

Artistic research, thought and education

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Photograph by Francesc Català-Roca
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**Biannual Journal
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Editorial

Issues and terms that drive another logic and new thought from and about art.

Zoom

How is it possible to put together another narrative of art? 'Zoom' is a space for new intellectual and bibliographic points of reference.

Display

How are exhibitions brought about? What does their research involve? This section attempts to make visible the processes by which exhibitions are conceived and defined.

Mediterraneans

A space for dialogue on the Near East, Europe and North Africa. Different voices offer new formulations regarding culture, art, religion, education and the common future of the societies in the Mediterranean region.

Artistic research

Why and how do I do what I do? Artists talk about their projects in the first person.

Academy

What is the role of education? How are critical visions constructed? 'Academy' deals with the relationship between art and the human sciences, as well as critical-social intervention both within the museum and beyond.

I CELEBRATE MYSELF AND SING MYSELF. ANACHRONISM AS METHOD

Chus Martínez

Head of department in the curatorial office
of documenta 13; associate curator
of MACBA.



‘Providence is the reason that man himself sometimes reappears in different centuries.’

BALZAC, *Letters*

In the last decade, we have seen how historians, curators and institutions have subjected contemporary artistic production to a reading defined by the philosophy of history, thus making works conform to history and systematising the experience of them according to the illusion of supposedly objective parameters. This approach is mediated by the primacy of the question of *theme* – that of which art speaks – such that ‘theme’ and ‘meaning’ become synonymous, making us forget that there are other ways of signifying. Herein lies the reason for the renewed interest in the notion of anachronism and its potential as a method that could allow us to escape the omnipresence of hermeneutics.

The anachronic designates a situation where the analysis of rhythm replaces the analysis of duration as the sole form of grasping time. Rhythm is tempo: power, drive, vibration, movement; duration, on the other hand, is the melody of history.

Insofar as the understanding of history means delineating a chronological axis upon which events are ordered, the sole task of the historian is to ceaselessly insert the stories that have not yet been included in that great continuous narrative. Meanwhile, the institution (where an exhibition is understood as a way of institutionalising a material) is reduced to the place where the legitimacy of a right acquires a public form. The fact that the exercise of revision and the recovery of things forgotten provoke unanimous respect proves that a fitting vocabulary has been found, one that serves solely to avoid the unpredictable function of experience in art.

Furthermore, the impact of this re-writing resembles the relationship between a text and a staggering number of footnotes that interrupt the reading to remind us that writing eludes the author and that countless parallel actions take place and have taken place synchronously with that great text. Those actions were hidden, but the time has come for a reordering, and that means finding a hole in the diachronic axis upon which history is written. The ‘well of the past’, to use Thomas Mann’s phrase, blossoms on the surface and drowns it. Nothing exists in the singular any longer. We can no longer speak, for instance, of a Modernity, but rather all its multiples. Yet, contemporary art seems to continue to be indivisible (perhaps that is the first symptom of its anachronism). Alongside this endless search for plurals, in the bosom of history there lies another one: the search of those individuals – artists – who seem to be stran-



View of the exhibition *The Modern and the Present. Change of Century in the MACBA Collection* where some of the works executed, between 1955 and 1961, by sculptor and potter Antoni Cumella (1913–85) are displayed.

In the exhibition it is argued that the aesthetic of modernism in Catalonia was strengthened from the 1950s when art, architecture and design were strongly connected.

Josep Maria Mestres
Quadreny, *L'Estro
Aleatorio, Six Concerts
for Soloists and Orchestra*
(detail), 1973–78
Mixed media on paper
41.9 x 89.1 cm
MACBA Collection.
Museu d'Art
Contemporani de
Barcelona Consortium

L'Estro Aleatorio is the synthesis of a stage of this Catalan composer's work. It encapsulates the techniques he used and evidences the influence that scientific thought and mathematical randomness exercised on his work. The scores, which in this case are circles of sounds, visually represent his idea of music, where sounds cannot be understood individually, but rather as part of a unique sound field equally affected by the laws of chaos and determinist phenomena.

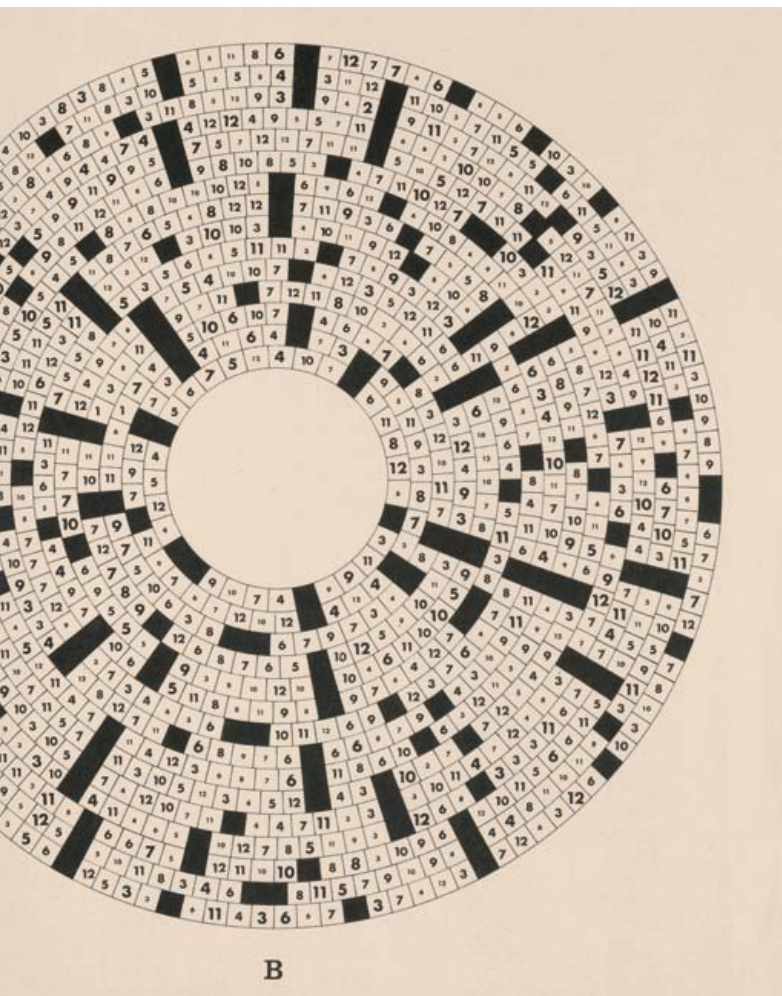


gers to time, who escape the wanderings of the present. In the last decade we have seen a heightening of the sensitivity to the exceptional in art, to those who, at least apparently, remain inflexible to the logic of globalisation. The proliferation of projects on *those others* – those who think and act without us, so to speak – also forms part of this operation of recovery, which no longer symbolises justice, but the vast seductive power that myth, archetypal being and the genuine still hold in our culture. What these projects evidence is our fear of entering into a state of permanent instability.

The political importance of recovery as a tactic is directly proportional to the impossibility of formulating a more complex statement of the relationship between contemporary art and a discontinuous conception of time, that is expressed in rhythms and cannot be represented as duration. In other words, a way of understanding time that is indifferent to the idea of progress and is therefore relieved of the imperative of innovation. This understanding of time has no qualms about repetition, about imitating what has already taken place. Generating doubt about these constant reincarnations and about the spontaneity of the contemporary would provide a way around the suppo-

sed sincerity with which it is believed that art and culture – but not, for instance, science – must speak.

In this dialectical interplay between great narrative and academic appendixes, the past and history are manifested as a new facet of culture and of its present power: this is not the power to delve into adventures of logic that might lead to a new *episteme*, but rather the *de facto* ability to include or exclude. Nonetheless, this explosion of voices and points of view has contributed to maintaining a degree of confidence in public opinion thanks to the constant effort at ceaseless expansion implied by historiographic revision and its relationship to contemporary art. The worst enemy of the enthusiasm inspired by the possibility of intervening in, interrogating, interfering with, modifying, amending, taking back and affecting hegemonic narration is the tendency to endlessness. Each footnote serves both to clarify and obscure in a new way, one that rather than providing a new consciousness of the issue at hand or of contributing to an understanding of the relationship between contemporary art and time, between production and the inextricable complexity of the contexts in which it appears, places us before endless windows through which we peer; always



under the promise of completing history. We can assume the risk that disconcertion brings. What is harder, though, is to face the fact that there are those who attempt to replace this strain of research not by adopting another logic but by emulating this effort and reducing it to a mere gesture that credibly illustrates the choreography of this explosion of histories within history.

The problem lies in the fact that the politically correct is not a method, but rather a strategy to avoid confronting a technical difficulty: the understanding of times that cannot be reduced to duration, the grasping of rhythms that do not give rise to a continuity, that operate outside the melody of history. The desire to avoid incoherence by abandoning the philosophy of history stands in contrast to the need – one upon which Schelling insisted long ago – to delve into other languages that formalise art objects, their ability to become facts and the role that individuals play along lines that distance us from the predictable; an exercise still more complex at a time when citizen-spectators are more passive than they are liberated in relation to what they expect from art.

The language that has contributed to producing what is socially known as contemporary art partakes of

the lyrical genre. It is a language geared towards creating enthusiasm, not method; a prose characterised by the careful choice of terms that defend the importance of teary eyes, the choreography of agency, the value of the hand on the heart rather than in the pocket. The inquisition of feelings – even ‘good’ ones – is as much a part of the totalitarian world as the global economy, but it is cloaked in good will while, with true disdain, it attacks the ‘null’ moments of life.

How to find a way out of this *melodic* way of understanding history without losing sight of rigor or responsibility? The ‘null’, that which seems to have strayed from meaning – idiocy, nonsense – merits our attention as never before. In these forms of absentmindedness lies a new imagination of the private, a way of resisting the power of empathy in all its strains, whether real or virtual. Mistrust of a thoroughly defined present allows a part of artistic intelligence to elude the desire for art and institutions to be able to respond eloquently to their times. In other words, it allows an escape from responsibility understood as the imposed need to answer for, to clarify and not to expose ourselves to the exuberance and lightness of thought.¹

This insistence on placing art and culture in the present runs the risk of turning objects and ideas into a mere support of the ghosts that fill in the empty place of a time lacking in resources, exhausted from having repeated the obvious so often. Too much preterit – as Didi-Huberman says –² runs the risk of being nothing more than ‘residue’, regardless of how positive it may be. And it is impossible to speak of the future since, despite a different rhetoric, it is a symmetrical form of the past. Hence, the importance of the extemporaneous, of that which is *not relevant*. While anachronism is not the solution to our problems – how to escape from ‘historical culture’, from ‘the fever of history’? –³ it does formulate a possible means to a different method, to a logic that, though still incipient, is capable of putting us at risk: disconnection and a skewed time.

Any question of method becomes a question of time, that is, a question that must truly consider a term largely forgotten in philosophy and art theory: rhythm. The anachronic names a different rhythm, the possibility of straining an analysis of meaning from a different angle that forces the subject and the context – whether institutional or not – to review the conditions from which it puts forth the experience and the interpretation of artistic production. I purposefully leave out art itself, since no art can be considered ‘contemporary’; that is an institutional consideration, not a question of practice. Indeed, the thesis would be that art is always anachronic. And ‘what must be reconstructed

¹ Nietzsche said that those who defended the notion that thinking was an arduous task should be attacked.

² Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronisme des images*. Paris: Minuit, 2000.

³ An expression used by Nietzsche in the prologue to his *Untimely Meditations* (1873-1876).

is the very idea of anachronism as error about time'.⁴ One of the ultimate aims of artistic production is to transform our idea of time. The anachronic implies accepting the importance of rhythm as fundamental to understanding the relationship between matter and energy. 'Rhythm' here has no connection whatsoever with the virtual or the cosmic. In relation to art we, like Gaston Bachelard,⁵ should speak of a *rhythmic realism*: the introduction of material and conceptual parameters geared towards freeing us from the need to construct cultural identity in terms of the philosophy of history.

Insisting that the anachronic is not an aberration but a need means that we must distance ourselves from a method of reading and interpretation dominated by the notion of duration, and instead delve into another method, into a contingency of heterogeneous times that provide other keys to pursue the question of meaning.

Duration implies order: rhythm, intensity. This difference has epistemological consequences: it means forgetting hermeneutics, putting away philological tools and inventing a new critical imagination. Hence, the assertion that the anachronic entails a risk (a challenge that art faces) means rejecting a whole set of conceptual exigencies to be able to express oneself in a foreign language, to introduce another rhythm and to generate a strangeness that forces us to reassemble the *current* unease. The question now is if academies and institutions are willing to give up the ironclad alliance between time and space and to assume once and for all that leaving the system behind is not synonymous with chaos.

A series of books that provide an in-depth analysis of the concept of the 'anachronic' and the importance of time in the world of contemporary art:

- Bachelard, Gaston. *La Dialectique de la durée*. Paris: Quadriage / PUF, 1950. (English: *The Dialectic of Duration*. Manchester: Clinamen, 2000).
- Belting, Hans. 'Toward an Anthropology of the Image', in Mariët Westermann (ed.), *Anthropologies of Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, pp. 41–58.
- . 'Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 31, no. 2, winter 2005, pp. 302–19.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Spectres de Marx*. Paris: Galilée, 1993. (English: *Specters of Marx*. New York: Routledge, 1994).
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. 'The Supposition of Aura. On the Once, the Now, and the Modernity', J. M. Todd (trans.), in R. Francis (ed.), *Negotiating Rapture. The Power of Art to Transform Lives*. Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996, pp. 48–63.
- . *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronisme des images*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2000.
- . 'Dialektik des Monstrums: Aby Warburg and the Symptom paradigm', in David Peters Corbett and Christine Riding (eds.), *Art History*, vol. 24, no. 5, November 2001, pp. 621–45.
- . 'Artistic Survival. Panofsky vs. Warburg and the Exorcism of Impure Time', *Common Knowledge*, vol. 9, no. 2, spring 2003, pp. 273–85.
- . 'The Imaginary Breeze: Remarks on the Air of the Quattrocento', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 2, no. 3, December 2003, pp. 275–89.
- Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *Éléments de rythmanalyse*. Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 1992. (English: *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. London: Continuum, 2004.)
- Loroux, Nicole. 'Éloge de l'anachronisme en histoire', *Le Genre humain*, no. 27, 1993, pp. 23–39.
- Michaud, Philippe-Alain. *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Zone Books, 2004.
- Mitchell, William J. Thomas. 'What Is an Image?', *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 7–19; 31–46.
- Rancière, Jacques. 'Le concept d'anachronisme et la vérité de l'historien', *L'Inactuel*, no. 6, autumn 1996, pp. 53–68.
- Rohy, Valerie. *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality*. New York: SUNY Press, 2009.
- Wind, Edgar. 'Warburg's Concept of Kulturwissenschaft and its Meaning for Aesthetics', *The Eloquence of Symbols. Studies in Humanist Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 21–35.

4 Jacques Rancière, 'Le concept d'anachronisme et la vérité de l'historien', *L'Inactuel*, no. 6, 1996, p. 53.

5 Gaston Bachelard, *La Dialectique de la durée*. Paris: Quadriage / PUF, 1950 (in the chapter on the analysis of rhythm).

THE PHILOSOPHICAL GESTURE OF DELEUZE

José Luis Pardo

Philosopher and essayist, he is senior professor at the School of Philosophy of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. In 2005 he was awarded the Premio Nacional de Ensayo for his book, *La regla del juego* (2005). He is a leading figure in the spread of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy thanks to books such as *Deleuze: violentar el pensamiento* (1990) and his articles and translations of works by that French philosopher.

'Some kind of innocence is measured out in years. You don't know what it's like to listen to your fears.'

Gilles Deleuze is a well-known name in contemporary thought, in social sciences, among art critics and theorists and in innumerable other contexts. A little bit of Deleuze seems to go well in any scenario, for he is correctly considered (Foucault *dixit*) the right thinker for our times. It is no doubt legitimate to use Deleuze to add an intellectual and provocative tone to any proposal and sometimes his own striking formulations seem to call for exactly that. Wasn't it Deleuze who said that a philosopher's work is a toolbox from which we should take what proves useful to us? Certainly. Yet it is equally certain that when he said that, the tools he had in mind were not the 'verbal formulae' one finds in a particular author's work, but rather the concepts, better yet, the *living* concepts; not so much what philosophers say (no matter how grandiloquently) as what they actually *do*, even when the latter is much more difficult to identify. Their activity is defined by how they handle their own thought, how they propose, interweave or untangle its parts, organise its sequences, organise or construct its elements, choose their subjects and elaborate their materials, or how they move from one problem to the next, and how they build or destroy a question. We could call such gestures a thinker's *style*, that is, what sets his or her characteristic movement light-years apart from those whose work seems to differ very little in terms of content. For example, it has been brilliantly hypothesised that Hegel and Nietzsche

actually share the same approach, but this in no way eliminates enormous stylistic differences; not only in how they write, but also in how their thought moves, which is deeply significant.

In the case of Deleuze, this movement is inseparable from a vast operation that brings a substantial part of the history of philosophy into play, discarding habitual connections and establishing other unexpected ones (Hume, the most radical of empiricists, goes hand in hand with Spinoza's absolute rationalism, and the latter is simultaneously wed to Nietzsche's irrationalism). And when Deleuze suggests that his use of the history of philosophy is comparable to collage, we should not mistake this for metaphorical hyperbole or provocation. We must instead consider collage's complexity (it is much more than merely gluing one thing beside another) in the light of Deleuze's procedure for 'combining' authors and concepts. What the Deleuzian 'tone' mentioned above often lacks is the density of this movement, which depends on a use of history – both general history and that of philosophy – that we could reasonably consider 'contra-historical'. Deleuze's philosophy stands as a rigorous reversal of the programme of classical thought – the approach so dryly and accurately defined by Aristotle as a focus on 'being qua being' – that is, the link that ties thought to presence while simultaneously favouring the present as a nuclear form



Illustration by Lewis Carroll for the first manuscript of *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*.

'When I say "Alice becomes larger", I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is now. Certainly, she is not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present. Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of the past and future.' Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 1.

of time, establishing the basis for what would remain for centuries the space of representation in the broadest sense of that term. The experiment that Deleuze pits against that programme – this is always a matter of experimenting without any advantage beforehand – follows the path of ‘being qua becoming’, that is, an effort to conceive of movement to the degree that it is not subject to the demands of presence and flees from representation and the present, with respect to both of which it is structurally later or earlier. And if this is a forceful position to take in this area, it is no less so when the confrontation takes place in the scenario of modern philosophy, which boasts of having freed itself from the limitations of antiquity. For Deleuze, modernity in philosophy has two faces. First, Spinoza, the founder of a materialist immanentism of unprecedented ambition, and second, Kant, who freed time from all its former bonds with respect to its content, conjuring up the figure of the vicious circle. The titanic battle between these two impulses in Deleuze’s work (metaphysical and transcendental, dogmatic and critical) is, however, essential to understand his change of course around 1966, which allowed him to formulate – in *Différence et répétition* (1968) (*Difference and Repetition*, 1994) – a ‘discourse on method’ that, with minor changes, remained in force through his final investigations.

We could not even sketch out that discourse here, but let us point out at least three images that may help to reveal the secret of a stylistic gesture that not only allows us to ‘accompany’ a thinker, but also frequently turns out to be our reason for doing so. As any more-or-less faithful reader of Deleuze knows, our means of access to any given problem is the apparition of ‘another scenario’, a sort of extraordinary parallel world whose rules in no way coincide with those of our own (Bergson’s order of the virtual, Spinoza’s viewpoint on eternity, and so on). It is necessary to travel to this world ‘through the looking glass’, although there is no possibility of communicating with it, so every attempt to ‘break down the barrier’ that separates us from it fails. The only way out of this *impasse* is to change our point of view, discovering that it is not at all a matter of travelling to another place or world as the scenario that gave rise to such seductive thought represents not an empirical or spatiotemporal order, but rather a condition or limit; the limit and condition that underlie the exercise of subjective capacities such as memory, sensitivity, understanding and reason (for example, the discovery by Proust’s hero that the ‘forgotten’ is not so much the mnemonic content of the past as what allows the empirical exercise of memory, and cannot, therefore, be found in any earlier or later present). Finally, what definitively escapes representation and only appears there as fantasy, what actually sustains it, must also have a present and be represented, even though this can only happen through fiction and with a certain dilapidation of representation in an ontological sense, but also aesthetically and politically.

Reading Deleuze is largely a matter of sharing this experiential journey through which his thought attains the capacity to diagnose our present by connecting with the movement that defines the selfsame, irreducible and not always agreeable newness of our time.

José Luis Pardo, *Madrileño* by birth, but not by character.

In July of 2010, **José Luis Pardo** gave a course during the summer session of MACBA’s Independent Studies Programme (PEI) entitled *Body without Organs: The Philosophic Gesture of Gilles Deleuze*. In it, he delved into the work and thought of that French philosopher. Some of the contents of the course are available in audio format at www.macba.cat.

A forthcoming book by José Luis Pardo to be published by Pre-Textos will gather his most important writings on the work of Deleuze. It consists of a re-edition of his *Deleuze: Violentar el pensamiento* (Deleuze. A Shock to Thought), first published in 1990 and out of stock in Spain; a collection of articles written after 1990 entitled *A propósito de Deleuze* (Regarding Deleuze); and a new essay on Deleuze entitled *Cuerpo sin órganos* (Body Without Organs).

SALON 54: ON BECOMING THE END

Nataša Ilić

Art historian, critic and curator. Member of the independent curatorial collective *What, How & for Whom* (WHW), a non-profit organisation for visual culture formed in 1999 and based in Croatia. The group WHW directs Galerija Nova in Zagreb and has curated projects such as the 11th International Istanbul Biennial (2009).

If there is one exhibition that marked the establishment of a modernist paradigm in former Yugoslavia after the Second World War, it was the exhibition *Salon 54*, held in the Fine Arts Gallery in the city of Rijeka in March 1954. The narrative of modernism it established lasted throughout the socialist decades and with minor adaptations survived the breakdown of the State and subsequent founding of a new cultural identity in which nationalistic elements and ideological re-interpretations of an anti-communist character reigned supreme.

The exhibition installation, organisation and catalogue texts were the collective work of a team of authors, including Mića Bašičević and Radoslav Putar. Arguably the most talented and prolific critics among the younger generation, since the beginning of the 1950s they had expressed in the daily press a clear educational agenda, a formal-analytical approach and a belief in the possibility of the positive, transformative impact of art on social life.

Salon 54 is generally considered the high point of the postwar process of founding a new cultural policy in Yugoslavia and the reconstruction of modernism. It ran parallel to similar processes taking shape in the context of postwar Europe, characterised by a dire economic situation and the increasing fears of escalations in the Cold War. But in Yugoslavia this process was distinctively marked by the end of the short but restrictive episode of Socialist Realism and the radical social changes taking place when Yugoslavia broke away from the USSR in 1948 after the level of political independence of the Yugoslav Party had become unacceptable in the eyes of the monolith Eastern Bloc. The result of months of pressure and tension, Informbiro (Information Bureau of Communist

Parties) – a kind of reduced Komintern whose members comprised the leading Communist Parties of the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, as well as the Communist Parties of Italy and France – without the presence of the Yugoslav delegation, issued a resolution denouncing the Yugoslav political leadership as enemies of the revolution and betrayers of the international solidarity of workers. Being expelled from the family of Communist Parties, the Yugoslav Party broke off all diplomatic, economic and military ties with the USSR, and proceeded to forge an independent and authentic path for the construction of socialism. This included a separation from the Soviet basis of Marxism and the reinterpretation of Marx's original model, as well as the abandonment of Socialist Realism's approach to the organisation of cultural production, leading to a major reconfiguration of the cultural field related to it. In that sense the reconstruction of modernism entailed a massive institutional reorganisation, the reinforcement of the unique cultural space of Yugoslavia, as well as the dismantling, rearticulating and overcoming of the narrow national framework of modernism.

Cultural changes were gradual, but dramatic nonetheless. In 1949, the leading party ideologist, Edvard Kardelj, proclaimed the withdrawal of the Party from cultural affairs, and in 1952 Miroslav Krleža, a writer and intellectual of considerable political authority, deconstructed Socialist Realism as reactionary, apologetic bourgeois art in a speech delivered to the 3rd Congress of the Association of Writers of Yugoslavia. From 1950 onwards, in an attempt to signal its willingness to open communication channels to the West, Yugoslavia began participating in the Venice Biennial. Nevertheless, heated debates about the proper expression



View of *Salon 54*,
exhibition of
Contemporary Yugoslav
painting and sculpture
held 7–22 March 1954
at the Fine Arts Gallery of
Rijeka (today the
Museum of Modern
and Contemporary Art,
Rijeka).



View of the exhibition
Salon 54

of socialist ideas continued for several more years, during which the reconfiguration of the bureaucratic institutional landscape secured ‘the transfer from the context of international proletarian culture into the context of the bourgeois culture of the West’.¹

Through the selection of works, their contextualisation in the installation and the mediation of the critical, analytical texts within the publication, *Salon 54* determined the outcome of the polemics on Socialist Realism, defeating those traditionalists who, whether advocating a return to pre-war modernism or defending Socialist Realism, basically only struggled over lucrative positions within current cultural conjuncture, therefore being united against any radical manifestations of modernism: not only in the 1950s, but for decades to come. During this time the cultural mainstream adopted as the dominant expression of its tastes what the art theorist Miško Šuvaković calls ‘socialist aestheticism’,² a moderate modernist art rooted in the tradition of a pre-war modernist compromise between abstraction and figuration. But in the early 1950s debates on the proper nature of socialist art were not mere empty

gestures. They were especially prompted by the appearance of radical abstract art in the work of the artist group EXAT 51,³ arguably the first neo-avant-garde movement in post-war Yugoslavia. The group exercised a lasting influence on subsequent generations of artists and cultural workers.

In their manifestos EXAT 51 promoted the collective aspects of work, the freedom of experimentation and the social engagement of art in the synthesis of all artistic forms, abolishing the separation between fine and applied art. Their enlightened position was carried by a desire to actively participate in the concrete reconstruction of material and social reality within a total socialist transformation of society. Reclaiming the legacy of the Russian avant-garde and the idea of abstraction as a revolutionary art for a revolutionary society, EXAT 51 shattered the dominant traditionalist view obsessed with authenticity and with local values reduced to modalities of the School of Paris from the first half of the twentieth century. Having no predecessors in local tradition other than pre-war Bauhaus functionalist architecture, EXAT 51 nevertheless created an important link in the small trajectory of avant-garde

1 Ljiljana Kolečnik, *Između Istoka i Zapada. Hrvatska umjetnost i likovna kritika 50-ih godina* (Between East and West, Croatian Art and Art Criticism of the 1950s). Zagreb: Institut za Povijest Umjetnosti (Institute of Art History), 2006, p. 156.

2 Miško Šuvaković, ‘Umjetnost i ideologija. Pedesete u podijeljenoj Europi’ (Art and Ideology, 1950s in the Divided Europe), *Život umjetnosti*, n^o. 71-72. Zagreb: Institut za Povijest Umjetnosti (Institute of Art History), 2004.

3 EXAT 51 (abbreviated from Experimental Atelier) was an artist group active in Zagreb between 1950 and 1956. Its members were the painters, Vlado Kristl, Božidar Rašica, Ivan Picelj and Aleksandar Srnec, and the architects Vjenceslav Richter, Bernardo Bernardi, Zdravko Bregovac, Zvonimir Radić and Vladimir Zaharović.

experimentation that art historian Ješa Denegri defines as 'the second line'. As an artistic movement that intervened in the dominant ideology, proposed the abolition of artistic autonomy and, after the country's split from Stalin, turned the lack of artistic autonomy into a strategic advantage open to the possibilities of an authentic new future in the context of Yugoslav socialism and its quest for the true origins of the revolution, EXAT 51 affirmed repetition as an authentic modernist gesture.

While the State did not recognise the authenticity of the social experiment in EXAT 51's programme,⁴ for those who were unsure about the Party's stand on the issue of abstraction, in 1954 Kardelj confirmed the Party's intention to distance itself from cultural affairs. In the same year the Gallery of Contemporary Art, the future Museum of Contemporary Art, was inaugurated in Zagreb.

Salon 54 assured the inclusion of abstraction in the context of modernism, although the question of its ideological acceptability lingered as long as the late 1950s, when philosopher Rudi Supek salvaged it from ideological susceptibility by introducing the notion of 'alienation': something that would prove so dear to humanist, Marxist philosophers in the 1960s. The revalorisation of tradition as resolved in *Salon 54* – as the narrative that outlined Expressionist and Constructivist tendencies as two broadly-defined dominant movements, thus forging conceptual links between the contemporary abstraction of EXAT 51 and the rational experiments of pre-war modernism – was inscribed as the background of a striving for a common cultural space within Yugoslavia and as an influence on the transformation of society in general. *Salon 54* included paintings by EXAT 51 members Picelj, Srnc, Rašica, Kristl, but the promotion of a socially-engaged geometrical abstraction was not partisan, the selection including other, less radical versions of abstraction besides. In many ways *Salon 54* thus opened the path to high modernism that cancelled the utopian projections on relations between art and life and strived for different utopias, if at all. Incidentally, in an unproblematic way it also serviced Yugoslav cultural strategy, that adopted and carefully promoted its liberal image.

This also means that *Salon 54* should not be interpreted as the moment of triumph of a liberal victory over a dogmatic and oppressive regime, as clichéd interpretations within the framework of dissident art and the simplistic typology of a Western-centric narrative on modernism would have it, but as the moment of normalisation in which the novelty of the Yugoslav revolution and the anti-fascist struggle in the Second World War ceased to be the

active principles of a collective social experiment. *Salon 54* was as much the expression of rebellion against the increasing bureaucratisation of culture, the first curated exhibition designed to argue, explain, and document the artistic currents of its time and their relations to a recent past, as much as it was the symptom of a normalisation that marked the end of revolutionary transformations of society. However, to rethink the specific conjuncture of *Salon 54* from today's gloomy, de-politicised post-socialist perspective stuck in nationalistic 'mythologisations' and the blunt affirmation of the existing state of affairs means in no way to regard it as a failure, but rather as the fold within the legacy of a socialist alternative to modernism in its de-culturalised form, outside of the dominant narrative that depoliticises communism as utopia, as the expression of a collective endeavour at the moment when its content was negotiated as a realistic possibility.

June of 2009 witnessed the founding of **L'Internationale**, a transnational platform of five museums in Europe whose aim is to share collections and question the dominant narratives of art history. The founding members of L'Internationale are: the Moderna Galerija of Ljubljana (Slovenia), the Július Koller Society (SJK) of Bratislava (Slovakia), the Van Abbemuseum (VAM) of Eindhoven (the Netherlands), the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst (MHKA) of Antwerp (Belgium) and the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). Starting on 13 May, MACBA will present the first exhibition organised by L'Internationale, a show entitled *Museum of Parallel Narratives. In the framework of L'Internationale* that will bring together more than a hundred works by key Eastern European artists in the Collection of the Moderna Galerija of Ljubljana. A number of events will be held in conjunction with the exhibition, including a roundtable scheduled for 14 May and the series of Yugoslavian films entitled *We Can't Promise that We'll Do Anything Except Experiment. Experimental Film in Yugoslavia, 1960 – 80* on 18 and 25 May. During autumn, a selection of works from the MACBA Collection will form part of a major exhibition to be held at the Moderna Galerija of Ljubljana. At the same time, L'Internationale is organising a series of seminars with the participation of the MACBA Independent Studies Programme (PEI). Thus far, events have been held in the cities of Ljubljana, Vienna, Bratislava, Warsaw and Barcelona. For further information, visit www.macba.cat and <http://internacionala.mg-lj.si/>.

⁴ EXAT 51 members Picelj, Richter and Srnc did develop a number of successful architectural designs for Yugoslav pavilions at trade fairs around the world, whose meager documentation is perhaps the best indicator of what EXAT 51's realisations would have looked like.

ALL OF A TWIST

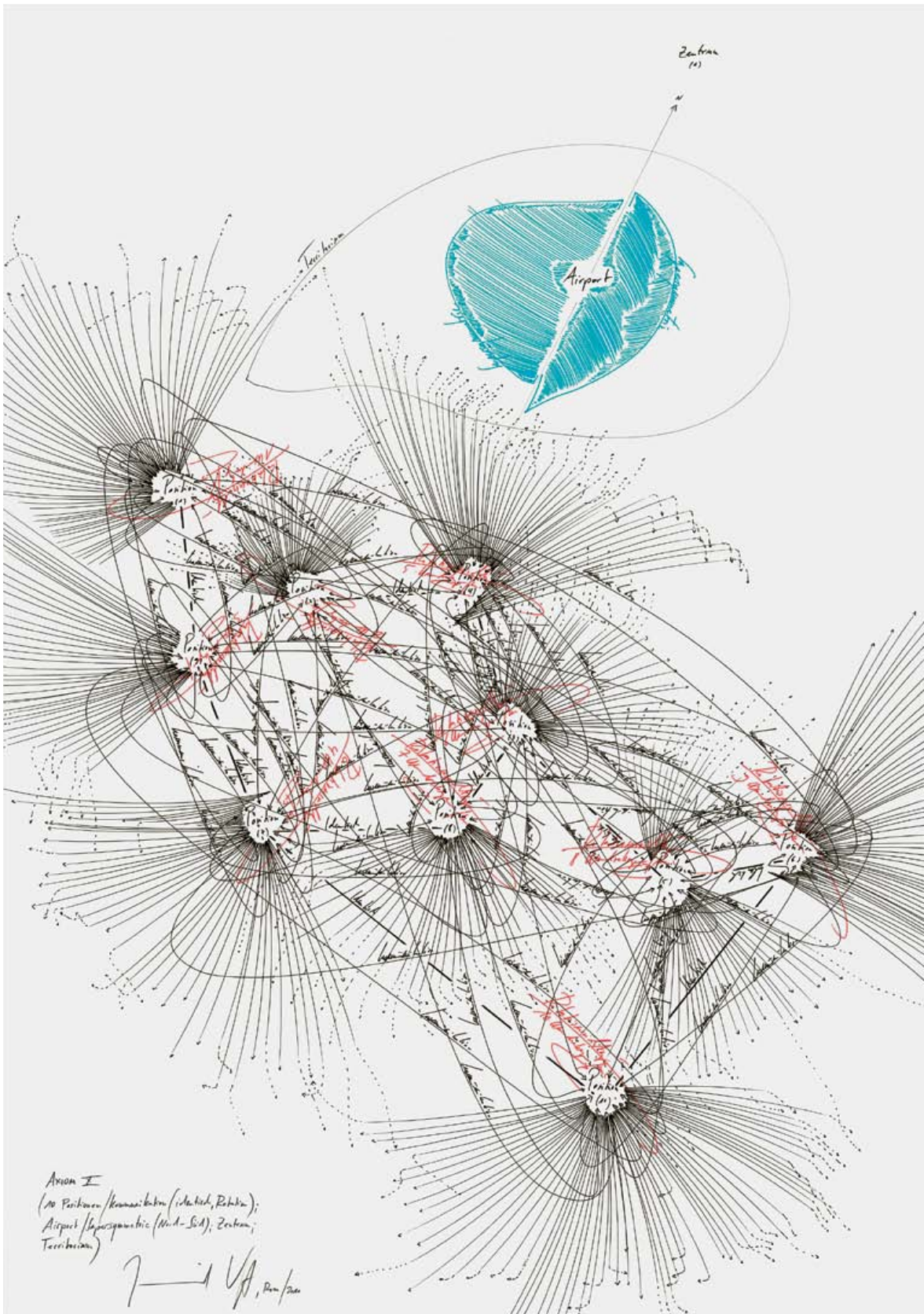
Reza Negarestani

Philosopher and writer born in Shiraz, Iran. He is the author of *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (2008), a work of theory-fiction on the Middle East. He has also written for such journals and anthologies as *Collapse*, *Angelaki* and *CTheory*.

In order to think narration in a world that is devoid of any narrative necessity – an expanding space into which all ideas of embodiments dissolve and an absolute time whose radical contingency aborts any necessary difference to which a narrative can be applied – first we must redeploy the hierarchy of thought in nature as the view point or locus of speculation and narration. The exteriority and contingency of the real or the cosmic abyss is not what should or can be objectified by thought; on the contrary, it is thought that is objectified by the exteriority and contingency of the real, which simultaneously and in every instance gives rise to thought and usurps it. The very hierarchy of thought that was supposed to bring the possibility of reflection on the object or event X is turned upside down and inside out, the space of reflection itself becomes a playground for the exteriority and contingency of object X. Now if narration is both ‘to know’ and ‘to relate’, not only is the narration of/about the contingent reality twisted with a logic endemic to tales of spirit possession (when I think, it is actually the outsider, the demon inside me that thinks through me), but also it is unfolded with the dynamics inherent to conspiracy theories (all relations, adventures and plots are twistedly driven by a secret agreement – or complicity – between contingent and indifferent objective worlds. . . the more epical the narration, the thicker the conspiracy, the more elliptical the depth of the complicity).

In this hierarchical corruption of the narrative, the narration of any trivial or non-trivial reality turns *from being a reflection on the world and objects to being an inflection of the world and objects themselves in their exteriority and contingency*. With regard to the narrative nomenclature, twist is the name given to this troubling turn whereby contingent aspects of the real reclaim the plot and fundamentally shake the course and hierarchy of narration. In the wake of a twist, whimsical imagination and extravagant plots are hardly more than intuitive errancies since any mundane and superficial world will turn out to be a local mode of dynamism or materialisation of an incalculably weird universe. The twist, therefore, has a spontaneous ability to reclaim and remobilise all forms of plot, perspective and history by force, collusion or contamination on behalf of a contingent outside. It is this ability that gives the twist a veritable narrative capacity that is asymptotic to crime, horror, conspiracy and detective fictions.

When the twist occurs – that is to say, when it seizes the trajectory of the reflection on behalf of the contingency of the objective relations and contorts the course of the narrative orientation – it forces a sweeping or perhaps even a pulverising re-evaluation of the entire narrative trajectory. This is especially evident in variants of pulp fiction from horror stories to detective thrillers, crime novels and conspiracy fictions. The so-called plot twist seizes the reflective space of narration or simply turns the ‘knowing’ of the



Jorinde Voigt
Axiom X, 2010
 Ink and pencil on paper
 51 x 36 cm

narration into the narrative object of contingencies and, therefore, subjects the narration to an inquisitive speculation from the perspective of complicity between objective resources, which in radically contingent ways play their influence over the narrative causality. What used to be 'knowing' is now, all of a sudden, revealed to be a literary gimmick facilitating a plummet into what was always already there but could not be reflected upon – a short-lived resolution (*dénouement*) degenerating into a cosmic conspiracy at the speed of a trashy airport thriller.

In the wake of the twist, the causal meshwork of the narration is forcibly revised to a new system that is determined by the contingency of the twist. For this reason, the twist, far from being mythoclastic, is at once pro-narrative and mytho-accelerative; rather than shattering the plot (mythoclasm), it remoulds and accelerates the plot through reconstructing the causal system from the viewpoint of an ineradicable alien presence that has suddenly erupted or has long resided in the narration as an alien seed around which the plot has been crystallised.¹ Yet this alienating shift of perspective is precisely equal to a descent wherein the narrative has to unconditionally adopt any (alien) point of view as the plot loses its established ground and the contingent depth is traversed. Sometimes this alienating descent is only registered as a vertiginous effect or a shock (cf. the plot twist as a shock in pulp narratives, especially *giallo* fiction). Other times, the descent becomes the narration itself. In the crime novels of Jim Thompson, such as *Pop. 1280* (1964) and *The Killer Inside Me* (1952), the first person voice of the narrator is itself the twist that forms the narrative while calmly – under nonchalant influences of a global unconscious – pushing the entire (narrative) world off the cliff.

The speculative power of the twist on the causal configuration of the narrative is analogous to the shock of trauma that sometimes simply overthrows all that has been narrated. Yet there are also times when, instead of inflicting a shock, the twist perforates the causal system of the narrative from all directions, changing the plasticity and the formation of the narrative to a new narration whose every relation is a twist, a contingency in complicity with another

contingency *ad infinitum*. The twist, in this sense, becomes another name for *speculation from the other side*, one whose endemicity to the narrative dynamism makes its role creatively problematic and whose irrepressible persistence for a thoroughgoing re-examination and reconstruction of the narrative world through the medium of contingency and from the outside allies it with the force of trauma. Since trauma is both an overthrowing contingency and a restructuring building process that changes the horizon according to contingent forces and objective resources of the Outside.

Now imagine a narrative book focused on a place on this planet called the Middle East, with its oil and dust-driven everyday life, with its controversial yet terrestrial politics, its religions, its arid and hot climate. What would be a veritable narrative of this place? One possible candidate would be a geo-political narrative shaped by embracing a Middle Eastern viewpoint (the victim, the other, the Middle Easterner). Another alternative would be a global/planetary narration (the Middle East as technologically, ethnologically and economically inhomogeneous, the breeding ground of terror or the land of ancient wisdoms). Yet both these narrative viewpoints harbour a twist that might creep on them at any moment for no reason whatsoever, confiscating their narration on behalf of a chasmic reality that can be narratively fabricated by the complicity of cosmic viewpoints – a narration accreted by the perspective of anonymous (cosmic) materials. In narrating the Middle East, the triad of the narrator, the narrated and the narration turns into the narrative object of cosmic contingencies, extra-terrestrial gravitational fields and alien influences: its petropolitics become the epic of hydrocarbons from a nether point of view, its religions, politics and demography are revealed to be links in complicity between terrestrial dynamics, solar radiations and stellar death, its wars the tactical mobility of nested geo-cosmic traumas and strategic perspectives spawned by contingent distribution of cosmic matter throughout the planetary body. What was supposed to be a theoretic or fictional speculation on the Middle East turns out to be a narrative from a chasmic point of view. It is not so much that this narrative is horrific or suspenseful; it is the usurping nature of this alienating

¹ One example of this resident model of an object that randomly or homogeneously constructs the plot around itself is the so-called Chekhov's gun, an object that early in the story is introduced to the reader, then it is abandoned and only later toward the end resurfaces to overshadow all human characters, narrative events and their relationships. Contrary to Chekhov who believed that an element introduced in the story must be used at some point, the gun is merely a force of contingency that might or might not (for no reason at all) resurface later in order to seize the trajectory of the plot. Hence in order to understand the function of Chekhov's gun, one must twist Anton Chekhov's own words: 'One must put a loaded rifle on the stage even if no one is thinking of firing it.'

twist that finds its narrative asymptote in horror, conspiracy and crime fictions. When it comes to astute realism, the regional or local speculation must be rethought and reformulated from the universal or cosmic point of view, but to do so means to affirm the vertigo of the twist that opens the regional (the Middle East) into the cosmic and to prioritise the role of the contingent turn by which the cosmic fabricates global and regional localities.

Here the twist as the force of the realist speculation (realist in the sense that it is asymptotic to the contingent reality that drives the universe) approximates the function of the philosophy of Speculative Realism in which speculation is not driven by our grounded experience or reflection but by the exteriority and contingency of a universe that always antedates and postdates us (that which thinks us from the other side). Ironically, philosophy seems to have strived this long only to become, belatedly, a crime fiction, a conspiracy thriller in order to embrace the force of the radical twist and paint itself yellow. This calls to mind the image of a philosopher who has realised that in speculating the world, it has been the world and its 'strange aeons' that have twistedly narrated her all along.² The philosopher's vocation is to recognise the abyssal cosmic twist that has given birth to her speculation and to adopt the cosmic perspective as the only viable commitment to reality. Thus spake Sutter Cane in *The Mouth of Madness* (1995): 'For years I thought I was making all this up, but they were telling me what to write.'³

² H. P. Lovecraft, *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999, p. 156.

³ *In the Mouth of Madness*, directed by John Carpenter, written by Michael De Luca, 1995.



Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*. Melbourne: re.press, 2008.

Cyclonopedia is the first horror and theory-fiction book from and about the Middle East. It is a Middle Eastern odyssey, where the author connects the appalling vistas of contemporary world politics, the politics of oil and the War on Terror to the archaeologies of the Middle East and the natural history of the earth itself. As a work of speculative philosophy, *Cyclonopedia* addresses the everyday life and politics of the region in the form of a pulp horror novel in which voices of human narrators are gradually replaced by inorganic noises. The story is meticulously told from the ever-twisting perspective of cosmic processes of formation. Reza Negarestani's forthcoming book *The Mortiloquist* is a hybrid of classical philosophy and play. It draws on various genres of drama and performance such as Greek tragedy and Viennese Actionism. In *The Mortiloquist*, the history of Western philosophy is staged by barbarian outlanders.



Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2010.

Launched in 2006, *Collapse* is an independent, non-affiliated journal of philosophical research and development. Each volume of this internationally-recognised journal has a specific theme and brings together new works by and in-depth interviews with contemporary artists, philosophers and scientists who are leaders in their fields. Through this cross-fertilisation, the journal attempts to develop new and productive inquiry at the forefront of current cultural, political and philosophical debate. Reza Negarestani is a regular contributor to *Collapse*; he is also an associate editor of the forthcoming volume. The next issue of *Collapse* will be vol. VII: 'Culinary Materialism', to be published in 2011. For further information, visit www.urbanomic.com.

OCCLUDED OCEANS, OPTICAL WATERS: NOTES ON *THE DREXCIYA MYTHOS II*

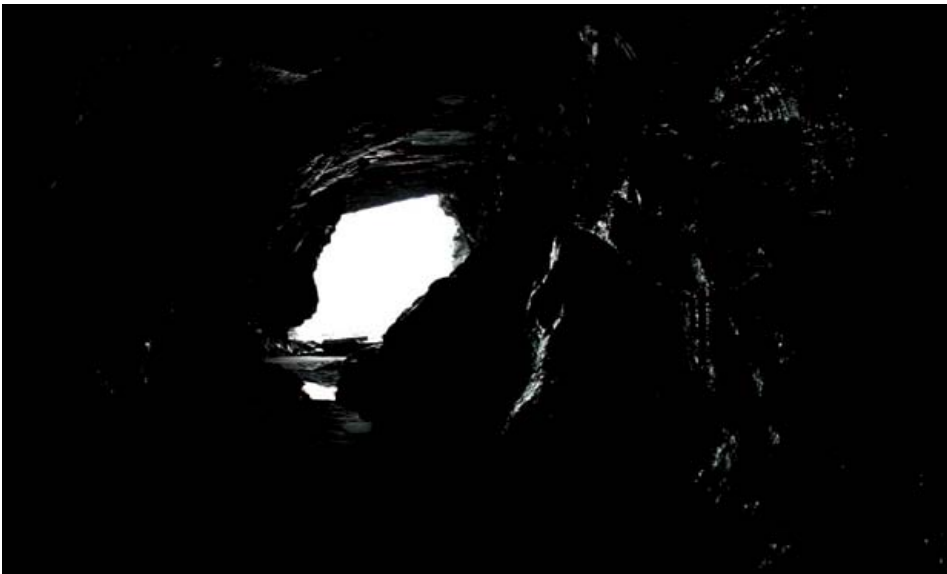
The Otolith Group

The artwork of The Otolith Group, founded in London in 2002 by Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun, presents a reflection on perception and the nature of human memory through films, texts and activities related to media archives.

Some of the questions posed by the artwork *Hydra Decapita* might be speculatively formulated through reverse engineering any one of its points of departure. A first scene: imagining William Morris, standing in his front room, after dinner. In the company of his evening guests, he is singing the four paragraphs of Chapter XIV of Volume 1 from *Modern Painters*, published anonymously, to great acclaim, in 1843, by John Ruskin. Devoted to a defence of John Mallord William Turner's indefinite depiction of ocean in *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying Typhon Coming On* from 1840, Ruskin's text inaugurates a certain tendency towards mimetic excess in British art criticism. Second scene: comparing as many catalogue reproductions of Turner's 1840 painting as possible, in an attempt to understand its peculiar resistance to offset litho printing technology.

Third scene: wondering how to induce as many moiré interference patterns as possible in an attempt to engineer varieties of optical water and types of fata morgana.

Reverse engineering these episodes does not lead back towards the intentionality or motivation of authorship of a work like *Hydra Decapita*; instead it reconstructs, partially, the movement by which a work withdraws from those intentions; it begins to measure the distance by which a work recedes from the aspirations invested in it. These practices of withdrawal constitute an attempt to initiate Edouard Glissant's demand for an opacity in which a practice of self-authorisation legitimates itself through the formulation of an appearance that simultaneously withdraws itself from visibility. Opacity announces itself as a private image constituted from publically circulating materials;



Videostills from
the film *Hydra
Decapita I* (2010)
by The Otolith
Group

Hydra Decapita I
was presented at
MACBA from
February to May
2011 as part of
the exhibition
*The Otolith Group.
Thoughtform*. The
first iteration of
Hydra Decapita II
(2011) was also
premiered at
MACBA in May.
The completed
Hydra Decapita
trilogy, co-pro-
duced by the Fundació
MACBA, will
become part of the
MACBA Collection.

it articulates a public secrecy that allows for the appearance of a political dimension that Glissant describes as the 'right to a shared obscurity'.

The monochromatic light of *Hydra Decapita* implies a desire to share this obscurity, to potentiate that which occlusion makes possible. *Hydra Decapita* does not emerge into the light of projection; instead it withdraws into the sky-less, land-lost black ocean of Drexciya. Apart from enlightenment, apart from transparency, allured by the severity of its constraints, a lure that occults its luminosity.

In the sequence of records released between 1992 and 2002, such as *Deep Sea Dweller* (1992), *Bubble Metropolis* (1993), *Molecular Enhancement* (1994) and *Aquatic Invasion* (1994), the Detroit-based duo Drexciya successively, stealthily infiltrated the functional demands of 1990s dancefloors across Europe, America and beyond with an elaborately recessed esoteric fictional system.

What enthralled The Otolith Group are the ways in which Drexciya invites and incites a mode of what McLuhan called *participation mystique*. The duo's first album, *The Quest*, compiled its first single releases onto a single CD. *The Quest* was accompanied by a short statement, written by a figure nominated as The Unknown Writer, printed on the back inside cover, accompanied by a map, in four stages, printed on the front inside cover. These formulations articulated, for the first time, the sonic fiction that had previously been hinted at by the titles of those earlier singles. The statement and the maps elaborated and encrypted those hermetic allusions. The statement read as follows:

'Could it be possible for humans to breathe underwater? A foetus in its mother's womb is certainly alive in an aquatic environment. During the greatest holocaust the world has ever known, pregnant America-bound African slaves were thrown overboard by the thousands during labour for being sick and disruptive cargo. Is it possible that they could have given birth at sea to babies that never needed air? Recent experiments have shown mice able to breathe liquid oxygen. Even more shocking and conclusive was a recent instance of a premature infant saved from certain death by breathing liquid oxygen through its undeveloped lungs. These facts combined with reported sightings of Gillmen and swamp monsters in the coastal swamps of the South-Eastern United States make the slave trade theory startlingly feasible.

Are Drexciyans water breathing, aquatically mutated descendants of those unfortunate victims of human greed? Have they been spared by God to

teach us or terrorise us? Did they migrate from the Gulf of Mexico to the Mississippi river basin and on to the great lakes of Michigan?

Do they walk among us? Are they more advanced than us and why do they make their strange music?

What is their Quest?

These are many of the questions that you don't know and never will.

The end of one thing... and the beginning of another.

Out – The Unknown Writer'

The Middle Passage becomes an *incunabula* for the fictionalisation of the human species via processes of forced adaptation, mutation and evolution. The fantasy of origination is replaced here with a fable of mutation. Drexciya operated as a hypothetical mythology, capable, on one hand, of registering the implications of a non-reversible diaspora while simultaneously operating as a convergence between the organisation of sound and the assemblage of fiction in the guise of elaborately arranged escapism.

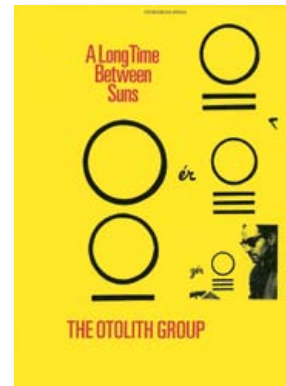
What could be discerned in the Drexciya mythos was a fabulation that pursued the implications of forced mutation. By seceding from the political category, the philosophical claim and ontological condition of the human, Drexciya retroacted received ideas of the post-human as a coming condition. The Drexciya myth was nothing less than a redreaming of the biopolitical atrocity of the Middle Passage; a revisionist electronic song-cycle in which the implications of financial speculation of a trade – whose promise to pay was insured by cargoes of bodies – were carried over into a fictional speculation on death, marine evolution, terracentricity and post-humanity.

Living through the contemporary crisis of market fundamentalism and inhabiting the ideological rubble of neo-liberalism foregrounds the understanding that practices of speculation were, and remain, as much financial as they are fictional. Between the publication of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* in 1993, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* in 2001 and Ian Baucom's *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* in 2005, a notion of Drexciya begins to emerge. Drexciya is thinkable as a spectre of the sub-Atlantic, a revenant that resurfaces and resubmerges with each cycle of capital accumulation. Baucom explained that what is at once 'obsce-

ne and vital' to contemporary understanding of the 'full capital logic of the slave trade' is to come to 'terms with what it meant for this trade to have found a way to treat human beings not only as if they were a type of commodity but as a flexible, negotiable, transactionable form of money'. Without this 'financial revolution in the business operations of the slave trade', there would have been 'no incentive for Captain Luke Collingwood to do what he did', that is, 'to confidently massacre 132 slaves aboard the *Zong*, secure in the conviction that in doing so he was not destroying his employer's commodities but hastening their transformation into money'.

Drexciya invites the assemblage of a constellation of intersections between atrocity and insurance, servitude and credit, and the ocean and mortality. Each of these intersections has persisted into the present, inviting degrees of chronological disturbance whose effects are difficult to calculate in advance. Impossible not to hear in Drexciya the murmurings of an anthropological exodus from capitalism that continually converts futures into finance in order to put bodies to death.

'Occluded Oceans, Optical Waters: Notes on *The Drexciya Mythos II*' is the second in a series of essays exploring the constellation of ideas around Drexciya. The first essay 'Notes Towards An Outline of the Drexciya Mythos' was presented on 8 February 2008 at the Broadway Cinema & Media Centre, Nottingham, as part of the *Culture and Slavery* talks series in partnership with New Art Exchange, Walsall, and Nottingham Contemporary. 'Notes Towards An Outline of the Drexciya Mythos' is published in Alex Farquharson (ed.), *Histories of the Present*, Nottingham, UK: Nottingham Contemporary, 2011.



The Otolith Group, Will Holder (eds.). *The Otolith Group. A Long Time Between Suns*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009.

A Long Time Between Suns is the title of the 2009 exhibition in which The Otolith Group presented its *Otolith Trilogy*. Under the same title, this book, which functions as an archive, collects a great deal of the material related to the production of that work. The Showroom and Gasworks of London, as well as the Fondazione Galleria Civica de Trento, the *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part of Your Revolution* of Amsterdam and MACBA of Barcelona have all participated in the publication

MACBA presented the work of **The Otolith Group** in the exhibition *The Otolith Group. Thoughtform*, held from February to May 2011. Curated by Chus Martínez and co-produced with the Fondazione MAXXI of Rome the exhibition was conceived as a place that could allow visitors to understand the group's methodology.

A conversation between Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun (The Otolith Group) and curator Chus Martínez is available in audio format at www.macba.cat, and on Ràdio Web MACBA are FONTS AUDIO and SON[II]A recordings that deal with the collective's work. For further information, visit <http://rwm.macba.cat/>.

SENSIBILITY AND SEMIOCAPITAL

Franco Berardi 'Bifo'

Graduate in Aesthetics, writer and media-activist, he teaches Social History of the Media at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan. Politically engaged from the sixties, he was cofounder of *Radio Alice* (1976) and the magazine *A/Traverso* (1975–81), and more recently of the *Rekombinant* website (2000–9). His books include: *The Factory of Unhappiness* (2001) and *The Soul at Work* (2009). His next book, *After the Future*, will be published in 2011 by AKPress.

During the present economic crisis, which is an effect of the transition beyond industrial capitalism towards the universe of semiocapital, we have to reconsider the genealogy of economic reason in the context of the history of art and media that contributed to shaping social sensibility, as well as in the context of an educational system that likewise helped shape the social accessibility to intellectual exchange and production.

What is of particular interest to this text is the modelling of sensibility, the faculty that makes it possible to understand what cannot be expressed in codified terms (i.e., in words, figures, digits). Thanks to the modelling of sensibility, economic reason has conquered the paradigmatic place that is semiotising the whole at a deep level, at the level of unconscious reactivity, at the level of sensual perception. This is why the relation between economy and aesthetics is crucial to the understanding of the present cultural becoming, if we think of aesthetics as a science of subjective sensibility and not as a study of the artistic object.

The predominance of economic reason in the modern mind has arisen from the integration of the economy and the infosphere. The infosphere – in which information both emanates and circulates – is affecting the nervous system of society, the social psychosphere, and in particular is affecting sensibility.

The mutation of the infosphere at the end of industrial modernity is producing a shift in social

perception: the end of modern bourgeois culture, and the instalment of a semiocapitalist post-bourgeois culture, can be better understood if we refer to the eclipse of the Protestant sensibility and the return of the Baroque spirit in the field of social perception.

The Protestant imagination, which according to Max Weber is prevalent in the formation of modern bourgeois culture, is essentially based on the severity of verbal semiosis, and is suspicious of the deceptive language of images. Basically, in joining the bourgeois proprietary instinct the Protestant spirit rejects Baroque ornamentality as a waste of both labour and time.

While the Baroque draws its strength from deterritorialisation (conquest, proliferation of images, triumph of the dissipative energy of the imagination), Protestant culture affirms the individuality of Christian consciousness as the site of the uniqueness of truth (implying a direct relation between the individual Christian and God, and a direct relation between the bourgeoisie and their property). Protestant sensibility is by nature puritanical and severe.

While the territorialised bourgeois economy was based on the iconoclastic severity of iron and steel, post-industrial production is based instead on the kaleidoscopic, deterritorialised machine of semiotic production.

In *L'Échange symbolique et la mort* (1976) Jean Baudrillard writes: 'The reality principle corresponded to a certain stage of the law of value. Today the whole system is swamped by indeter-

minacy, and every reality is absorbed by the hyper-reality of the code and simulation.'

With Richard Nixon's decision in 1971 to end the convertibility of the US dollar, an aleatoric regime of fluctuant values was inaugurated, and because of post-bourgeois deterritorialisation the entire system fell into indeterminacy: the relation between referent and sign, simulation and event, value and time of labour, is no longer fixed and guaranteed. Language is no longer just a tool for representing economic process; it becomes the main source of accumulation, constantly deterritorialising the field of exchange. Speculation and spectacle intermingle, because of the intrinsic inflationary (metaphoric) nature of language. The metaphoric potency of language opens the door to semiotic inflation, to the over-inclusivity of the message. The linguistic web of semio-production is a game of mirrors leading to bubbles, bursts and the unavoidable crises of over-production. Simulation and fractalisation are essentially Baroque categories, and the Baroque spirit is revived by the regime of financial indeterminacy and proliferation.

In its prevailing form, modern capitalism was based on the commensurability of the relation between labour and value. In traditional pre-capitalist economies, the value of goods was merely linked to the relationship between resources and social needs, but the dynamics of capitalist accumulation redefined the measure of value on the basis of the time expended on its production. In the sphere of modern capitalism, the value of a product is defined by something that is on average measurable: the amount of time socially needed for the production of goods. Bourgeois capitalism was predicated on the production of a territorialised form of wealth, and the modern bourgeoisie was an essentially territorialised class. The very definition of this class is related to the territory of *bourg*, the town or city where productive energies are assembled, where factories are built and property is protected. Therefore we can speak of *affectio societatis*, as the bourgeois capitalist is devoted to the physical place where wealth can be produced, the community of workers whose exploitation makes the accumulation of capital possible and the community of consumers who make possible the realisation of its value. Consequently, bourgeois society is the place of universal, rational measurement: truth, conventional agreement on something that does not depend on arbitrary will, but on a fundamental convention – the relationship between labour time and value.

The Weberian identification of capitalism and Protestant ethics somehow overshadows the second stream of modernity, that which emerges

from the Counter-Reformation and the Baroque. This second modernity became subordinate and marginalised when the industrialisation of the human environment reduced the social field to a process of mechanical production and reproduction. But since the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church has been a centre of cultural and economic power based on imagination and deterritorialisation. The spiritual and immaterial power of Rome has always been based on the emanation and the manipulation of the social imagination. This has something to do with the genesis of Italian fascism, both in its Mussolini and Berlusconi versions.

Protestant modernity defined the canon of modernity, but the Baroque stream never disappeared. Rather, it went underground, tunnelling deep into the recesses of the modern imaginary only to resurface at the end of the twentieth century when the capitalist system underwent a dramatic paradigm shift towards a post-industrial society, as language and the economy became increasingly interwoven.

The new production sphere, which I call semiocapital, is centred on the creation and commodification of techno-linguistic devices, which have a semiotic and deterritorialised feature. (See Marazzi, 2009; Virno, 2003.)

At this point the Baroque stream of modernity re-surfaces. Semiotic production is transferred from the severe space of referential denotation to the vertiginous kingdom of proliferating appearances and polisemic connotation. In the sphere of Baroque sensibility, the research of meaning is doomed to fall into *desingano* (deception), because of the absence of any ontological foundation and because of the perpetual sliding and shifting from one level of simulation to the next. José Antonio Maravall speaks of Baroque cosmivision, i.e., a cosmology based on the relativism of vision, on the ever-changing point of view of the subject and on the proliferation of images. The Baroque *desingano* is an effect of the spread of images, of the realistic (and deceiving) representation of space.

To close with a political question: how can we start a process of autonomisation from the Baroque effect of semiocapitalism without going back to the old fashioned ethics of the Protestant bourgeoisie? How can we start a process of autonomous subjectivation in the precarious and fractalised condition of creative work nowadays? In Europe, as elsewhere, the educational system, which was built as a crucial dispositive of modern progress, is under attack from privatisation, under-financing and subjugation to the dogmas of corporate profit. The post-bourgeois leading class of financial

capitalism is destroying the state school system and is subjecting university education to the interests of the economy.

We cannot go back to the old educational system; we cannot restore the school of the past, which was an expression of the bourgeois state. We have to reinvent the autonomy of knowledge and the social role of learning and research. It is possible that creative sensibility will be the first field of transformation and reinvention of the educational system, and will be the leading force behind the transition toward a self-organisation of the general intellect, beyond the alternatives of severe Protestant bourgeois power or the Baroque regime of financial power and semiocapital.

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Franco Berardi will be at MACBA in autumn 2011 to participate in a lecture held by the Independent Studies Programme (PEI). For further information visit www.macba.cat.

Franco Berardi is one of the authors who will contribute to the project *100 Notes – 100 Thoughts*, a project of documenta 13 and Hatje Cantz that explores how thinking emerges and lies at the heart of reimagining the world. For further information visit www.documenta.de.

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ÍNDEX Number 2 will include contributions from Xavier Antich, Yto Barrada, Cristina Freire, Daniel Heller-Roazen, Hassan Khan and Antonio Vega Macotela.

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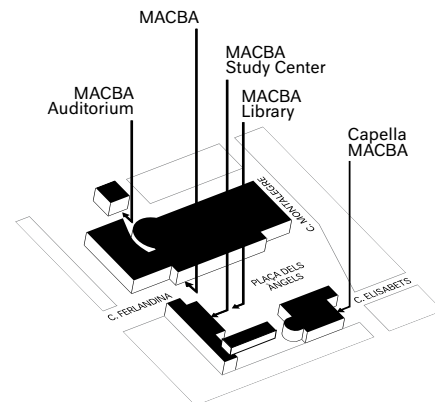
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«Insisting that the anachronic is not an aberration but a need means that we must distance ourselves from a method of reading and interpretation dominated by the notion of duration, and instead delve into another method, into a contingency of heterogeneous times that provide other keys to pursue the question of meaning.» Chus Martínez

«And when Deleuze suggests that his use of the history of philosophy is comparable to collage, we should not mistake this for metaphorical hyperbole or provocation. We must instead consider collage's complexity (it is much more than merely gluing one thing beside another).» José Luis Pardo

«We have to reinvent the autonomy of knowledge and the social role of learning and research. It is possible that creative sensibility will be the first field of transformation and reinvention of the educational system, and will be the leading force behind the transition toward a self-organisation of the general intellect.» Franco Berardi

