that, in another way, would be presented to the subject without depending on him or without having in him its proper place.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of representation is that it constitutes an epistemological and political form not only of perception but of situating oneself in relation to the object: "for," "by" and "in." The condition of representation marks not only the place of the "Same," but of the "Other." A strange duality of violence that is practiced upon the subject, from the forms of subjectivization, and to the object from the forms of representation that not only make the absent available but produce it, from the actualization of its double, as truth.

Beyond insisting on locating this connection in a specific form of modernity, which is a lengthy debate between the German and French philosophical tradition, what we can point to as regards the representation typical of this era would be, in the words of Derrida, the authority and general domination of representation:

It is the interpretation of the essence of the entity as an object of representation. All that becomes present, all that "is," namely all that is present, is presented, all that happens is understood in the form of representation. Experience of the entity becomes essentially representation. "Representation" becomes the more general category for determining the understanding of any thing that might be of concern or interest in any relationship. All of post-Cartesian and even post-Hegelian discourse, if not precisely modern discourse as a whole, has recourse to that category for designating the modifications of the subject in relation to an object. For this era the big question, the core question, is, then, the *value* of representation, that of its truth or appropriateness to what it represents. And even the critique of representation or at least its delimitation and its more systematic overflow – in Hegel at least – does not seem to place in question the very determination of experience as subjective, that is to say, representational.<sup>3</sup>

Following Derrida, we can posit that the problem of representation is that the subject is no longer defined in his essence as the locus and the site of its representations. He himself is determined as that which represents. As an image, copy, object that becomes present in its absence. The logic that is imprinted, then, of presence will be the experience of the thing disposed, that which is presented in a politics of visibility. And so, a feature of our time is an experience of representation. "Of," "for" and "in" representation.

This logic of experience does not simply imprint an epistemological order but instead determines the forms of distribution and production of identities, which is always of a political order.

### II. The Representation of the "Other"

An ever-pending task is undoubtedly that of violating these representations by renouncing any purism that hopes to accede to an essential identity in order to show its condition of production. Identities are fabrications that in a complex system of exclusions create forms of neutralization and control based on a civilizing logic that insists on sameness as a register of totality. Thus, not only representation but

representation of the “Other” is presented as a space of critical endeavour and of political dismantling.

In his book *On the Postcolony* Achille Mbembe, the Cameroonian philosopher, offers a warning that must be taken into account when one seeks to address the problem of “Otherness”:

We should first remind ourselves that, as a general rule, the experience of the Other, or the “problem of the ‘I’ of others and of human beings we perceive as foreign to us,” has almost always posed virtually insurmountable difficulties to the Western philosophical and political tradition. Whether dealing with Africa or with other non-European worlds, this tradition long denied the existence of any “self” but its own. Each time it came to peoples different in race, language, and culture, the idea that we have, concretely and typically, the same flesh, or that, in Husserl’s words, “My flesh already has the meaning of being a flesh typical in general for us all,” became problematic. The theoretical and practical recognition of the body and flesh of “the stranger” as flesh and body just like mine, the “idea of a common human nature, a humanity shared with others,” long posed, and still poses, a problem for Western consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

The problem of the “Other” is fundamental to understanding contemporary policies of representation. It is not just a question of political forms based on “representation” typical of an era that has caused politics to disappear as a form of discord (Rancière) and that has instead instaurated a representative order from a practice of democracy that maintains abstraction and exclusion as a structure of the *demos*, but of the policies that determine the forms of distribution of functions and places for the subjects. Policies of representation in which some form part of the *demos* and others only form part on the basis of their exclusion. The forms of otherness and sameness make up a perverse system of productions in which, on the one hand, a system of domination is established based on the negation of the “Other” and, on the other, which creates a violence in which the existence of the negated, which exists despite its negation and, in many instances, in negation.







### III. Representation and Art

The rupturing of the device of abstract inclusion and concrete exclusion is one of the interventions suggested by the work of Rogelio López Cuenca. Starting out from the obsessive compilation of images and gestures that accumulate in the press, literature, advertising, art, film and other systems for the circulating of information, López Cuenca manages to reveal, in the repetition of representation, the forms of production of the thing disposed, that which at the same time as it fixes meanings structures a reality based on the copy and mimesis.

In the case of *Gitanos de papel* (Paper Gypsies), a project realized with Elo Vega, the archive proposed is used to demonstrate how the exclusion of the gypsies is constructed from a representation of the “Other” which at the same time as it turns the features susceptible to being industrialized and commercialized into spectacle creates the “primitive” characterization of the “Other,” on which the twin structure of desire and allergy is interwoven:

Gypsy “primitivism” has always formed part of the capitalist economy, from the accounts of Romantic travellers, the “impertinent onlookers” Mérimée, Washington Irving, etc., to today’s industry of the spectacle. The appropriation of the gypsy world by Andalusian culture (and in turn by Spanish culture) has been performed at all times under the logic of its economic profitability, and it is in such a context that, given their subaltern role in relation to the dominant society and culture, the gypsies have had no other option than to internalize the features assigned to them.<sup>5</sup>

Understood, as Mbembe suggests, in a more general way, colonialism is a power relation based on violence, and in that respect it is an epistemic logic that affects the very terrain of enunciation.

It is not my intention, here, to enter into a discussion of the colonial condition in Spain itself. What one seeks to do is to underline how, based on the extermination of the “Other,” colonial logic is not simply a historical moment that is overcome by means of pro-independence processes but is instead an epistemic logic that produces a system of signs that have been maintained in different periods of modernity and which go on determining forms of inclusion and exclusion that are propagated in terms of contemporary forms of representation.

Andalusia, an epicentre of expulsions, conquests, sackings, wars, historical erasures, repressions of memory and migrations is a territory in which the “Other” has been reduced to a vestige, to a monument, to an element of exoticism or quaintness that now, in its identity as spectacle and commodity, reveals to us the perverse dialectic between history and power that is interwoven in the representation of those who are superfluous in the calculation of the parts: gypsies, Arabs, Africans.

All of them form part of the representation of the region, inasmuch as a specific character is imparted, one that is quaint, happy and exotic but still within the bounds of sameness. In the colonial system the “Other” is characterized by an obscene and grotesque excess. As Mbembe claims in his critique of the position Mikhail Bakhtin accords to such concepts, these two elements are intrinsic to any system of domination, as well as to the media by which these systems are confirmed or deconstructed. Hence, the body and the personality of the “Other” are represented by categories of the monstrous – forever



mad, passionate, sexual and violent. It is the fear and thus the fantasy of a Western rationality that dreams of the obscene as freedom from the repression this system brings with it. That which borders on the boundaries between the human and the animal, what fascinates and thereby terrifies.

In the realm of images, the role of the gypsies is passive, too: the gypsy is photographed, he never photographs. He doesn't look, he is looked at. The photograph is the direct reflection of one society that never acts upon another, that uses images of the other as a warning signal about where the borderline of normality, of the acceptable, is; a boundary behind which are invariably found, as we have seen, references to the natural, the wild and instinctual, bestiality, promiscuity, incest, cannibalism – all the long list of taboos that define “us,” those on “this side of the line,” as a “civilized” community.<sup>6</sup>

The terror caused by the Arab world is also born of the fascination and projection of the Western world, of a negative portrayal that seeks to locate the form of the terror and the forbidden in the “Other.” In projects like *El paraíso es de los extraños* (Paradise Belongs to Strangers) López Cuenca addresses the construction of the image of Arab-Islamic world in the West and videos like *Haram* (2000) or *Voyage en Orient* (Voyage to the Orient) (2000) are works which in a series of repetitions and variations dismantle the figurations that have been established in order to assimilate certain features in the dominant culture, almost always from the glorious past of the Arab-European world, and by eliminating, via the figuration and radicalization of the “Other” in barbarism, the features that cannot be assimilated in contemporary European culture.

These problems are evinced in works to do with tourism and migration, two forms that given tension to and drastically change the territory. On the one hand, the Arab past is glorified as the historical inheritance of a particular place in the forms of industrialization and commercialization concentrated in tourism, and on the other, one is afraid of the aesthetic and political change that occurs in cities and towns with African-Moslem migrations, above all in the case of Andalusia. Works like *La Alhambra sobrevivió* (The Alhambra Survived) make a perverse intervention vis-à-vis this erasure, with an installation in the style of a souvenir shop that uses the souvenir in such a way that the act of recall is not produced by

the “trinket” alone but also by the counter-information scattered all around, which enables the different meanings of the same sign to be brought together in a single space.

These works do not seek to make the “Other” appear – something which is obviously aporetic – but to evince the modes in which the politics of representation are executed through a policy of domination that establishes the cartography of the real in homogeneous formations that perpetuate the systems of expulsion and conclusion.

To be sure, López Cuenca's work does not make for pleasure. One hopes that whoever decides to approach puts the actual system of signs into operation and is able to call into question the referent and thereby make the mobilization of signifieds possible and arrive at another production of subjectivizations and subjectivities.

*Cercanías* is a project that provides a cultural critique in which art is a device of destabilization and overspill. The territory it marks out is not that of the cartographer who attempts to describe what is and to colonize it, but that of the archaeologist who places on the surface the levels of the system of production that has made its description possible and so intervenes to transform the cartography.

1. See Eduardo Subirats, “Siete tesis contra el hispanismo” in *Filosofía y tiempo final*. Madrid, Fineo, 2009.

2. Jacques Derrida, “Envío” in *La desconstrucción en las fronteras de la filosofía*. Barcelona, Paidós, 1996. At <http://www.jacquesderrida.com.ar/textos/envio.htm>

3. *Ibid.*

4. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001, p. 2.

5. Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, *Gitanos de papel*. Jerez de la Frontera, Cajasol Obra Social, 2007, p. 80.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

## A Test Extending Beyond the Action Exhibiting the Projects by KP Brehmer

Doreen Mende

In 2009, the British music critic Mark Fisher published the book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* One of Fisher's main thoughts is that the recent economic crisis in the West did not result in a collapse of Capitalism. "Capitalist realism hasn't weakened since the bank crises; if anything, it has intensified."<sup>1</sup> Reading Fisher's book while working on a show with projects by the German artist KP Brehmer (1938–1997), made me think that we can utilize Brehmer's practice for a series of tests in order to get our heads and lives around a Capitalist Realism that has become a living condition. The exhibition of projects by KP Brehmer leads us today into a space of reflection: how do the visual systems of Western societies affect the human being? What means do we have for making audible our disagreement without withdrawing our words and images? Is an alternative contract with a Capitalist Realism possible?

We are living in a time of an excess in exhibiting. Magazines, newspapers, stores, television and especially today, the Internet, constitute and reproduce visual grammars, directing our understanding of the world. Museum exhibitions are just a further component of the circuit. This excess in exhibiting is a living condition monitored by Capitalism. If we approach Brehmer's displays, films, publications, compositions and installations as "notation systems" of social processes, then a similarity to a musical score emerges. Only in the moment of the performance do the questions posed by these works become apparent, under the actual conditions of making them public. Exhibiting here might be understood as both a means and a concern of a practice – for KP Brehmer, and for us, today, perhaps more crucially than ever.



KP Brehmer working on *Realkapital-Produktion*, Berlin, 1974  
© KP Brehmer Nachlass, Berlin, 2011

### Interstice

The exhibition at CAAC opens with *Wie mich die Schlange sieht. Wie ich die Schlange sehe*. (How the Snake Sees Me. How I See the Snake, 1985), which is juxtaposed here with the seminal postage stamp project of *Trivialgrafik* (1968). These works share a political impulse that takes place without writing the word 'politics' in front of a marching crowd or shouting it in an agitating voice. Brehmer used the pattern of the postage stamp into wall paper, editioned prints, inflatable plastic pillows and so called *Auswahlbeutel* (a bag of assorted stamps). Brehmer's use of the stamp shifts its original function in the economy of propaganda, towards a 'sociology of art': the art collector shall be confronted with the trivial and ideological purpose of everyday image production. The confrontation of the stamps with portraits of Hitler, Walter Ulbricht and Lenin, with *Wie mich die Schlange sieht. Wie ich die Schlange sehe*, that eventually exposes the artist's own head, emphasize Brehmer's recognition of his own implication in the visual codifications of societal orders, from dictatorships to other forms of governance.

The title of the two-part work *Wie mich die Schlange sieht. Wie ich die Schlange sehe* marks the respective perspectives of looking. It could be a Shot-Reverse-Shot. These well-known filmmaking techniques produce a sequence of takes that stage a dialogue or a relationship between two characters. The painted head appears in the manner of a so-called thermo-painting, that utilizes the visual grammar of thermography which Brehmer had already used in the mid-1970s as a technique to deliver visual "templates" for his paintings. According to the principles of thermography, the colour red signifies warm temperature; blue stands for cold. The snake is photographed.<sup>2</sup> But is it the snake that the 'I' sees? We see an image of a snake which makes us believe that we know what a snake is. Yet we cannot be sure 'what' or 'who' the snake actually is. *Wie mich die Schlange sieht. Wie ich die Schlange sehe* opens up a huge discrepancy of a visual grammar between the image of each character. But both are each an *image* in which truth has two faces: fiction and documentary.<sup>3</sup> We have no proof of evidence that the image presents the head of Brehmer, as the title suggests; nor can we axiomatically define what the head of a snake signifies.



No-Yes, 1964. © KP Brehmer Nachlass, Berlin

The question of truth is situated *between* an image and its appearance in a magazine, a display, a stamp, a film and in an exhibition space. It is from this interstice, that we need to ask ourselves *what is it that makes today's images so different, so appealing?*<sup>4</sup>

This approach treads the ground of self-reflexivity, which Mark Fisher considers in 2009 as a crucial means to re-think the relation of the individual to Capitalism. Self-reflexivity demands an investigation of both visual and display strategies of everyday imagery and its effect on the individual, and our own implication in its operation. For Brehmer, there is neither an outside nor an inside of a system. We cannot step out of a system as we might wake up from a dream.

### Make Images Politically

Brehmer's projects resonate with the famous sentence by Jean-Luc Godard and the Dziga-Vertov-Group, who claimed that the aim is not to make a 'political film,'

but to 'make films politically.' In this respect, *Ideale Landschaft* (1968) is a compelling project: the colour spectrum 'green to blue' is spread out in different shades, similar to printed sheets in halftone blocks, and in different print formats. This spectrum is presented in different formats such as displays, large-scale Klischee-prints on plastic canvas, publications, drawings and a film (exhibited at CAAC the first time) discloses the singular conditions of a medium and performs a self-reflexivity on the conditions of image production. Inflected with a strong pedagogical impulse, the projects challenge him and us to reflect on the conditions of seeing through their exposure in public. The many forms of *Ideale Landschaft* demonstrates how the visualization of the world, even in such a seemingly innocent image of an 'ideal landscape,' is implicated in politics. Like Godard, whose many films vivisection the complicated relationship between the violence of and the passion for the image, Brehmer's projects reveal an absolute political concern for the conditions of image production as well as for the conditions of image distribution (exhibition) in everyday life. The *image* of a landscape in *Ideale Landschaft* appears as a construction.

Much subtler than the loud agitprop posters of Klaus Staechel or the shamanic universe of Joseph Beuys, Brehmer's approach is closer to the understanding, that "Art is not a reflection of reality. It's the reality of reflection."<sup>5</sup> *Ideale Landschaft* articulates a sharp awareness of how the image takes place, in the literal sense of the expression 'taking a place,' within society and – perhaps more importantly – *in relation* to each individual member of society: in front of a display, a TV screen, a publication, in a landscape garden or even in front of a meditation object.

#### Decoding

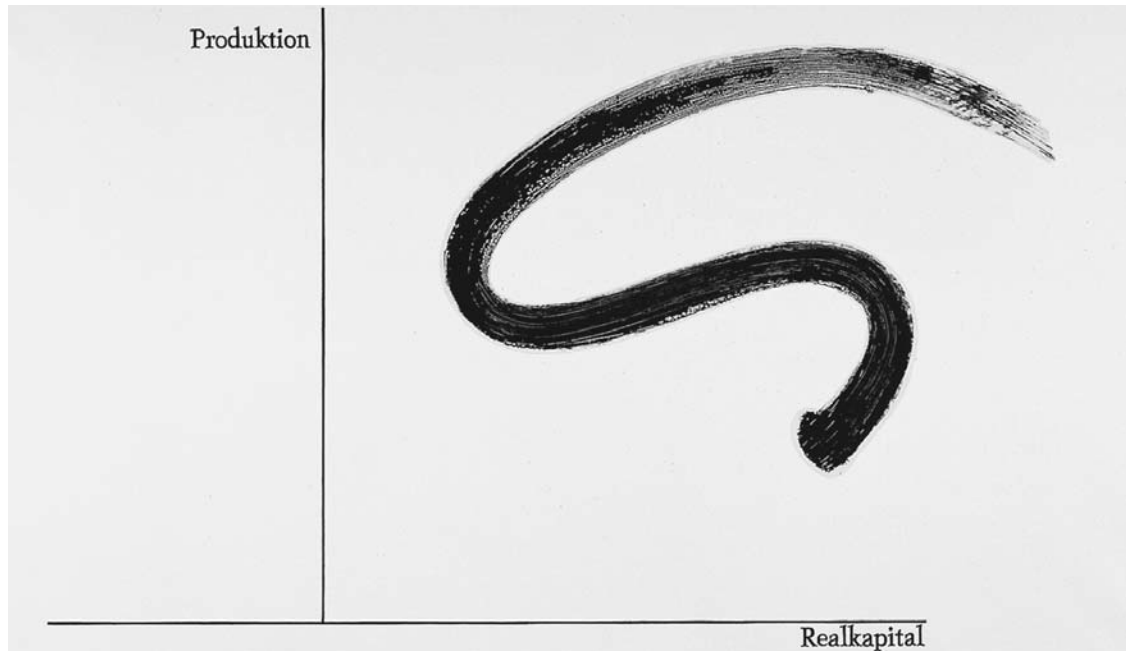
As a major figure of the German Pop Art initiative called Capitalist Realism, which culminated in the famous catalogue raisonné, *Grafik des Kapitalistischen Realismus*, by René Block in 1971, Brehmer worked for decades on the inversion of the capitalist economy of knowledge production by decoding its forms of visual nomination. His reflection on the means of formalization in a context of public display enabled the political to take place without

shouting the word 'political.' His expropriation of Western concepts of typography, cartography, thermography and colour theory reveals the ways in which visual appearances are implicated in economics. Borrowing the term 'exappropriation' from Derrida, Brehmer's projects alter existing visual grammar structures in order to restart the contract with a Capitalist Realism in a different way.<sup>6</sup>

Developed in relation to industrial printing techniques 1960s, Brehmer produced many works as Klischee-Drucke.<sup>7</sup> We find this printing method in various displays, original prints and stamps throughout large-sized works of *Ideale Landschaft*. His interest in printing processes as an artistic practice hold a singular relevance in the lifelong friendship with René Block. They met first at the Werkkunstschule (School of Arts and Crafts) in Krefeld in 1959. Both Block and Brehmer loved music "more than literature and maybe even more than fine arts."<sup>8</sup> It became a friendship between an artist and a curator, constantly punctuated by exhibition and publication collaborations. Brehmer then participated in the inaugural exhibition *Neodada, Pop, Decollage, Kapitalistischer Realismus* of Gallery René Block in 1964, that included Gerhard Richter, Konrad Lueg, Wolf Vostell, Sigmar Polke, before the exhibition and publication *Trivialgrafik* was produced by the Block gallery in 1967-68. Yet Brehmer was always very interested in the British branch of Pop Art, which blossomed already by the mid-1950s in formations such as The Independent Group and its interest in the "As-found" which has been a major conceptual material to work with. He appreciated Richard Hamilton's work, with whom he intermittently corresponded. Hamilton dedicated him a collage of newspaper clippings about the Rolling Stones dating from 1965-67 and another collage called *The Critic Laughs* (1968).<sup>9</sup>

#### Dynamizing

Along with Joseph Beuys, Hans Haacke, Gustav Metzger, Klaus Staechel<sup>10</sup> and others, KP Brehmer was also invited to conceptualize the German Month at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London in Fall 1974 resulting in the influential exhibition/publication *Art ⇌ Society*.<sup>11</sup> Understood in the context of its time, the London project started with a colloquium in Berlin in April 1974, that extensively explored the complex



*Realkapital-Produktion (II)*, 1974. © KP Brehmer Nachlass, Berlin, 2011

relations between the artist, the curator, the institution and society. The colloquium comprised a self-critical investigation, and also included an analysis of previous exhibition projects, before the actual exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art opened in Fall 1974.

We would fail to understand KP Brehmer's subtle political thinking, if we reduced his attitude to a loud agitating voice, which the initials KP at first might suggest. In solidarity with the DKP (German Communist Party), which was prohibited in West-Germany in the early 1960s, Brehmer, then based in West-Berlin, changed his surname Klaus-Peter into the distinctive part of the Leftist party's acronym. However, membership in a political party was not his political means, his strategies were instead located in art making, exhibiting, and teaching.<sup>12</sup> Similar to the group of artists who constituted the initiative of Capitalist Realism, the projects until the mid 1970s could be considered as a network of exhibitions as it formed a network of artists around issues of Art and Politics<sup>13</sup> dynamizing the role of art in relation to

society and life. In this context, Brehmer's understanding of "a test extending beyond the action"<sup>14</sup> is attached to a very clear mission of the project *Farbtest "Nationalfarben"* (Colour Test "National Colours") from 1969/1972. It relates (in the publication to the London show in 1974 and in the exhibition at CAAC in Seville in 2011) to the work *Realkapital – Produktion* (Real Capital – Production, 1974). Here, the relations between labour and capital are the point of departure: Brehmer jolts "the aggressive gestures which the representation of the profit rate develops"<sup>15</sup> with the generosity of gestural brush strokes.

#### Conditions of Seeing

From here a large range of diagrammatic projects emerge. As Brehmer demonstrates, we are confronted by everyday imagery that contains an ideology of image making as a major strategy of political tenure as well as of colonialism. For example, *Farbengeographien* (Colour Geographies) strongly



Aufsteller 25, *Das Gefühl zwischen Fingerkuppen...*, 1967  
© KP Brehmer Nachlass, Berlin, 2011

reveal the manifestation of racial ideologies and party platforms based on statistical data and shaped by visual mapping.<sup>16</sup> *Vier-Farben-Problem* (Four Colour Theorem, 1980) relates to a mathematical game claiming that the world can be entirely visually represented with only four colours. Following this, the conditions of seeing embedded in Western rationality becomes a territorial totalitarianism. In *Goya*, Brehmer seems to exceed a territorial belief in relation to the image, when he locates the mortal remains of Spain's immortal painter in France. But Goya's skull as a symbol of human singularity is treasured in the painting of Goya's head in the Museum of Saragossa. We cannot quite say where to draw the distinction between the division of rules of evidence, totalitarian imagery and the power of imagination. The instances of judgment are turned on us and on our accountability as individuals in relation to the classifying forces of colonial societies.

But Brehmer, again, includes himself as well as us into the process of investigation. It is not a perspective from outside, but a reflection of the extent to which a systemic schematization of our vision affects us. *Vergleiche das Kartenbild der Iberischen Halbinsel mit dem Griechenlands! Betrachte die Grenzen gegen Portugal* (Compare the Map of the Iberian Peninsula with the One of Greece. Look at the Border to Portugal) is a concrete test, while in *Schriftproben zur Bestimmung der Sehschärfe* (Writing Sample to Identify the Acuity, 1976) Brehmer articulates a more abstract and speculative proposal to detect a relation between typography and degrees of human existence from "tired" to "dead."

We must keep in mind that following Brehmer's expropriation of the visual systems of representation, a test can never be finished. Or to turn it upside-down: a test is only valid in the very moment of its performance, but will never be able to stand for something or speak for someone. Related to Brehmer's suspicion towards data collection, the major project *Seele und Gefühl eines Arbeiters* (Soul and Feelings of a Worker, 1978-80) concerns a sociological study from the early twentieth century, a time in which not only labour, but also health and leisure became industrialized with its bio-political effects resonating even today. It seems that its different "versions," such as a 42-part drawing, large-scale panels, sketches, display instructions, a self-test in form of a diary-book, each allows a spatial generosity to unfold an immediate and singular temporality undergoing a test. It neither claims to be a rule of evidence nor provides a general truth. But if anything, it stands for itself.

### Score

The project *Seele und Gefühl* also exists in the form of a musical score for solo flute, cello and piano. On a conceptual level, it is similar to the practice of Hanne Darboven, as Brehmer's score shows a strict structure of the musical scale, according to the scale of a statistical investigation of emotional states of a worker over 48 weeks. Two large pauses, marked in two blocks of several rows without notes, indicate the worker's holiday and illness. They interrupt the tonality, and it appears to become a performance in which the audience, the conditions of the performance and chance are un-controllable elements, as in a composition by John Cage. In a musical

performance even more stringently than in a visual work of art, time is folded: there is the moment of writing down the note which already implicates an imagination about the quality of the sound of a tone in the future performance. Yet the actual performance, in the form of a concert, cannot be calculated in total. It introduces a temporality which does not follow a linear temporal movement from past to present, but the performance of a musical score exposes a past beyond a present: the notation might be like an itinerary, but only when we take the journey we will be able to transfer it from a manifest form (score) to a singular experience. Brehmer's 'notation systems' of social processes implicate a future that becomes altered in the act of exposure. A thought from 1974 could turn into "a test extending beyond the action" today and tomorrow.

Is an alternative contract to Capitalist Realism possible? Maybe it is neither 'direct action' that helps us to survive nor is it a dichotic division into 'friend' and 'enemy' that allows us to propose a new set of instruments for change. The exposure of projects by KP Brehmer today proposes *a series of tests* "extending beyond the action." It is incumbent upon us to understand that to look is a claim to act in order to question. What might we learn from KP Brehmer: the reflection on the means of exposure, including ourselves, has the capacity to potentiate the excess in exhibiting in order to articulate a possibility to defy Capitalism and defend society in a different way.

1. Interview with Alex Andrews, September 2010, <http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk>, distributed by *Multitudes* founded by members of The Otolith Group, London.

2. One version of the snake exists as page torn from a print publication (in the exhibition at CAAC); the other one is a painted watercolour of the picture by Brehmer.

3. The replacement of shot/reverse-shot by fiction/documentary is taken from a sequence of *Notre Musique* (2004) by Jean-Luc Godard, where Godard is filmed while giving a lecture in front of an audience of a literature festival in Sarajevo in 2002.

4. The British artist Richard Hamilton pioneered a rather reflexive understanding of Pop Art in the 1950s already, when he asks himself and us through the famous collage *just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (1956).

5. Jean-Luc Godard, *La Chinoise*, film, 1967.

6. Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2002, pp. 56–67.

7. "Klaus Peter Brehmer produces collages from negatives of

newspaper imagery, from print raster, from typographic and constructivist elements into image designs, construction plans, which he copies on zinc printing plates, before they are retouched, alienated, smudged. Finally, the plates are etched in an acid bath until stable large 'klischees' develop. Any amount of reproductions can be produced from these 'klischees.' " Werner Rhode, in: Galerie René Block (ed.), *Klaus Peter Brehmer Trivialgrafik Hansjoachim Dietrich Ereignisbilder*, Berlin, 1965.

8. René Block, "Lügen Bilder auch?" *KP Brehmer Alle Künstler lügen*, Kassel, 1998, p. 7.

9. Monika Brehmer via a phone conversation with Sarah Poppel, February 14, 2011.

10. Wilfried Kuehn, Doreen Mende (eds.) *Displayer 01*, University of Arts and Design ZKM Karlsruhe, 2006, pp.041–047

11. Christos M. Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal (eds.) *Art=Society*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1974.

12. In the year 1971, KP Brehmer was appointed professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Hamburg; in 1987 guest-professor at the Art Academy Hangzhou (PR China).

13. *Kunst und Politik* (Art and Politics), exhibition and publication by G. Bussmann, Badischer Kunstverein, 1970; *Kunst im politischen Kampf* (Art in the Political Struggle) exhibition and publication by Christos M. Joachimides and Helmut R. Leppien, Kunstverein Hanover, 1973; Berlin Colloquium, 7. Produzentengalerie, April 1974; *Art=Society*, exhibition and publication by Christos M. Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1974.

14. KP Brehmer, in: *Art=Society*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1974, p. 57.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

16. I would like to draw the attention to the film *Ticket of No Return*, 1979, by Ulrike Ottinger, staging a psychogram of a city like Berlin in which the art character 'exact statistics' reveals the hypocrisy of class society.

A Booklet in English and Spanish is part of the exhibition. It shows the path through the exhibition and includes the first publication of a series of texts by KP Brehmer related to his own projects as well as texts by René Block, Jürgen Becker and Doreen Mende. Thanks to Rachel Jans for her precise English corrections.



*Marx Lounge* at CAAC, 2011. Photo: Guillermo Mendo



## Re-reading Marx

### Juan Bosco Díaz-Urmeneta Muñoz

1. Behind them they left no legendary adventurers or cities without name. The gold of Sierra Pelada in Brazil only generated an enormous crater at the bottom of which there swarmed men working in conditions of all but slavery. There were eventually tens of thousands of them. Every day, tools in hand, they climbed down the steep walls of the pit, which the frequent rains converted into a quagmire, and then clambered back up bearing heavy bundles of material.

Alfredo Jaar arrived in Sierra Pelada in 1985 and stayed for months photographing and filming figures who seemed to relive, at the end of the twentieth century, the excesses of the *mita* enforced labour system. A year later he exhibited his work in the Venice Biennale. *Gold in the Morning* was an installation in which the photographs, in light boxes, placed on the wall at different heights and on the floor, even, created a space that more than the gaze, addressed the body of the spectator. That same year he arranged other photos of the mines on panels that covered the walls of Spring Street Subway station in New York. On each panel, *Rushes*, the title of that project, incorporated a sign that recounted the price of gold on the world's stock markets.

In this way Jaar established one of the nodal points of his work: "To give visibility to those our world denies it to." What's more, he did this without producing a feeling of compassion in the spectator. In his photos the exertion of the bodies and the exhaustion in the faces emit a certain logic, inhuman but rational, "that of necessity" which all labour must agree to. A logic which corresponds to another one, that of the market, no matter how different the plane on which the latter moves might appear. This is what the Subway panels indicated, while *Rushes*, the title of the show, alluded to the rhythm of that brutal labour as well as to the options of the market.

From that point of view, Jaar's work makes one think of another attempt to make the hidden visible. In the first few pages of *Capital*, Marx sets out to unravel the mysteries of the commodity by showing where the value comes from that we attribute to things, beyond their physical properties and their actual usefulness.<sup>1</sup> Step by step, his analysis shifts economic value from the things themselves (where naïve consciousness places it) to the relations of exchange, also pointing out that the latter is measured by the amount of labour each product requires. This "labour-measure" does not take into account the skill

it is done with nor the harshness of the circumstances it has to be done in: it is an abstract kind of labour, that is to say one distinct from such matters since it only pays attention to the time that is socially necessary for it to comply with profitable exchange.<sup>2</sup> Labour and market are on a mutual collision course, showing that neither the necessity which puts pressure on the first nor the value that the second claims respond to the nature of the things themselves, but occurs, instead, in a specific structure of social relations. It would still be worth speaking of gold: its value is also shown in those pages. As a general equivalent for the exchange of commodities it enjoys special prestige, but as a commodity it obeys the same requirement as all the others: its value is equivalent to the labour time considered to be profitable.<sup>3</sup> This explains the exertion and the exhaustion of the individuals who turned up at the short-lived excavation of Sierra Pelada.<sup>4</sup>

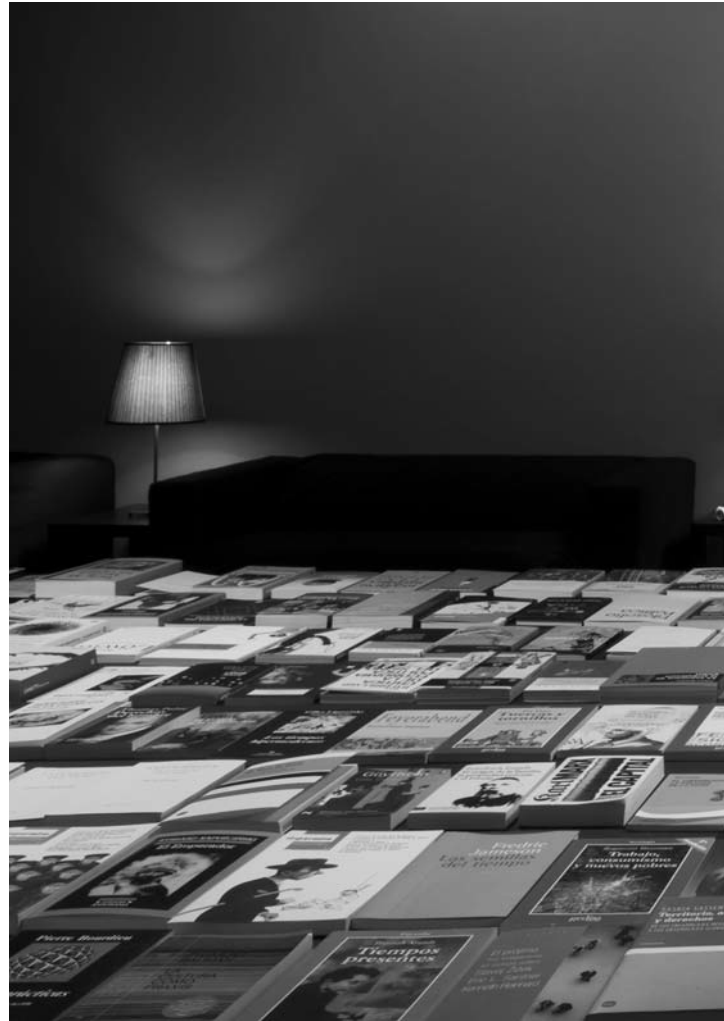
2. For Jaar, Brazil marked the beginning of a succession of pilgrimages. His willingness to travel comes from way back: he spent his childhood in Martinique and his university years (studying architecture and film) in Chile, his country, but in the peculiar inner exile into which the dictatorships forced people. There, he made his first forays into art, before leaving for New York in 1982 on a grant from the Fundación Pacífico. Following his stay in Brazil, he assembled images in Nigeria of one of those industries that nobody wants to have on their doorstep on account of their high toxicity. The resulting work would form part of a controversial exhibition, *Les Magiciens de la Terre*, which some people take to be the beginning, albeit unsatisfactory, of the debate in contemporary art about postcolonialism and multiculturalism.<sup>5</sup> Jaar's contribution put its finger on another peculiar logic of Capitalism. He describes it as a dialectic between the "here" and the "there" (respectively, the First and Third World),<sup>6</sup> which means the siting of factories like the one in Nigeria or workings like those in Sierra Pelada: we take what we don't want "there" (toxic industries, inhuman jobs) and we bring the profits of both "here."

In principle, Marx also dealt with this logic by unmasking it: seeking ever-greater profitability, early Capitalism offered work to primitive communities. In these, work was divided according to the capacity, skill and age of the different agents. It was "concrete"

labour, inscribed within a single social organization. But this changes when the community accepts new tasks. The offer of monetary reward seduces the family or the village that is involved in the new work, equal for all, thus displacing to a marginal time period their former tasks or entrusting them to others, in exchange for payment. Little by little the ancient organization of work is transformed: labour becomes “abstract,” distinct from old social roles, and subject only to the time socially necessary to it and to the wage relation.<sup>7</sup> But the new “local division of labour” (the artisan becomes a worker and the peasant a day-labourer) occurs in a more general context: what work will be entrusted to the primitive community if not the kind that would only be performed in the metropolis with difficulty? In the “territorial division of labour” capital, initial, mature or late, will displace the more thankless tasks to the peripheries, as Jaar points out in the case of Brazil or Nigeria.

3. The reduction of the different classes of labour to mere abstract labour, the amount of the latter that serves as a measure for each commodity, and the division of labour itself are social processes that are further to consciousness. Marx uses a colloquial expression when saying that “they work behind the back of the producers” and that they assert themselves over the latter with the force of a “law of nature,” just, he sarcastically adds, as does “the law of gravity when a house falls about our ears”.<sup>8</sup>

The most disconcerting aspect of the fetishism of commodities is precisely the logical rigor, analogous to that of the laws of nature, which appears to justify it. Such “logic” legitimates inhuman jobs of work, permits the moving up and down of prices regardless of needs, and justifies territorial imbalances – this is why it has been a recurrent source of reflection for many thinkers. Deleuze alludes to Capitalism’s ability to extend its axiomatic, with which it unceasingly accommodates its logic to new situations by concealing its illogicality,<sup>9</sup> and Badiou says that everybody knows the “truth” that is “organized socially by Capitalism” in terms of its effects but nobody controls its source.<sup>10</sup> For his part, Adorno used the word “spell”,<sup>11</sup> which cleverly synthesizes the paradoxes of commodity fetishism: the quasi-mythic union between strict logic and a lack of reason, by means of which it asserts its authority over consciousness, bewitching it and neutralizing its



Marx Lounge at CAAC, 2011. Photo: Guillermo Mendo

critical capacity. This fusion of conceptual rigor and superstition can easily end in fatalism.

Can the critical capacity of the image challenge that fatalism, break its “spell”? In the First World War, and above all in the Great Depression, the documentary photo played an important role *qua* denunciation. When industrial technology is employed systematically to destroy the human body and the earth,<sup>12</sup> or the economy calls for an individual’s pain<sup>13</sup> – and those images showed this – there is something amiss. The logic of the system suffers. But the photographic document is produced in a social environment traversed by the division of labour and by certain circuits of distribution, and both can influence the outreach of the image. The camera gives visibility to whosoever does not have it, but it does this by cutting out and selecting so as to place something before our eyes. This power of the camera<sup>14</sup> places photography



on dangerous terrain: it can deprive what is photographed of its singularity, reducing it to a mere moment in the succession of events or to an instance of a strict law. It is easy, then, for the image to suffer, in its reception, a displacement that converts its critical force into a sign of impotence and ends up fomenting fatalism. On the other hand, the documentary nature of photography does not rid it of its status as an “image” which has to fulfill certain requirements. Another instance of ambivalence emerges, this time between the rigor of the testimony and the formal and expressive exigencies of the image.<sup>15</sup> Such tension leaves no room for simplistic solutions, but the risks remain: conceived as denunciation, the image may only lead to compassion.

Images lose their bite, then. Not because of the action of the photographer but because this action is inscribed within the division of labour and the work

within circuits of communication that are not oblivious to the “spell” Adorno talked about, and which act as an authentic prophylaxis of the social stability and tranquility of (false) consciousness.

4. Some commentators have pointed out how in *Proyecto Rwanda* (The Ruanda Project), to which he devoted six years (1994–2000), Jaar rigorously addresses these problems,<sup>16</sup> although his ways of doing things already appear in his early works. For the Sierra Pelada photos in Venice he constructed an area in semi-darkness in which the spectator came across the images in light boxes and in an order different to that of the museum. More than revealing themselves to the gaze they grabbed the attention. In the New York Subway, the photos broke with the habitual use of such a space and were contextualized with precision. Marked by work, the figures in the photos

did not for all that lack determination, and far from inviting commiseration they challenged the spectator through their very effort.

Jaar breaks through the “spell” of the image without toning it down, for fear of formal correctness, and without avoiding the selection, the “cutting out,” that photography demands.<sup>17</sup> He does not try, then, to avoid the exigencies of the division of labour, but interrupts the routine of the circuits of communication through what Rancière calls a “regime of visibility,” that is to say by regulating the status of the bodies depicted and the kind of attention they deserve.<sup>18</sup> Faced with the profusion of contemporary images and with the indifference with which each is presented alongside the others, Jaar, as an architect, constructs an exhibition space for each image, focusing on and drawing particular attention to it, or intervenes in a public space, altering its use. Or again, he endows images with a context that calibrates their outreach, taking his leave of the usual media methods (concise photo captions, shrill headlines lacking in content, etc.). Such a reflexive framework is completed by the choice he makes of the figure. A mangled body may become, whether we like it or not, an object; bodies under strain, those of Pelada – which more than enduring, “suffer”; that is, they bear their pain, affirming their passion with integrity<sup>19</sup> – are positioned as equals before the spectator, as one individual to another. Maybe it is hardly worth repeatedly, glossing Marx, that more than interpreting the world, these figures stimulate us to transform it,<sup>20</sup> but they certainly do not move us to fatalism.

5. They have yet another virtue: they drive knowledge on, are a catalyst to the disquiet of learning. If the fascination the commodity exercises over individual consciousness is disquieting, the hypnosis it inculcates in public life is even more so. In the privacy of his own home the individual may still get angry about needs he cannot satisfy, but publicly he gives in, because the public sphere is unable to escape the logic of the commodity. A recent symptom is the docility of the State to the demands of the market. A phantasmagoric commodity, subprime mortgages, has unleashed a disaster as global as was the very circulation of those credits. Demanding no more responsibilities than the all too flagrant ones, various states have confined themselves to paying the “tribute of crisis” to the markets, thus shifting the



*Marx Lounge* at CAAC, 2011. Photo: Guillermo Mendo

consequences of the disaster onto their own citizens. Such an attitude is perhaps related to a politics which, for three decades now, has increasingly resembled a mere administration, turning into a “police force” (in the Old Spanish sense: a force aimed at putting order into and cleansing public life<sup>21</sup>), while the decision-making remains in the hands of the experts. The logic of the global market has extended so far that activism comes to nothing if not preceded by debate and reflection.<sup>22</sup>

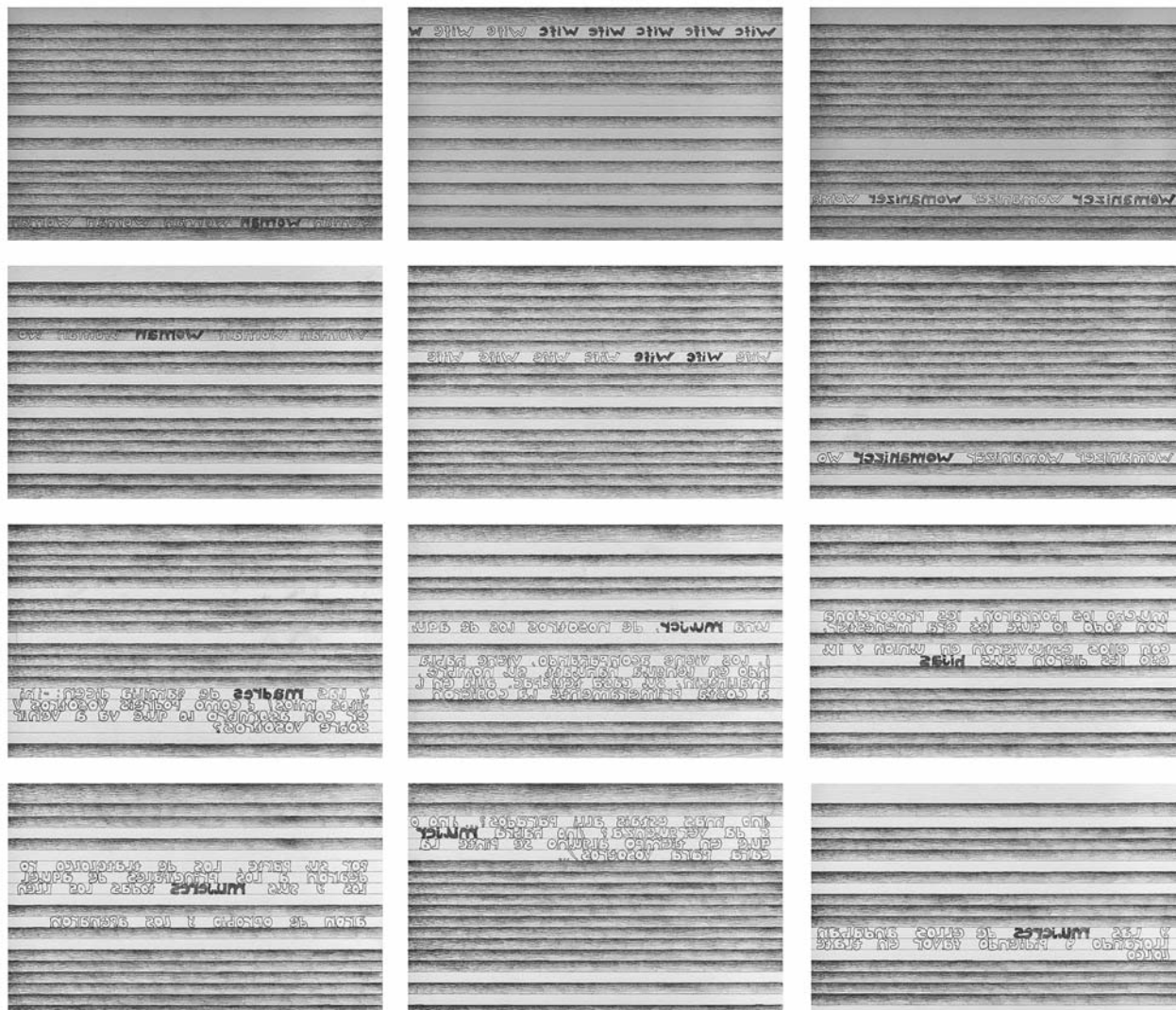
*Marx Lounge* is Jaar’s most recent work. A room painted in red, neon lettering that identifies it, and on top of the huge table, specially designed, several hundred books from the Marxist tradition. They appear to describe a skyline, but they’re there to be read, as the black chairs and the light in the room indicate.

As in earlier works, Jaar constructs a space in which a number of objects, the books, take on visibility, with the result appealing first to reflection and then to the gaze. Its “time,” though, is different: it is not that of attention to what is on display but that of reading, unhurried reading, without calls on the cellphone or surfing on the net. The work responds to the recent appearance of numerous Marxist texts in the same years in which there occurs the advance of globalization and the “retreat” of the politics spoken of above, marking the universal dominion of the commodity. These new books abandon the utopian dreams and ineffable catechisms typical of the old Marxism and go more deeply into the theoretical aspects: concepts like “the vacant world” (Badiou) or “discord” and the “division of the sentient” (Rancière)<sup>23</sup> go back over the central issue of the logic *sans* logic of Capitalism, prolonging the critique of Marx and such now-classic derivatives as the “performance principle” (Marcuse), the concept of “problematics” (Althusser), and the difference between “the real” and “reality” (Lacan). In its automatism the logic of the commodity models an idea of the world in which a supposed necessity calls for sacrifice, pain and inequality. These books invite us to think of the world in another way, says Jaar, adding that this is what he “as an artist” is seeking after.<sup>24</sup> *Marx Lounge* is, then, an invitation to be critical in times of scarcity: a request to follow the “old mole” in looking for new ways of seeing the world.

1. Marx, K. *El Capital*. Translated by W. Roces. Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974, vol. I, p. 47, notes 87-9.
2. Marx, K. *Op. cit.* p. 7, note 10.
3. Marx, K. *Op. cit.* p. 54, notes 11 and 12.
4. The lode ran out in 1992, some twelve years after its discovery.
5. See the note by Hal Foster in Foster, H., Krauss, R., Bois, Y.-A., and Buchloh, B. H. D. *Arte desde 1900. Modernidad, antimodernidad y postmodernidad*. Translated by F. Chueca, F. López Martín and A. Brotons. Madrid, Akal, 2006, pp. 617-621.
6. Interview with Lilly Wei. *Art in America*. July, 1989, p. 155, cited by Sever, N. “Alfredo Jaar: From there to here” [www.anu.edu.au/hrc/research/WtoS/Sever2.pdf](http://www.anu.edu.au/hrc/research/WtoS/Sever2.pdf).
7. Marx, K. *Contribución a la crítica de la economía política*. Translated by J. Merino. Madrid, Comunicación, 1970, pp. 247-283.
8. Marx, K. *El Capital. Op. cit.* Vol. I, pp. 12 and 40.
9. Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. *El antiedipo. Capitalismo y*

*esquizofrenia*. Translated by F. Monge, Barcelona, Paidós, 1995, pp. 245 ff.

10. Badiou, A. *Pequeño manual de inestética*. Translated by L. Vogelfang, J. L. Caputo, M. G. Burello and G. Molina. Buenos Aires, Prometeo, 2009, p. 101.
11. Adorno, Th. W. *Dialéctica negativa*. Translated by J. M. Ripalda, revised by J. Aguirre. Madrid, Taurus, 1984, pp. 342 ff.
12. Cf. the war photos chosen by Jünger: Sanchez Durá, N., ed., *Ernst Jünger: Guerra, técnica y fotografía*. Valencia, Universitat de València, 2001.
13. Doud, R. K. “Encontré el coraje en lugares inesperados”. Interview with Dorothea Lange in *Dorothea Lange. Los años decisivos*. Translated by J. Porter and C. Granés. Madrid, La Fábrica, 2009, pp. 129-136.
14. Rosler, M. “Ética y estética de la fotografía documental”, in *Imágenes públicas. La función política de las imágenes*, ed. J. Carrillo. Translated by E. García Agustín. Barcelona, G. Gili, 2007, p. 258.
15. Sekula, A. “Desmontar la modernidad, reinventar el documental. Notas sobre la política de la representación”. Ribalta, J. ed. *Efecto real. Debates postmodernos sobre fotografía*. Translated by E. Llorens Pujol. Barcelona, G. Gili, 2004, pp. 35-63. Crimp, D. “Photographs at the End of Modernism” in *On the Museum’s Ruins*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London, The MIT Press, 2000, pp. 2-31.
16. Rancière, J. “L’Image intolérable” in *Le spectateur émancipé*. Paris, La Fabrique, 2008, pp. 105-110 and “Le Théâtre des images” in *Alfredo Jaar. La politique des images* (exhibition catalogue). Lausanne, Musée Cantonal, 2007.
17. Photography is not only a “trace” of light but also a “cutting out” that selects a part of the world and rejects the rest. Barthes, R. *La cámara lúcida*. Translated by J. Sala Sanahuja. Barcelona, Paidós, 2004; Krauss R. *Lo fotográfico. Por una teoría de los desplazamientos*. Translated by C. Zelich, Barcelona, G. Gili, 2002.
18. Rancière, J. *Loc. cit.*, also see *Le partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique*. Paris, La Fabrique, 2000.
19. The difference between *endure* and *suffer* comes from Carlos Gurméndez, *Teoría de los sentimientos*. Mexico City/Madrid/ Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981, p. 45.
20. Marx, K. “Tesis sobre Feuerbach” in *La ideología alemana*. Translated by W. Roces. Barcelona, Grijalbo, 1970, pp. 665-8.
21. Rancière, J. *El desacuerdo. Política y filosofía*. Translated by H. Pons. Buenos Aires, Nueva Visión, 2007. Foucault, M. *Seguridad, territorio, población*, ed. M. Senellart. Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006.
22. Žižek, S. *Sobre la violencia. Seis reflexiones marginales*. Translated by A. J. Antón. Barcelona, Paidós, 2009, pp. 16 ff.
23. Badiou, A. *Logiques des mondes*. Paris, Seuil, 2006. Also see notes 18 and 21.
24. [www.culture24.org.uk/art/](http://www.culture24.org.uk/art/)



## We Never Look Once and for All, But Inside Time

### Mar Villaespesa

"In the inside there is sleeping, in the outside there is reddening, in the morning there is meaning, in the evening there is feeling. In the evening there is feeling. In feeling anything is resting, in feeling anything is mounting, in feeling there is resignation, in feeling there is recognition, in feeling there is recurrence..."  
Gertrude Stein

Repetition as a mechanism or stylistic feature is an essential element of the works by Inmaculada Salinas (Sevilla 1967) showed in this exhibition. The alignment of meaning and feeling, looped in a circular and repetitive time, is the base of her poetics. The four series she presents now – *Espejo*, *Visión de las vencidas*, *Prensadas* and *Como fondo* – share with the works of the last two years – *Postales*, *Callejera*, *Asocial*<sup>1</sup> – the small format and the specific focus on women (with the exception of *Como fondo*). Her new series of small-scale works on the social subject of "women" represent a stark change with regard to her previous work, done in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which was mainly pictorial, abstract and big scale. Nevertheless, the pieces of both periods have something in common, something about which Gertrude Stein declared: "I like a thing simple, but it must be simple through complication. [...] William James was my big influence when I was at college. He was a man who always said, 'Complicate your life as much as you please, it has got to simplify'."

These new pieces not only represent a break but also a "complication" in Salinas' career, because she has giving up the aesthetic paradigms in which she was trained (she studied at the Fine Art Faculty in Seville) and to which she has dedicated all her research and emotions over more than fifteen years of silent studio work. However, she has not abandoned the simplification that Gertrude Stein found so interesting.

Certainly there is a big difference between the previous pieces and the current ones (closer to the idea of drawings, of works on paper), but once again she sets the drive against the gesture. No inaugural sense of gesture can be found in her paintings, despite the interaction between painting and the body. Her paintings are not geometric, either, even

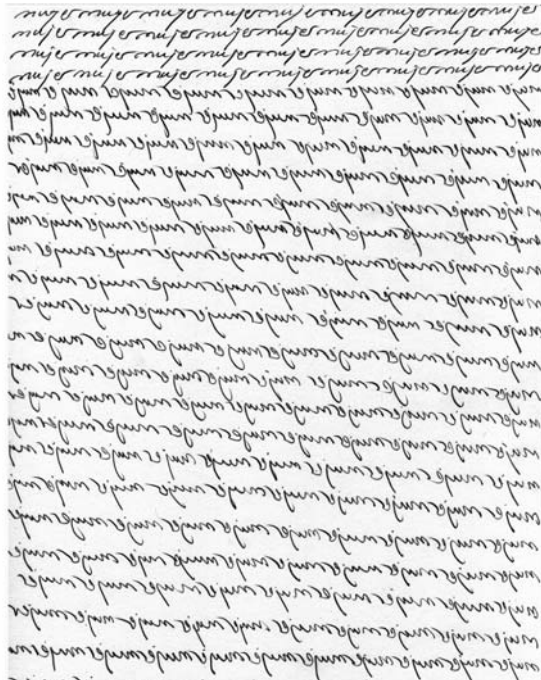
though they are almost exclusively structured by lines, while colour has always been a functional element. Her idea is closer to calligraphic painting and serialism, but without abandoning the notion that lines, which wander between restrained geometry and unconscious fantasy, form organic and symbolic shapes. These sexually charged shapes could be considered part of a "female imagery," using the term that Lucy Lippard coined in *From the Center* to discuss the iconography that a group of women artists were creating in the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> From this point, Salinas' lines seem to suggest ties to another debate: identification through recognition, and how this can be an implicit confirmation of the dominant ideology, while hinting at its huge "potential importance as an agency of psychic and social change," as Kaja Silverman analyzes in *The Threshold of the Visible World*.<sup>3</sup>

Drive, together with learnt visual values and a talent for drawing, is the construct behind both the pictures and the recent works by Salinas. The notion of drive is here understood in the psychoanalytic sense, as a psychic energy which directs behaviour towards a goal and runs down after achieving it. In Salinas' case, this happens after composing each one of the pictures in the diverse series and, also, after working systematically to shape this new group of works.

Among the different ways in which drive can show up, the drive for knowledge has lead Salinas to the current state, in which she again needs references external to painting (as in the *Emblemas* series from the second half of the 1990s). However, the formal features of her work remain the same: in three of the series which could be called "drawings" she still starts from minimal elements such as the line and a basic colour, and in the fourth series, *Prensadas*, she starts from the minimal acts of selecting, cutting out and labelling press photos.

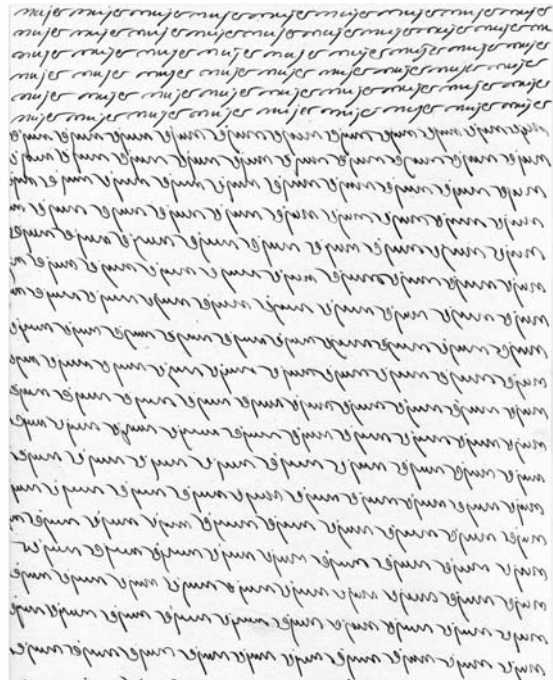
Drawings and found "images" have the common factor of displaying the word *mujer* (woman) or representations of women. It is obvious, Salinas says, that we need to reflect on the binomial formed by women's visibility and invisibility, by voice and silence.

The linguistic sign substitutes the lines which Salinas compose her pictures with; or rather the new lines are made of such signs, which wholly sketch the *Espejo* series and mostly the *Visión de las vencidas*



Espejo, 2008

series. Calligraphic painting has evolved into calligraphy exercises that involve writing a word in an impossibly illegible, specular fashion, as she may have written before educational and societal constraints were imposed upon her. The word is repeated along a line, constantly multiplying until there is no more space left, and then fills every remaining line on the first sheet of paper. On the second sheet, the word is revealed, appearing in the “usual” way on the first line only: *mujer*. Then, line by line, sheet by sheet, for 40 pages, the word is repeated, and on the last page all the lines are taken up by the revealed word. Although she has not been traumatized by being forced to change her way of writing or of doing other actions with the left hand, this fight between her two hands, between the power of autonomy and the subordination of discipline, helps her (herein lies the therapeutic power of art) to reflect on the part (both in the literal and in the figurative sense) of the assigned social roles, on what is considered normative, on so-called “bad characters,”



on the naturalizations and denaturalizations to which the body is subjected by different mechanisms of power.

Specular writing is used once more in *Visión de las vencidas*, where Salinas handwrites the English word for *mujer*, woman, together with wife and womanizer (the three terms that she found in a pocket electronic dictionary as the English translation for *mujer*, a surprising fact when it comes to womanizer). Here there is less space for calligraphy: 50 lined cards, 25 in one colour and 25 in another; on yet another 50 cards, equally divided into two colours (note how she continues using colour in a functional way), Salinas writes 50 sentences from the book *Visión de los vencidos*<sup>4</sup> that contain the word *mujer* or other terms associated with it: *madre, hija, doncella, reina, vieja, esclava, infanta*, etc. (mother, daughter, maiden, queen, old woman, slave, princess, etc.). By altering the gender of the title of the book, Salinas gives a name to the series, establishing an analogy with the vanquished. In doing so, she tries to appeal to the



power systems, which authorize certain representations while hindering or making others invisible, instead of portraying women as victims, something she viscerally rejects. The sentences take up a random part of the card and other lines are painted with a pencil; the words referring to women are also shaded in, composing graphical rhythms. The 100-card sequence is organized both randomly and by the rigorous methodology followed during the composition process. The cards combine alternating variations and repetitions where the stressed words seem to comprise notes in a pentagram and recall other sensorial spheres like minimalist music. However, the marked words draw the viewer's attention away from the text, a distracting effect which hinders reading by interspersing subjective gaps and short circuits in the canonical vision. Creating a sort of blurring weft, a resource she has been using from the beginning of her career, gives way to new resources, like specular writing, at the service of new politics of representation.

These perception tricks (in one of her last paintings, if paying thorough attention, it could be seen how the lines drew the word *mujer* – the genealogical starting point that explains where she is heading with this new phase) allow her to distort the dominant codes.

Plastic resources are still present in Salinas' recent works but now they are used for constant constructions of the subject. Inmaculada Salinas sees her previous plastic work not as a defeat, but as a turn. She does not reject or deny it, she has just taken another path; a path which allows her to break from and move towards new practices where it is possible to combine poetics and politics (or, as historical feminism said, "the personal is political").

That is why before materializing these works, before investigating beyond the pictorial field, she spent a long time away from the studio, leaving the canvass at home and going out "for a searching roll" (in her own expressive words). First, she searched inside herself through different psychotherapies, and then she researched contemporary critical discourses – both artistic and sociocultural – and discussions about subject formation. Judith Butler claims that the concept of subject has generated much controversy; some defend it as the pre-condition for power while others revile it as a trace of "domination" that must be rejected. So, she proposes "to take account of how

a paradox recurrently structures the debate, leading it almost always to culminate in displays of ambivalence. How can it be that the subject, taken to be the condition for and instrument of agency, is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as the deprivation of agency? [...] 'The subject' is sometimes banded about as if it were interchangeable with 'the person' or 'the individual'. The genealogy of the subject as a critical category, however, suggests that the subject, rather than be identified strictly with the individual, ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation."<sup>5</sup>

The training that Salinas has gained in these five or six years has helped her to redirect her steps towards her study, although obviously she has taken a different stance there, as she says. This does not imply a disconnection in relation to her previous training, but a broadening. She has expanded her knowledge, now open for signifiers and thus for their content: the signified. Following Saussure's school, the word *mujer*, repeatedly used by Inmaculada Salinas, would be the signifier that points at the signified of what a woman is. Following Lacan, for whom the signifier is such when it is inscribed at the symbolic level and the thinking is formed by signifiers whose signified changes constantly, the signifier may have some conscious signifieds, but it may also refer to unconscious signifieds. The "complication" is here again at the service of the artist, especially if we take into account the rich feminist debates about gender and the subject woman. Since this is not the place to expose, not even synthetically, the genealogy of essentialist feminism discussed by constructionist feminism and its evolution, I just want to mention some milestones formulated in negative or interrogative form: "one is not born a woman" (Simone de Beauvoir), "ain't I a woman?" (bell hooks), "lesbians are not women" (Monique Wittig). I also want to recall the gaps opened by the problematization of identities, which have provoked new crises in the subject of political and ontological representation of feminism. From this thinking emerges the seminal theory of Judith Butler on "performativity" that considers gender as a ritualized repetition of conventions, rituals imposed "socially, thanks partly to the power of compulsory heterosexuality." Recently, a polyphony of voices from new generations questions gender because they consider it "a power mechanism that imposes



Prensadas, 2009

man/woman and masculine/feminine categories in a rigid, violent and hierarchical way with the aim of producing bodies which adjust to the established social order.”<sup>6</sup>

Salinas’ methodology is based on structures, on rules, on mechanical acts. The sign and calligraphic action and the idea of serialism (she obviously empathizes with Hanne Darboven), even when selecting media pictures as she does in *Prensadas*, is equally structured. This series is composed by 624 cards systematically catalogued during nine months (though not premeditated, it coincided with the length of human gestation), from the 5<sup>th</sup> of February to the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2009. Each card shows an image of a woman (or something that symbolizes her and thus represents her) cut out from a major newspaper – *Público*, *El País*, *El Mundo*, *ABC* –, together with the name of the newspaper, the date and the number of pictures of solely women, solely men, and women and men together published in the newspaper that day. The taxonomy she has created reveals the result of her research and displays before her and the spectator the statistical reality that can be drawn from the recount: the number of pictures of women is less than half the number depicting women and men together, and less than a third of the pictures of men (despite the great number of images

showing women as objects in the media). With this experiment, Salinas questions the legitimacy of representation and remarks what the feminist discourse has been saying for decades: there is a need for the “displacement of the subject of scientific statement,” for the “decolonization of hegemonic representation.” Critical thinking has highlighted how we see ourselves and how we are seen through pictures and, with regard to the current visibility regime of disciplinary society, how current social powers exercise a disciplinary regime over the visibility of women and the role of the media.

Against the automatism that combines sight and feeling with no more mediation than the weft linking the paintings, Salinas has started to create new mediations from the reflection that her recent training has implied, new “screens” between sight and feeling. She is conscious of the fact that, as Kaja Silverman says, the normative features of the screen can be so deeply rooted in our psyches and mingled with our hopes that they can determine what we see when we first look at an object. Nevertheless, Silverman claims, “no look ever takes place once and for all. Rather, each act of spectation is subject to a complex series of conscious and unconscious ‘vicissitudes,’ which can completely transform the value of what is originally seen [...] the eye may

invest libidinally in the given-to-be-seen, or pursue a radically other itinerary, one which works to derealize rather than to affirm the visual standard. [...] if the look acts in concert with enough other looks, it can reterritorialize the screen, bringing new elements into cultural prominence, and casting into darkness those which presently constitute normative representation.”<sup>7</sup>

Once Salinas has made it complicated, she focuses on rigorously simplifying the work. The series *Como fondo*, chronologically conceived in the first place, can be considered the hinge between previous and current works. The solitude of the silent studio work and the repeated and passionate insistence on painting had a double effect on the artist, both filling and emptying her. As has been before said, she decided to escape from the “isolated body,” to go out of the studio to work on the inside and the outside: in the figurative sense, to approach different fields of knowledge; and in the literal sense, to approach the street, the community, and the conflicts that arise there, absorbing the changes that take place in the public space. She acted on attraction and this escape allowed her to start living the aesthetic experience in a different way, to glimpse new frameworks where the poetics of image could also imply other politics of image and, thus, to understand the artistic experience in relation to the sociocultural context where it takes place. Salinas also observes the fate of the paintings when they leave the studio and enter the market, where they become immediately reduced to but a few of their many features, particularly their visual potential as decorative objects (even though we know that the commercialization of society turns the most immaterial work into decorative objects). This is why she decided to make use of the new methodologies she is developing and selected a group of press pictures where a person or a group of people appear in front of a painting in offices, official places or museums. After, she covered the bodies with a layer of colour so the coloured silhouette appeared outlined against the painting in the background. Then, she contrasted each one of these pictures with a card painted with wavy lines of the same colour of the layer until completing the Pantone colour scale on the 100<sup>th</sup> card. With this series, Salinas tries to question the use of her own painting as the prelude for future aesthetic experiences and constructs a new temporality from her own life.

Butler, again, affirms: “The temporal paradox of the subject is such that, of necessity, we must lose the perspective of a subject already formed in order to account for our own becoming. That ‘becoming’ is no simple or continuous affair, but an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete, wavering on the horizon of social being.”

1. Inmaculada Salinas. Paper presented in the workshop “Capital y territorio. ¿La construcción de un sueño?” UNIA arteypensamiento, Sevilla, 2009. [http://ayp.unia.es/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=582](http://ayp.unia.es/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=582)
2. Lucy R. Lippard. *From the Center, Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, New York, E.P. Dutton, 1976.
3. Kaja Silverman. *The Threshold of the Visible World*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996.
4. *Visión de los vencidos* (lit. Vision of the Vanquished, translated as *Broken Spears*), by Miguel León-Portilla, compiles indigenous codices written between 1519 and 1521 that present the Conquest of Mexico from the Mesoamerican point of view; the importance of this work lies in the break with the story spread through the texts written by the Spanish.
5. Judith Butler. *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997.
6. Mirian Solá. “Reflexiones feministas sobre el no binarismo. La fragmentación del sujeto y la apertura del género, un nuevo escenario para las luchas feministas”. Jornadas Feministas Estatales, Granada, 2009, published by Coordinadora Estatal de Organizaciones Feministas, Madrid, 2010.
7. Kaja Silverman. *Op. cit.*

I  
HATE  
BUSINESS



## The Memo on the Wall

### Lydia Dona

Jessica Diamond's wall drawings, text fragments, objects, and items for pleasure and contemplation deal with (rather than deny) sadness, self-awareness, and the "funny" through an almost Aristophanic, accusatory tragicomedy. As some of her objects have, in addition to their powerful semiotic flow, an associative hint of the functional/utilitarian commonplace, they carry the double meaning of the literal and the connotative through her chosen phenotexts. Through them we witness an American Dream, "the" American Dream, as a culture falling apart into a pathetic generic mode in which superpowers are reduced to pea-brains drawn as shadows reflected onto Japanese rice paper (a motif which reappears in *Collapsing Super Power Scrolls with Rising Sun*, 1990). They are drawn in lines that fade away, as thin as the paper itself, in texts broken down into short, angry notes.

Jessica Diamond leaves a memo on the wall, an angry one, in which abandonment and self-protection assert themselves in personal but non-nostalgic, unsentimental codes. Her memo, a quickly written message rooted in the tactics of corporate America, is always a strong, direct statement in which individuality is reconstructed despite the generic qualities of the world we inhabit.

*I Hate Business* is a huge, written statement in black, bold, authoritative letters, but personal, handwritten (that is, hand-painted) on the wall or on paper. It is in the sound evacuating the object, the text, and the intertextuality reconstructed within the environment she creates as a total installation, that desire, the speaker, the addressee, and their reconnection to the self recur. Diamond creates a subjection in which the subject is positioned as both audience and performer, both aggressor and attacked.

It is in the fear of abandonment and emptiness, and where the "emptiness it opens up is nevertheless also a barely covered abyss where our identities, images, and words run the risk of being engulfed,"<sup>1</sup> that vulnerability is positioned, a vacuum in the narcissism of *Sex, Power, Money, and Business* through which Diamond "casually" but "carefully" repeats her message in gold, in the high look of desire and the substitutes for desire. Like slogans or commercials scattered into our urban pragmatism, they are at once concrete and hallucinatory, behaving like the deceptiveness of wishes. *Buy a Condo or Die, Elvis Alive* – certainties are subverted through this

aggressive fragility. She points a finger at the big, almost epic concepts in a Kafkaesque *Amerika*, but without engaging in text-as-rhetoric, discourse-as-rhetoric, or image-as-apparatus for closed, one-dimensional sign systems.

A complex dynamic is hidden beneath the various manners and representational modes of her declarations. She is "an author, a reader, a spectator, and a voyeur," as Roland Barthes wrote when identifying his subject of representation.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, all these distinctions eventually collapse in the role reversals they are led to play. A teapot or gold bar may be juxtaposed with a wall drawing in which gold is a fragment of a broken image/text. Gold is applied to the surface of materials to reinforce them with an aura of "glamour" or a jewelry-like aspect, while major structures are transformed into collapsing chaotic lines on walls that barely support the gravity of the statement. With fragile means she reverses light/heavy relationships of image/code/material/sound and amalgamates them into the context of installation.

However, to read this work only through the apparatus of advertising slogans, media, and low culture as coercive powers would be a misleadingly direct take denying complexities, subtleties, and contemplative aspects. Such terms identified with consumer society permit only one kind of accessibility. But Diamond's obsession with the syndrome of the kid growing up in America witnessing its emblems of authority reduced to entertainment brings her to an opening to ethics. Rather than addressing "You" the viewer as an oppressive male gaze à la Barbara Kruger, she is closer to the "Me" of Vito Acconci's claustrophobia-suffocated self or Bruce Nauman's highly charged emotional "intensities/insanities." Her moral angle transforms her project into a visionary and experimental, rather than didactic, form of conceptualism, where the repression of systems allows for freedom of speech. Jessica Diamond gives me, you, us a direct statement about where she is and who she says yes (and no) to: *Yes Bruce Nauman!* read one earlier piece, while a new one, *New Economic Shorthand: What Money?, No Money. Totally Unequal* (1990), says no to a land of opportunities that are not necessarily so equal.

In *Money Having Sex* (1988), where dollars are used for fake regeneration, or in the recent installation, *Money as Barbed Wire* (1990), dollar

signs perform, split themselves, multiply in various forms of movement and entanglement, forming a gate, a mural, a menacing trap with globally overwhelming political implications. In 1990 Jessica Diamond's anger is stronger than ever. Under an almost chaotic mixture of handwritings, the gallery space is broken into distinct zones of perception, manipulated through multiple tactics into revealing itself as sculptural space in which the main pictorial images serve as body traps. Through this environment Diamond readdresses the personal, or rather reconstructs a worldview that has collapsed under the territorial invasion of disappointment. What makes Diamond's discourse a poetic language despite its semaphoric disjunctions is that it maintains its signifying function even through its dislocations of signification. Her objects never

become fetishistic mechanisms: they are gracefully incorporated and subverted in "her" environment. She gazes toward and experiences a social body that gives her a power of renewal over her own identity and autonomy, negating the authority of the Model. She can leave the room, slamming the door and saying, "I can see the writing on the wall." In Diamond's work, the long sad night of the American Dream ends in the clear light of the morning after.

Originally published in *Arts Magazine*, October 1990, pp. 62-63.

1. Julia Kristeva, "Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents," in Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 238.
2. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, tr. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, New York: Hill & Wang, 1968.

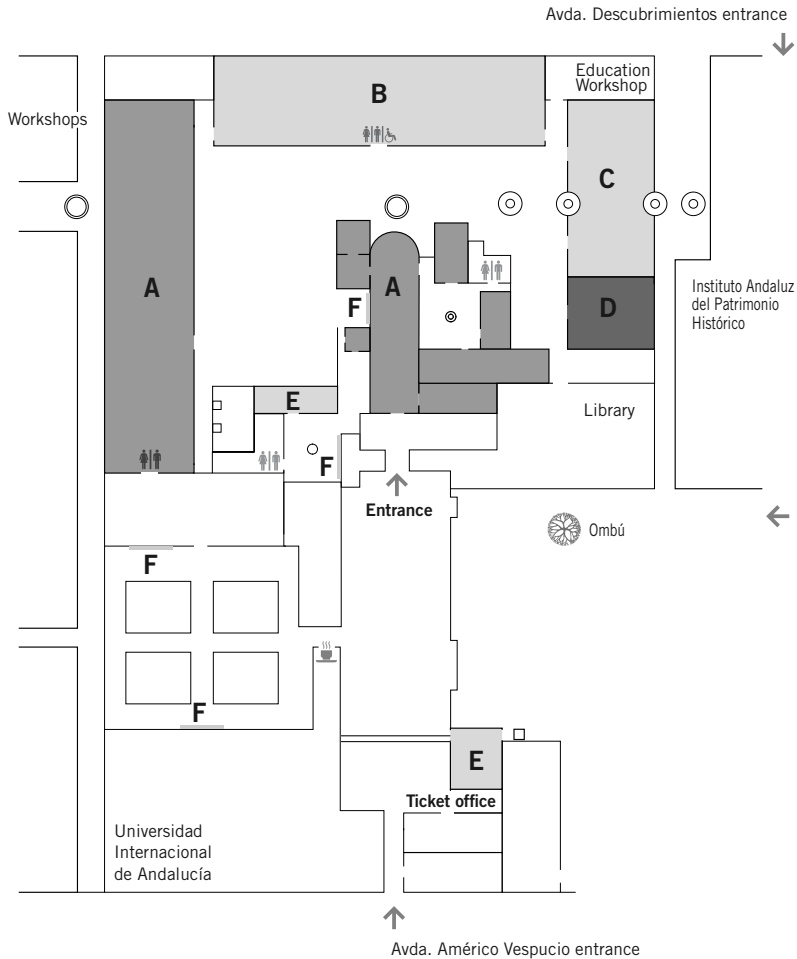


*Money Having Sex*, 1988

**IS THAT ALL THERE IS ?**



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- B. KP Brehmer. A Test Extending Beyond the Action.** From March 31 through June 12
- C. Rogelio López Cuenca. Cercanías (Outskirts).** From March 3 through May 15
- D. Alfredo Jaar. Marx Lounge.** From February 15 through May 15
- E. Inmaculada Salinas. Prensadas (Pressed Out Women).** From March 31 through June 12
- F. Jessica Diamond. Murales (Wall Paintings).** March 31





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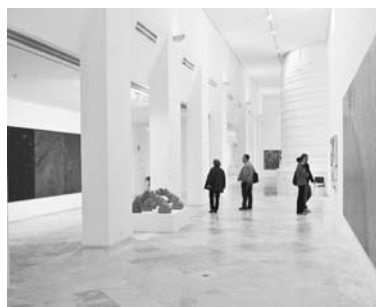
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**Alfredo Jaar. Marx Lounge**

February 15 – May 15 2011

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Yolanda Torrubia

Installation  
Carpintería Olivera, CEDECO, Grupo 956

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Trillo comunicación audiovisual

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**Rogelio López Cuenca. Cercanías (Outskirts)**

March 3 – May 15 2011

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**KP Brehmer. A Test Extending Beyond The Action**

March 31 – June 12 2011

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Doreen Mende

Coordination  
Alberto Figueroa

Installation  
Grupo 956

Framing  
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**Jessica Diamond: Murales (Wall Paintings)**

March 31 2011

Coordination  
Raquel López

Painter  
Iván Javier Marí

**Inmaculada Salinas. Prensadas (Pressed Out Women)**

March 31 – June 12 junio 2011

Curator  
Luisa López Moreno

Coordination  
Raquel López

Installation  
Otto Pardo

**Sin realidad no hay utopía (Without Reality There Is No Utopia)**

April 14 – July 10 2011

Curators  
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