NOTES ON RATIONALISM, DESIGN AND MODERNITY

ALEX WALKER

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1.

I'm uncomfortable writing in a first-person voice. It feels self-absorbed and too inward looking. But maybe it's good to stay with that discomfort. Why do I not want to be present in this writing? I guess I want to remain hidden and therefore unexposed. It's safer to be detached from the subject. I've been educated and socialized this way too, to be suspicious of a 'personal' account. I feel as though my arguments are weakened, biased—less 'objective' and less 'rational'. What do I mean by Objectivity, in this context? I understand it to mean something being 'true' independent of individual perception, and independent of context. Truth that is not relative, relational or partial but universal: judged from a position of 'nowhere'. It's important to have consensus on what things mean, but the claim of 'Objectivity' often masks the perspective of a dominant position and political agenda. Sometimes only those in the privileged position of being unmarked—that is, not racialised or gendered—are afforded a view from nowhere, a disembodied perspective.[1] So, I do not propose objective definitions here but rather only want to make clear how I understand certain terms and how I will use them—how I will instrumentalize them, to construct and to rationalise. This will exclude a lot, as definitions and categories tend to do.

What is Rationality? Dictionary definitions tend to rely on some form of dichotomy: Rationality is thought or action based on Reason as opposed to Emotion, or intuition, or sensory perception, or belief. To think with these dichotomies requires severing connections in the body—disconnecting intelligence and senses—which seems to make no *rational* sense. Still, I guess some kind of spectrum exists. Certainly, there are moments when in extreme happiness or sadness or anger I'm thinking with less of a clear head—my perception is muddied. But of course, there are very good—that is, accepted, legitimate—reasons for being extremely emotional. If to be rational is to listen to reason, how do we say which reasons are rational? It then becomes a question of values, a question of what we approve of... Or what gets approved, what society approves of.

1. Donna Harraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 575–599.

Design is usually framed as rationalist 'problem solving,'[2] but this seems an inadequate or inaccurate definition. At least, from my own experiences it rarely seems the case. Is my design process rational? Obviously I consider *function* as far as it is needed and of course if I'm working for or with someone then I want to make sure they are also happy with the outcome. Fundamentally though, my decisions come more from gut feeling, intuition, desire. I have found it useful at times to explain my process in rationalist terms, to use rationalist rhetoric—to appeal to rationalism. In previous education and at times where I've made a living from graphic design, constructing a logical reason for why you have made something *the way you have*—how it responds to a certain question, problem, need—is a way to communicate value. It's how you convince educators that your work meets some criteria, just as you might convince a client that what you've made deserves the payment you're asking for. Not that getting paid is ever so simple.

In terms of motivations or desires (other than getting paid for my work), I make things as some form of expression. Maybe this is more accurately placed towards the *Art* end of an Art–Design spectrum. However, I'm most interested in situations where 'expression' is considered a supporting role to what gets called 'content' (in a book, a website or a poster, to list some obvious examples). Maybe I just mean decoration. I'm not sure, nor am I seeking classifications. It's work that is not useless but exists for more than utility alone. Embodying poetic qualities that exist outside the economics of use value and efficiency. Expression as a supporting role asks for nothing in return; it is a gift of sorts. It is not Art with a capital A—that which demands your engagement or contemplation.

2. Graphic design's assertion of 'this is what rationalism looks like' is reproduced through the canon: design history. Graphic Design (with an emphatic capitalized G and D) is framed through its solutionism and its productivist ties to business and state institutions, through publication and exhibition of 'design classics', mostly with a bias towards individuals and their 'genius' (overlooking any collective/collaborative intelligence), mostly white men (overlooking structural conditions which may privilege them) in service of 'big name' clients: Massimo Vignelli and the NYC Subway system, Paul Rand and IBM, Otl Aicher and the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, etc. There are hefty coffee table books celebrating expansive and meticulous corporate identities and signage systems, books which speak in a language of gridded schematics and nuanced optical considerations. The canon tells us 'here are the professionals'. The canon excludes what Martha Scotford calls 'Messy History': *'design works for small enterprises or local causes, design works which are not produced in great numbers...design works for small and specialized audiences; design work in forms more personal and expressive; design that turns its back on mainstream design'.*

I've been fascinated by aesthetics and the surface appearances of things. This is usually viewed as superficial, trivial, shallow: lacking depth. Aesthetics can just be performative gestures—a way to culturally code something, as 'radical', for example, or 'progressive', when beneath the surface the reality is otherwise. The sparse, utilitarian aesthetics typical of modernist design are an (oftentimes honest) attempt to bypass this, to present things transparently, neutrally, *objectively*. 'The typeface doesn't *say* anything—only the words do.' Proponents of modernist design take the position that it isn't a style. The grid is not stylistic—it's structural. Rationalism in design is an effort to remove, to de-style, to arrive at formal purity, to find the essence of something, to create archetypes (of a house, table, teapot, book, letterform, etc.) The designer is no longer the commercial artist, but an engineer, a technician. Using certain rules, structures and formulas, the designer manoeuvers from problem X to solution Z. Rationalist design seeks depth over surface, it seeks to penetrate, to find underlying laws and universal truths. But for this reason, modernism cannot be culturally neutral or an 'international style'. The belief in the objective, universal essence of something—in getting to the core of it, through rationalism, through a quest for Cartesian certainty—marks modernist design as distinctly Eurocentric.

In the essay 'Concerning a Baroque abroad in the World' from *Poetics of Relation*, Edouard Glissant makes a helpful counter case to rationalist depth through the figuring of *The Baroque*, as disruption to universal truths: 'The baroque made its appearance in the West at a moment when a particular idea of Nature—as harmonious, homogeneous, and thoroughly knowable—was in force. Rationalism refined this conception, one convenient to its own increasing ambition to master reality. At the same time, the spectacle of Nature was supposedly something one could reproduce: knowledge and imitation set themselves up as mutual guarantors…Baroque art mustered bypasses, proliferation, spatial redundancy, anything that flouted the alleged unicity of the thing known and the knowing of it, anything exalting quantity infinitely resumed and totality infinitely ongoing.'[3] Glissants 'Baroque' refers not to a specific historic style, but to modes of expression which are decentred, plural, inclusive and never fully knowing nor ever needing to be.

Aristotle defines the Human as 'The Rational Animal', and the notion of rational intelligence being exclusively Human is important to understanding the Human/Nature separation present in Western knowledge and philosophy, in which humanity is the centre, Civilization, and nature is the background, the Environment.

3. Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1990), 78.

An anthropocentric hierarchy is established where rational humanity reigns supreme over the natural world.[4] This underpins the Eurocentric progress narrative of modernity: Nature is the domain of our *primitive past*, but humanity has developed, discovered, become civilised, become enlightened—through rationalism. But this is not some universal, inevitable evolution, as it is presented. This single timeline of progress conceals the foreclosure of other possible trajectories.[5] The assertion of certain knowledge forms, ways of life, life-worlds as rational—as approved—and others as irrational has meant the negation of alternative worlds and futures. Understanding rationalism as *approved knowledge* is important for understanding modernity, and it's important for understanding modernity as coloniality.

2.

There is a long tradition in the West of the powerful deciding what may or may not count as rational knowledge: what is approved knowledge and what isn't. The witch-hunts carried out across Europe during the transition period from feudalism to capitalism serve as one example of this. Before this period, many Women had significant social status and influence as leaders in resistance movements against the enclosure of commons and through their social power as 'Witches': those with knowledge of magic, and much prescientific medicine, in a society where belief in magic was widespread. The *irrationality* of magical thinking, its promise of *getting something for nothing* was simply not compatible with the emerging capitalist order. In *Caliban and the Witch*, Silvia Federici describes magic and the practice of magic as 'the refusal of work in action'.[6] On the role of the witch-hunts in both suppressing Women's social power and establishing the female gender role in relation to capitalism, which relegated women to domestic space, as unpaid labourers and re-producers of the workforce (as has been well documented by feminist scholars since the nineteenth centu ry), Federici writes 'the outcome of these policies that lasted for two centuries… was the enslavement of women to procreation…

defining women in terms—mothers, wives, daughters, widows—that hid their status as workers.'[7]

In the context of colonialism, the European self is asserted as 'rational' against the non-European 'irrational' other. The Enlightenment-era philosophy of John Locke and John Stuart Mill[8]—among many others—acted as ideological counterparts to colonialism. In Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, his notion of property relates to the dichotomy of a 'civil society' (developed) and the 'state of nature' (undeveloped), with ownership and property forming the basis of 'civil society', and 'state of nature' representing an absence of cultivation or property. When the land and resources of the 'new world' presented an enormous economic opportunity to Western European countries, and the indigenous people's land and society didn't mirror the Eurocentric image of civilization, Locke's concept of 'state of nature' acted as a convenient moral justification for the stealing of this land and the genocide of its population.[9] Similar epistemological justifications for European imperialism can be found in the biological taxonomies of Carl Linnaeus. In the first edition of *Systema Naturae*, published in 1735, Linnaeus listed four varieties of Human—with *Americanus*, *Asiaticus* and *Africanus* all positioned in a negative alterity relative to the white *Europeanus*—and described the non-Europeans in terms indicative of 'irrational' behaviour traits, such as 'lazy' 'stubborn', 'ruled by opinions', 'jealous', 'capricious'. The *Europeanus*, of course, was 'acute, inventive and governed by laws'.[10]

The modernist architect Adolf Loos' influential 1908 polemic 'Ornament and Crime' has streaks of the same colonialist mindset. It contains Eurocentric notions of rationalism, civility, and a single timeline of human progress that stands in opposition to a 'state of nature'. Loos' broad argument is that 'cultural evolution is equivalent to the removal of Ornament from articles in daily use'.[11] Ornament is irrational: it is 'erotic' and 'pathological'. Modern European man has 'outgrown' ornament, and he contrasts Modern Man[12] with a state-of-nature figuring of a Papuan: 'What is natural for, a Papuan

4. Rolando Vazquez, "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity. Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening," in Raúl Fornet-Betancort, ed., *Capital, Poverty, Development, Denktraditionen im Dialog,* no. 33 (2012), 241–252.

5. Rolando Vazquez, "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene: Decolonizing design", *Design Philosophy Papers* 15, no. 1 (2017): 77–91.

6. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 142.

7. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 89–97.

8. "Liberalism and Empire", Colonialism, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism/#LibEmp, accessed January 6, 2019.

9. Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancioğlu, *How the West Came to Rule* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 124.

10. "Scientific Racism," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_racism, accessed January 7, 2019.

11. Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime* https://web.archive.org/web/20150403175309/http://www2.gwu.edu/~art/Temporary_SL/177/pdfs/Loos.pdf, accessed April 29, 2019

12. Ibid

and a child, is degenerate for modern man.' As the self-proclaimed Modern Man, Loos asserts his own culture as the *real* here and now, as the universal modernity. Those not conforming to this image are placed as 'stragglers' living in the past.[13]

Loos, like many of his modernist architect contemporaries, wants to break free from 'the past' through utopian dreams of rationally planned, gridded, 'glistening white-walled' streets—a *ville radieuse*. It's perhaps a cliché to bring up Le Corbusier—the quintessential modernist bogeyman—but his disdain for existing urban spaces that had developed organically and his authoritarian zeal for the scientific masterplan (starting from scratch, planned from above, dismissing geography, cultural difference and any modes of living which don't fit into a framework of regimented efficiency) serve as good examples of rationalist design taken to the extreme. 'The despot is not a man. It is the Plan. The correct, realistic exact plan, the one that will provide your solution once the problem has been posited clearly, in its entirety, in its indispensable harmony. This plan has been drawn up well away from the frenzy in the mayor's office or the town hall, from the cries of the electorate or the laments of society's victims. It has been drawn up by serene and lucid minds.'[14]

3. Rationalism Management

Is it possible to say when something looks rational? That something has the appearance we associate with rationality, with clear-headed logical thinking? Perhaps this is an 'irrational' line of enquiry: from feelings and associations. Grids look rational because they speak to an order and logic, a machine efficiency, standardization, modularity, scalability. Units arranged in a grid become more legible, quantifiable, manageable. Easier to govern. From the design of text and images on the screen or printed page, to houses, office and retail space, to city streets, infrastructural space, and the systems that manage it.

13. Whilst Loos' temporal bias places Europe and its cultural development ahead on a timeline, we can just as easily construct the opposite case, with Europe playing catch-up (though we're better off ditching this progress temporality altogether): The reductionist aesthetics of European modernist design are indebted to the avant-garde artistic movements that preceded it, which are themselves indebted to non-realist traditions outside European art. The influence of traditional African sculpture on the post-impressionist works of Cezanne and Gauguin, and Picasso's cubism are well documented, even in the most conservative and Eurocentric art history narratives.

14. Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to Be Used as the Basis of our Machine-Age Civilisation* (New York: Orion press, 1967), 154.

Grids and maps, as tools of organisation, rely on oversimplification, a narrowing of vision to bring certain information into sharp focus. Legibility is only achieved by prioritizing a specific interpretation and agenda. In this sense they are lenses—lenses which do not just portray a simplified vision, but also shape societies and spaces to fit these simplification techniques.

Viewed through an anthropocentric lens, in which only assets of human utility and exchange value are noticed, Nature becomes 'Natural resources': commodity waiting to be extracted. In *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, James C Scott uses the nineteenth-century scientific forests of Germany—'same-aged, single-species, uniform trees growing in straight lines in a rectangular flat space cleared of all underbrush and poachers'—as a case study in capitalist oversimplification: 'Everything that seemed unrelated to efficient production was ignored. Having come to see the forest as a commodity, scientific forestry set about refashioning it as a commodity machine.'[15] The consequences of this are that mono-species landscapes are ecologically much weaker and unsustainable in the long term, since the forests are less disease resistant and more prone to storm felling, and the clearing of underbrush and snags reduces the diversity of animal populations essential to soil-building processes.[16]

Another landscape of stand-alone asset extraction is the *Plantation*, which Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing describes as 'ecological simplifications in which living things are transformed into resources, future assets, by removing them from their life-worlds. Plantations are machines of replication, ecologies devoted to purification and production of the same.'[17] Aside from the immense significance of the plantation in the history of the Atlantic slave trade and European imperialism, Tsing situates the monocrop plantation as the blueprint to the factory—*a machine of replication*. To create 'resources', life-worlds are disentangled and alienated.

The rationalist grid assumes self-containment, it assumes individual and alienated units while ignoring and excluding relationality and entanglements or what Tsing refers to as

15. Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to Be Used as the Basis of our Machine-Age Civilisation* (New York: Orion press, 1967), 154.

16. James C Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998) chap. 1, epub

17. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "A Feminist Approach to the Anthropocene: Earth Stalked by Man," (lecture, Barnard College New York, NY, November 10, 2015), http://bcrw.barnard.edu/videos/anna-lowenhaupt-tsing-a-feminist-approach-to-the-anthropocene-earth-stalked-by-man/, accessed January 20, 2019.

'Contamination' and 'Transformative encounters', or what Donna Haraway refers to as 'Sympoesis'. The abstract, archetypal individual stands in for all as a unit of analysis, meaning knowledge can be organized without situated and contextual study.[18] Against the one-size-fits-all rationalisms, Tsing argues for observation and analysis which is not scalable, which perhaps refuses scalability: 'patches' of knowledge, which may not neatly fit, which require translations, instead of being universally applicable. Tsing uses polyphonic music as an analogy through which to explore the concept of noticing and listening to patterns and temporalities that are ignored against the driving beat of progress: 'Polyphony is music in which autonomous melodies intertwine...These forms seem archaic and strange to many modern listeners because they were superseded by music in which a unified rhythm and melody holds the composition together. In the classical music that displaced baroque, unity was the goal; this was "progress" in just the meaning I have been discussing: a unified coordination of time.'[19] If the grid is the oversimplification of space, then the progress timeline is an oversimplification of time and histories.

The *Anthropocene* is the proposed term for describing our current geological epoch (succeeding the holocene) of Human-caused climate change. It is a contested name, for good reasons. Firstly, it alludes to humanity acting universally, as a single actor: the 'human species in general'. But there is no single timeline, no single universal history of human disturbance on Earth. There are particular groups of humans, particular corporations, particular civilisations with particular philosophies and long histories of imperialist expansion. Climate change and environmental transformation are not unintended accidents of which we have only recently become aware of, rather they are part of the logic of capitalist extractionism and warnings have been made for a very long time by both colonized peoples and from people within imperial nations (and have been ignored). And just as the causes of and responsibilities for environmental catastrophes are not evenly spread over humanity, nor is everyone on earth experiencing climate change in the same way when we consider how it intersects with wealth, class, race and geography.

Secondly, the dominant Anthropocene rhetoric privileges what Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz call a 'Geocratic' account, which views the earth as a cybernetic machine to be governed and financialized: 'The project of the "green economy", born within international institutions in recent years, accentuates this development,

with the celebrated "ecosystem services" now being the object of markets: the biosphere, the hydrosphere and the atmosphere appear as mere subsystems of the financial and commodity sphere.'[20] It is important to make space for other narratives of how we got here and of what to do. The Anthropocene brings knowledge and warnings which need to be taken seriously and with urgency, but it also narrates the account with the same technocratic hubris responsible for the mess. It focuses on mitigating the effects of climate change (global warming, drought, rising sea levels, CO_2 pollution), instead of the causes, the structural conditions enabling it. So, rather than situating climate change within broader anti-capitalist struggles—as is the practice within climate justice and decolonial discourse, and is signified by alternative namings such as Capitalocene or Plantationocene—the Anthropocene privileges geoengineering and other techno-fixes as ways of sustaining the very system of limitless economic growth that has been the problem all along, tweaking the controls so that capitalism can continue. It's business as usual. The Anthropocene speaks of Man piloting Spaceship Earth. It speaks to a kind of Cold War era hippy-modernism. A NASA-logo-on-a-H&M-t-shirt nostalgia for geodesic domes and long-haired garage-tinkering 1970s Steve Jobs.

4.

'Modernity' did not arrive though the disinterested passing of time—a gradual, natural, inevitable 'evolution' of all of humanity—but rather was determined by the negation of other worlds and possible futures. There is ideology at work: value judgements of what it means to be civilised, what it means to be rational, have been weaponized. It begs the question (if only for the purposes of pointing out the hypocrisy): for all its displacement of other 'irrational' worldings, is modernity so rational after all? Is the current hegemonic world-system of capitalism with its belief in the free market and endless economic growth so rational? It is presented as 'common sense', with market governance being the only realistic option. 'There is no alternative'. Everything seems to answer to the economy. Everything becomes a market. The problems are too vast and messy, and my understanding or ability to express anything I do understand is so limited that it only makes sense to talk from where it becomes tangible in my own life—otherwise I'm taking yet another 'view from nowhere'.

I'm often pushed to answer, 'Where is your position in this?', 'How does this relate to you?', and it isn't easy to answer. I know my starting point—my suspicion of how rationalism is asserted, in design specifically—comes from fairly everyday, mundane experiences.

18. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) chap. 2, epub.

19. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World,* chap. 2.

20. Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2016), 23.

ALEX WALKER

In terms of my identity, I am viewed by Western society as 'normal', that is, unmarked: British, white, male, heterosexual, cisgender. But I guess this is the point—my 'normativity' is reflected back to me by the society I live in, where I am not defined by race or gender or sexuality and this is a privileged position. It is the same position that is often presented as the universal experience and the objective perspective.

Positioning becomes important in rejecting the stealth ideology and values hidden in terms like objectivity and rationality—terms so often touted as universal virtues in design—and it becomes important in relation to knowledge: where known things are not universal truths but are always situated, relational, belonging to worlds, never disinterested, always ideological. Not knowing is important too—not as ignorance but as humility, listening and leaving space for other stories which may not neatly fit into existing frameworks.

THE CROWD, THE STATE, AND THE IMAGE

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ANDREAS TRENKER

Andreas Trenker is an Italian designer who investigates socio-political topics through an analytical and documentary approach originating from the context of conflictual geographies. In his work, he examines the underlying power structures and the politics of the image.

As a photographer, I am aware of my subjective reading and selective framing of situations. I produce images that to my understanding are informative and relevant. The modes of production applied and circumstances of dissemination chosen are crucial; they are factors rooted in my core ethical values. This approach continuously challenges my visual practice and raises questions about my situational role and the ramification of the images produced.

Recently, I documented a violent encounter between the Israeli army and Palestinian adolescents in the city of Hebron. As I was about to publish my photographs of the clashes, I became aware of their compromising nature. Although most stone throwers had covered their faces, there were some images in which they were depicted unmasked before and after the confrontation, and in some others, even as stones were leaving their hands and flying towards the soldiers. The publication of these images would have put them in danger of arrest, conviction and severe prison sentences. The decision to withhold this damning evidence was not partisan in nature but was rather a reflection upon my responsibility towards the subject as an image maker. Although I might have prevented the straightforward identification of some individuals by means of this material, my published images of masked protesters (which still reveal crucial information regarding location, time, physique, clothing...) might still be of use to the authorities hoping to make identifications and arrests, as long as someone else supplies the missing visual links that would allow conclusions to be drawn.[1]

All images produced and published—regardless of intention, or of the quality and quantity of information they reveal—can be utilised as evidence. They might function differently than expected in relation to other images or involuntarily come to serve diametrically opposed entities. The meshing of visual fragments and the asymmetry that exists in access to knowledge are at the core of the debate about image-based practices in relation to the maintenance of predominant power

[1]. Note on positionality:

Referring to Roland Barthes assumption that a text is a tissue of citations, resulting from innumerable centres of culture, rather than from one, individual experience, this essay abandons the *author's* visibility after this introduction. Barthes claimed that 'the true locus of writing is reading' (*La mort de l'auteur*, 1967) and what is true for the death of the author is comparatively true for the one of the image maker. Every reader applies his own lens in interpreting text or imagery.

structures. Thus, this essay explores the possibilities available for participatory investigation and sousveillance,[2] which undoubtedly bring up fundamental moral questions and reveal both the image of power and the power of the image.

VISIBILITY AND INVISIBILITY

Seeing and being seen are manifestations of bilateral power relations. Being constantly exposed to someone's sight has repercussions on one's behaviour. This implication has been profoundly studied by the French philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault, who coined the term *Panopticism*, which is derived from Jeremy Bentham's architectural model of the perfect prison, the *Panopticon*.[3]

Foucault used the panopticon as a metaphor for surveillance in contemporary society, arguing that the panoptical principle had broken loose from the institutions where it was first applied and had become a generalizable formula for the *disciplinary society*,[4] in which self-disciplining occurs because the individual fears the possible punishment of institutions and therefore acts accordingly. Subsequently, his compatriot philosopher Gilles Deleuze observed that in an increasingly surveilled and interconnected technological world, this effect of self-governing shifted from closed structures towards a network of entangled and interconnected systems that he named *societies of control*.[5]

2. The term sousveillance, coined by Steve Mann, describes the inversion of surveillance, thus the monitoring of an activity by a participant in this activity. Based on the French word *sous*, meaning 'below'.

3. pan → 'all', opticon → 'to be seen'. Uniform jail cells are arranged on several levels circularly around a central watchtower staffed by a prison guard. From there, the guard sees into all cells which are separated from each other. However, the prisoners cannot see the tower, which is situated in the backlight, and therefore they do not know if they are being watched but need to assume they are under constant observation. The primary effect of the panoptic system manifests itself in the way that it works flawlessly, also without permanent surveillance. The panoptic principle, applied to other hierarchical structures with an evident disequilibrium of power, like schools or factories, functions as in the example of the prison. The sheer possibility and uncertainty of being seen causes a disciplining effect, and the scholars or workers act as if the teacher or supervisor is always watching. Thus, the actual exercise of power becomes superfluous.

4. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

5. Gilles Deleuze, *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, October 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7.

The panopticon epitomises the power inherent in visibility and invisibility and has therefore been repeatedly adduced as an allegory in the discourse of digital mass surveillance. Applied to today's ubiquity of cameras and digital recording devices, it appears as if the power of seeing and being seen has morphed into the power of recording and being recorded. With the advent of digital photography, the internet and social media, the prevalent power structures of *image production*, *distribution*, *archiving* and *interpretation* underwent radical changes. This was particularly the case in the realms of investigation, policing and surveillance—practices in which the image serves as proof and is synonymous to fact.

Sticking to the panopticon metaphor, one can argue that power no longer manifests itself in a central *watchtower*; instead it has been decentralised and is located in the possibility that any of the digital recording devices that everybody has to hand can execute such pervasive, controlling authority—a possibility that transforms everyone into both prisoners and guards simultaneously.[6]

With reference to recent occurrences, this essay explores the consequences such multiple *watchtowers* might have on the way power gets executed and controlled. It approaches the *decentralisation of control* and *diffusion of power* and questions the alleged democratisation of image practices, thanks to which everybody supposedly has the means to redirect the monitoring gaze. By shedding light on the tendency towards *crowdsourcing in policing* and *autonomous opensource counter-investigations*, it sketches an outline of how digital tools have transformed modes of policing, investigation and accountability. So, who is watching? When? And moreover, how?

BURDEN OF PROOF

At the peak of the Arab Spring,[7] *techno-enthusiasts* rejoiced over the roles allegedly played by smartphones, social media platforms and free internet access in the organisation, documentation and distribution of the protest and its visual representation. Promptly, terms like 'Twitter Revolution' and 'Facebook Revolution' were applied by Western mass media. Although it is expedient to concede the amplifying role such tools, devices and platforms played,

6. Shoshana Zuboff, *In the Age of the Smart Machine: The Future of Work and Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

7. An ongoing series of uprisings in several North African and Middle Eastern countries, beginning in 2011.
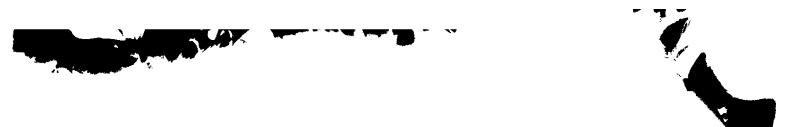
they did not lead to the insurgency itself, and nor did they define its outcome.[8] They can be seen as catalysts[9] that succeeded pre-eminently in bypassing the state censorship of some oppressive regimes in order to act as windows for the West, allowing it to look in on a conflict it had little understanding of.

Examining today's situation, especially when taking into consideration the ongoing civil and internationalised war in Syria, one can argue that what these devices triggered was the advent of real-time war coverage, producing probably the most detailed visual documentation of war in history.[10] It is perhaps superfluous to state that the increased accessibility of smartphones and internet connections permitted broader—and often *unedited*,[11] as well as *un-editorial*[12]—views of the conflict and to note that the previous power structures of image production and distribution had been shuttered. Even though there had been no previous conflict in which citizen journalism had been as relevant as it was to become in this war, it is worth mentioning that such modes of coverage were common among all participant entities, including Islamic fundamentalist groups such as *Daesh*, which appropriated them to diffuse its inhuman narrative. Much of the visual evidence that has been gathered of crimes committed within the self-proclaimed *Islamic State* was not documented and disseminated by activists or civilians but by the perpetrators themselves. What had previously been the purview of citizen journalists and activists was now carried out by the criminals themselves, who recorded their atrocities and published the images via their media channels. While, in the past, warring parties primarily sought to disguise their wrongdoing, *Daesh* opted for the power of visibility over that of invisibility. But contrary to their aims of radicalisation and recruitment, these photographs and videos also serve, alongside the millions of files uploaded by witnesses and activists, to bolster the cases of investigators and journalists. The *Syrian Archive*[13] gleans such visual

evidence of atrocities committed by all parties and attempts to verify in each instance the location and date of the event, and the source of the evidence. The fact that their archive contains 3, 314, 265 files, of which only 5, 743 have been verified,[14] illustrates the sheer inconceivable amount of imagery that exists as documentation of the war and indicates the laborious work that will be involved in the likely decades-long investigations still to come. This burden of terabytes exemplifies the fact that the mere recording of a war crime does not lead to instant justice. Images need to be verified, interpreted and put into context before they are able to function as evidence or used to hold perpetrators accountable.

AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY

Not every piece of visual evidence is initially recorded with the intent of propaganda. Taking images with mobile devices has almost become a reflex, and the omnipresence of cameras in everybody's pockets is now conceived of as a valuable information resource by the police.

The G20 Summit of July 2017—during which both peaceful demonstrations and riots erupted—crippled the city of Hamburg. The public debate about the violent protests and the role of the police in them was dominated by imagery from the very beginning. The police—as is common practice nowadays—had cameramen within their units. While they were with one hand producing their POV-footage,[15] they were impeding and intimidating journalists and pushing photographers with the other.[16] The maxim was to document but not to be documented. By trying to avoid the production of compromising visual evidence that could testify to misbehaviour within their ranks, the police applied the principle of power through invisibility. Soon after, however, they became very interested in the amateurs' material.

The Hamburg Police set up an online platform[17] where citizens could upload images and videos taken during the protests. By this means, the police expected to identify suspects and uncover unreported crimes. To begin with, the encouraging of public manhunts and the repetitive transmission of images showing a violent minority contributed to a distortion of the public opinion about the protest en bloc.

8. Evgeny Morozov, "Facebook and Twitter are just places revolutionaries go," *The* Guardian, March 7, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/mar/07/facebook-twitter-revolutionaries-cyber-utopians.

9. A term used within chemistry to refer to substances that accelerate an ongoing reaction or process.

10. "Watching Syria's War," *New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/watching-syrias-war, accessed February 8, 2019.

11. As is the case when events are live-streamed.

12. Such as when there is direct communication between eye-witnesses and 'spectators' without the mediation of a media outlet.

13. A collective of human rights activists.

14. "Syrian Archive," Syrian Archive, https://syrianarchive.org/en, accessed January 23, 2019.

15. Point-of-view footage.

16. Journalisten-Verband rügt Polizei," taz, August 28, 2017, http://www.taz.de/!5436980/.

17. "Polizei Hamburg Hinweisportal," Polizei Hamburg, hh.hinweisportal.de, accessed January 23, 2019.

The visual denunciation of the few impinged upon the many. While condemning the rioters, stone throwers and looters publicly, the police reached out to the 'good demonstrators'—those who took part in the peaceful protests—as well as the bystanders and onlookers, and the numerous citizen journalists and reporters (whom they had previously pushed). The aim of this bidirectional approach was to drive a wedge between the demonstrators by labelling them as either 'good' or 'bad', and thereby to convince the non-violent protestors to provide visual material that would incriminate the rioters.

Naturally, this call also resulted in the upload of vast numbers of images depicting 'innocents' among the rioters. Although the federal state government assured that such images would not be stored and would be deleted if they were found to be of no importance,[18] there is a high chance that such images of uninvolved demonstrators might be archived in one way or another, inasmuch as the definition of importance is a nebulous concept, being subject to police interpretation. There are very few numbers to indicate the expediency of this tactic by the German police; however, one could assume that some of the approximately 4, 200 investigatory proceedings concerning the G20 Summit were at least partly enabled by the 12, 204 files obtained via the crowdsourcing strategy.[19] Interestingly, the authorities had to admit that about 5, 000 of the uploaded files had no pertinence or were images and videos of pornographic content or of clearly jocular nature.[20] Eventually, the decrease in quality, quantity and relevance of uploaded data led to the close-down of the portal around forty days after its implementation.[21]

This case reveals not only the public's willingness to collaborate with the national security apparatus by this means, but also raises the far more interesting question of what the incentive was to contribute of one's own volition to such an investigation. Was it the feeling of fulfilling civic duty? The gratification of incriminating vandals? Or might it be the execution of control and power? However, another aspect of such investigatory strategies, which should not be overlooked, is that public manhunts quickly turn into cyber-vigilantism and tend to produce erroneous accusations—a phenomenon that continually recurs in the context of crowdsourced policing.[22]

18. Bürgerschaft der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg, *Drucksache 21/10148: Schriftliche Kleine Anfrage und Antwort des Senats*, 29.08.2017, 6.

19. Bürgerschaft der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg, *Drucksache 21/10148, 5.*

20. Bürgerschaft der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg, 6.

21. Bürgerschaft der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg, 1.

22. For instance, in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon Terror Attack.

TO COUNTER THE POWER

Foucault noted that power is not an exclusive property of governmental institutions; instead, power is exercised throughout the social body (bodies), and as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance to it, no matter how oppressive the operation of any particular system.[23] To oppose power and control, one can adapt the same strategies and tools used by the state to counter the monitoring gaze and perform investigations, as Allan Sekula proposes in his definition of counter-forensics.[24]

Due to the extensive presence of cameras, it was inevitable that during the G20 protests the violent police reaction to the demonstrations would also be recorded. With a zero-tolerance policy, the German police tried to choke off the protest by applying massive force against violent and non-violent protesters alike. Even though some national TV stations broadcasted the images of excessive pepper spray use and of demonstrators being bashed by police, Hamburg's mayor Olaf Scholz claimed that there was no police violence. This blunt statement not only denied the existence of such violence but in doing so declared what had already been recorded and broadcasted as tolerable, ergo setting the threshold of police violence for future interventions. What does or does not constitute violence is not defined by the image itself but by the reading of the same.

As a corollary to the call by the police for data submissions and the denial of police violence, activists turned the tables and opened their own online platform: g20-doku.org. This archive allowed citizens to upload material of (alleged) police violence. In gathering, examining and cross-referencing the various clips, photos, and testimonies, the activists reviewed and evaluated the actions of the police at the demonstrations. While the police publicly called for the identification of violent demonstrators and succeeded in this task quite quickly, the activists did not seek for such an identification of violent officers. On the contrary, the activists' platform was primarily aimed at countering the prevarication by the police. While the state's investigations inevitably led to reports, trials and convictions, there was no real chance that the activists' investigations—even when successful—would result in violent police officers being brought to justice by their colleagues. Instead of achieving

23. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (University of Chicago Press, 1983), 208–226, https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.power/.

24. Thomas Keenan, "Counter-forensics and Photography," Grey Room 55 (Spring 2014): 58–77.

judicial consequences for the police, the platform functioned as a public display of their misbehaviour. The trial took place not in the courtroom but in the (digital) public domain. One could argue that the activists' investigation excluded the possibility of judicial prosecution for individual police officers, which may lead one to the assumption that the platform was nothing more than an attempt to pillory and discredit the police as a whole in the same way that the police decision to publish imagery of the worst of the riots discredited the protests in its entirety. However, when police violence is relativised or justified, and when there is no effective independent organ policing the police, the public can only counter-activate the same strategies of recording and documenting to draw attention to the misconduct of the state authority. This is a strategy that inevitably leads to accusations being levelled at the police at large, as long as identification regulations (like individual ID badges on uniforms) are not implemented and esprit de corps rates higher than justice.[25]

The necessity of independent counter-platforms for document-ing, collecting and archiving visual evidence of protests and how they unfold has become apparent in numerous other occurrences, including the Gezi protest in Istanbul, the March of Return in Gaza, and the aforementioned Syrian conflict. To obtain, securely store and make publicly accessible such material is an increasingly important task amid attempts to elicit shifts in predominant power structures. In the book *Autonomous Archiving*, the *Artıkişler Collective* describes the advent of this citizen-driven practice.

As an institutional practice, archival practices often tend to serve the colonized, surveillance and discipline society of the modern world. However, during the last ten years, with [an upswing] in digital technology and the detection of social movements, the recording and accumulation of images has become a civil activity. [26]

The act of archiving images is similar to their framing[27] in that it is a highly selective process propelled by political and ethical beliefs. The same is also true of the reading of the material collected. The G20 case is one among many—including the killings of black citizens by white officers in the US—that illustrate the asymmetry of power inherent in mutual recordings of violence: a disequilibrium nascent in who records and who gets recorded.

25. "Polizeigewalt beim G20-Gipfel," ARD Mittagsmagazin, aired on June 20, 2018, on Das Erste.

26. Özge Çelikaslan, Alper Şen and Pelin Tan, *Autonomous Archiving* (Barcelona: dpr-barcelona, 2016), 7.

27. The process of image production in which the author decides what is worth including within the frame.

SNITCHING FOR THE (FUTURE) AUTHORITARIAN STATE

Recent incidents in the Turkish political landscape may be seen as the striking symptoms of a weakening democracy slowly drifting into an authoritarian regime. While the Gezi protest of 2013 was labelled and acclaimed by Western media as one of the 'Twitter Revolutions'—insurrections that were organised and kept alive due to images recorded with mobile devices and shared on social media platforms—the Turkish government quelled the protest by violent means and intensified their control, monitoring and censorship of the national media, focusing specifically on online and social media platforms. The attempted coup d'état in 2016 put another nail in the coffin of Turkish democracy, and the government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan exploited it as a pretence to proceed against his critics.

The same year,[28] the *Emniyet Genel Müdürlügü*[29] published the free app EGM Mobil, which gives access to essential police services by helping users with tasks such as finding the closest police station or filling out accident reports. However, the app also has a feature that allows users to report suspects or crimes to the police and invites them to help identify *terrorists*[30] within Turkish society. Within the app, the camera of the phone can be accessed to take a photo and to send it to the police along with a report. Opponents of the app claim that this feature instigates the denunciation of Erdogan's critics to the regime, saying it amounts to a call to spy on the Turkish community, and especially on those abroad. Although the app store does not show the exact number of downloads,[31] the vast number of entries in the comment section for the app's listing reveal its popularity. Likely triggered by critical reportage,[32] users describe the app either as a great tool for making police services more accessible or as a dystopian 'Gestapo app', a 'Stasi 2.0' par excellence. Regardless of the intentions of the app's creators, the discussion reveals the jeopardy involved. The mere possibility that someone can report a political opponent to an increasingly au-thoritarian regime with a few clicks is unsettling. This is the phone as

28. Deutscher Bundestag, *Drucksache 19/5499, Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage*, 06.11.2018, 3.

29. General Directorate of Security.

30. A rather flexible term that, in the rhetoric of authoritarian regimes, quickly comes to include all critics.

31. More than 100,000.

32. Report Mainz, Television newscast, Claudia Kaffanke, Feliz Kükrekol-Koch, ARD - SWR, September 25, 2018.

a ubiquitous snitching device. Meanwhile, in Germany, a country with a substantial population of Turkish origin, the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*[33] has investigated these allegations and attested that the app is a potential instrument of denunciation.[34]

In like manner, the German far-right party *AFD*[35] has launched a snitching portal through which pupils and parents can report teachers who talk disparagingly of the AFD. This attempt at intimidation, which also provides a way to gather a list of names of people to proceed against once in power, might appear improbable in a democratic society, but as already illustrated in the example of Turkey, the transformation of a democracy into an authoritarian regime is a gradual, sometimes creeping process. After the attempted coup d'état, 15, 000[36] officials from the Turkish Ministry of Education were suspended, and another 21, 000 private teachers[37] lost their licences because they were not well-disposed towards the Turkish government. Even if such a scenario might not necessarily come to pass in Germany, any attempt to urge pupils to snitch on their teachers and to report them to a far-right political movement should raise an alarm.

The consequence of such an app is not only the possibility that someone might get reported to the authorities, but also that it's very existence could have a significant impact on social life. Discussing political topics or even engaging in a critical debate with friends in a café may no longer be possible if there is the threat of being recorded and reported. One cannot be sure whether or not others will use their omnipresent smartphones to record any particular action or speech, yet one needs to assume that this is possible, and one's behaviour may be adapted accordingly—conforming to the panoptic principle. A collection of compromising recordings may not be a threat within a democratic system, but it will be in a future authoritarian regime.

33. Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

34. Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Newsletter Nr.4/2018*, 3.

35. Alternative für Deutschland.

36. "Bildungsministerium in der Türkei suspendiert 15.000 Verdächtige," *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, July 19, 2016, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/europa/tuerkei/tuerkisches-bildungsministerium-suspendiert-15-000-verdaech-tige-14347855.html.

37. "Yildirim: Präsidentengarde soll aufgelöst warden," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 24, 2016, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/news/politik/konflikte-yildirim-praesidentengarde-soll-aufgeloest-werden-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-160723-99-794080 – 24.01.2019.

ARMY OF DIGITAL VOLUNTEERS

The two primary ways in which authorities use crowdsourcing are what Daren C. Brabham calls *knowledge discovery* and *distributed human intelligence tasking*.[38] The crowd is either asked to collect enormous amounts of data in a common location or to analyse it. Such analysis also implies the close reading and interpretation of images.

National and transnational law enforcement agencies, as well as non-governmental human rights organisations, have already grasped the potential of the crowd's inclusion in their ongoing investigations. In *EUROPOL's Stop Child Abuse—Target an Object* campaign, users were asked to look at censored images of abuse and to identify objects within them that might allow inferences to be made about the locations where they were taken. According to a Europol press release, more than 21, 000 tips have already been submitted, and the fact that one image was geolocated within only forty-eight hours of dissemination shows the value of the public contribution to the investigation.[39]

Addresses made to online communities rather than individuals have the advantage of gathering a loose group to work together on the same task, sharing their clues and doubts as they carry out the investigation in a discursive manner. A collective approach such as this speeds up the investigation as well as the process of analysis for any found clues, which otherwise would again have to be carried out by the small number of law enforcement officers allocated to this task. By outsourcing such a time-consuming and laborious process, Europol utilised online communities to generate intelligence that would have been difficult or impossible to obtain by other means.

Similarly, Amnesty International benefits from mobilising their vast network for their *Decoder Projects*. After successfully outsourcing microtasks to supporters in recent years,[40] they are now able to call on over 50, 000 people from 150 countries. This is their active crowd, or to say it in Amnesty's militant lingo, their 'army of digital volunteers.'[41] Language of this type also appears in

38. Daren C. Brabham, *Using Crowdsourcing in Government* (Washington, DC: IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2013), 11–16.

39. "With your help we are 21 000 steps closer to saving a child from sexual abuse", Europol, Press Release, June 1, 2018, https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/your-help-we-are-21-000-steps-closer-to-saving-child-sexual-abuse.

40. As part of the projects *Decode oil spills, Decode Darfur, and Troll Patrol.*

41. "Amnesty Decoders – Troll Patrol," Amnesty International, https://decoders.amnesty.org/projects/troll-patrol, accessed January 23, 2019.

Lighthouse Report's *ItalianArms* project. Their unpaid voluntary researchers are '*armed* only with curiosity and critical capacity' [italics added], as member Benjamin Strick terms it.[42]

In November 2018, Amnesty issued a call for the US-led bombing of the Syrian city of Raqqa to be decoded. The goal of the project *Strike Tracker* is to classify, date and map the destruction of each building. By analysing a timeline of satellite images, users mark the last image where a given building was still intact and the first one where it appears to be destroyed. This method allows for the pinpointing of the time interval in which the attack must have been carried out. The game-like design, use of direct language and non-monetary reward system (recognition is all you get) that are employed all have an addictive undercurrent. While clicking through satellite images, paying attention to the smallest deviations in the depicted structures in the attempt to identify the moment of a building's destruction, a rewarding feeling makes itself present. Through this benevolent participation in a collective task, the user has the notion that they are actively contributing to holding the perpetrators accountable, and this compelling sense led to 39, 358 contributions being made by 1, 117 decoders in the first week alone, which was merely 4 percent of the total work to be accomplished.[43]

The incentives to participate of one's own volition in such investigations are clearly ideological, political and ethical in nature. While the vast majority would endorse Europol's undertaking aimed at bringing molesters to justice, the participation in Amnesty's investigation immediately raises questions about its political agenda. Nonetheless, it is important to recall that the expansion of policing measures often gets vindicated by the use of examples that one can hardly disagree with.

CHALLENGING THE STATE MONOPOLY ON INVESTIGATION

In an era of backsliding democracies, governmentally doctored evidence, Glomar-responses,[44] and information wars against human rights organisations and the free press, it comes as no surprise that the state monopoly on *investigation* and *surveillance* is being challenged by non-governmental entities.

One group that contributed to the aforementioned Europol investigation was the citizen investigative collective *Bellingcat*. The loose team that has formed around pivotal figure Eliot Higgins uses open source technology (so-called OSINT[45] tools) for their online investigations. Though they were first called hobby detectives and conspiracists, they gained world recognition for their findings in regard to the downing of flight MH17 and the Skripal poisoning in 2018.[46] What is remarkable about Bellingcat is that most of their investigations have been carried out solely online and mostly using free-to-use software. Bellingcat was able to rally a large group of *enthusiastic amateurs* to engage in and contribute to their investigations, especially when it comes to questions of geolocation. The community that had sprung up around Bellingcat's practice were among the first to analyse Europol's images. As Daniel Romein writes in a Bellingcat article regarding the geolocation of one of those photographs: 'It takes hours of research, and a complex investigation as this one clearly cannot be solved by one person or a small team; a crowdsourced wisdom is required to solve cases like this.'[47]

Certainly, Bellingcat's work is far from being *neutral*. Their set of values and beliefs is inscribed in the cases they investigate. Instead of working alongside the police or the state, they challenge their narratives and sometimes provide evidence of governments lying. By sharing their OSINT-knowledge with journalists and activists around the globe, the group has contributed to the rise of digital forensic practices in newsrooms and the human rights sector, as in the case of the Syrian Archive, whose initiator Hadi Al Khatib is linked to Bellingcat and has exposed various war crimes using such techniques.

Higgins once described Bellingcat's work as 'just looking at pictures,'[48] which is something anybody could do. Indeed, the tools needed to conduct such inquiries are accessible to all parties across the whole political gamut. An event which vividly illustrated the potential and danger of such autonomous cyber-investigations was

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42. https://italianarms.it/news/AQS29ELlpQY6EoQiMq8KA — 03.12.2018

43. In the end, 3 101 decoders from 124 countries analysed all 11 218 buildings thanks to their 138 5570 contributions.

44. Neither confirm nor deny

45. OSINT: Open Source Intelligence Techniques. Collection and analysis of information gathered from public or open sources.

46. Michael Schwirtz and Ellen Barry, "Armchair Investigators at Front of British Inquiry Into Spy Poisoning," *New York Times*, October 9, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/09/world/europe/bellingcat-skripal-poisoning.html.

47. Daniel Romein, "Europol's Asian City Child Abuse Photographs Geolocated," bellingcat, November 8, 2018, https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/case-studies/2018/11/08/europols-asian-city-child-abuse-photographs-geolocated/.

48. Elliot Higgins, "Online Fact-Checking In A Post-Truth World" (talk, Impact Festival, Utrecht, October 27, 2018), http://impakt.nl/festival/news-2018/impakt-festival-2018-eliot-higgins-bellingcat/.

the troll campaign carried out by *4Chan* users against the online performance artwork *He Will Not Divide Us* by Shia LaBeouf. A flag lettered with the work's title was hoisted up at a secret location in America, and an internet-connected camera transmitted its image on a live stream. On *4Chan /pol/*—an online sub-forum of 4Chan that is a notorious hotbed for alt-right supporters and white supremacists—users started to geolocate the flag's position merely by analysing the sky in the background, which was the only reference point. Motivated to spoil the artwork, the 4Chan community investigated the aeroplanes crossing the live stream, the wind direction and supposedly even star constellations. Within only thirty-seven hours they were able to identify the unknown location, reach it, and replace the flag with a *MAGA*[49] baseball cap.

This case demonstrates how effective and quickly such an operation can be executed, even among amateur detectives. As long as there is a 'purpose' that activates enough people, there is a high probability that such investigations can be undertaken successfully. Whether fuelled by crude political belief or by the promise of the pure joy that was to be found in annoying LaBeouf, the /pol/ community was able to verify a secret location so quickly that a governmental institution might not have been able to do much better. Having a vast number of people at one's disposal might sometimes outdo technical hardware or state privilege. But it is mostly a taste of what is to come, as (political) extremists learn to pool their resources and forces to investigate and disclose opponents' physical locations. Such attempts, to reveal and map the addresses of political adversaries, have been taking place for decades, but the free online tools that are now available for performing such tasks in very short amounts of time are considerably more worrisome.

POLITICS OF THE IMAGE

John Berger once stated that 'photographs carry no certain meaning' and 'lend themselves to any use.'[50] This is equally true for visual evidence, which is never self-evident but can be seen through various political lenses. Contemporary conflicts produce different optic regimes, and image-making capabilities are spread among all participants.[51] The ability to produce and to read images—from citizen-generated material and CCTV, to satellite and drone foot-age—has become key to modern warfare. Today, both killing and its investigation are image-based practices.[52]

This understanding is a founding premise of the independent research agency *Forensic Architecture*, another vanguard group of counter-investigators in the realm of public truth-seeking. The multidisciplinary collective of scientists, architects, designers, lawyers and researchers investigates (mostly) state crimes and presents their findings in political and public forums. Forensic Architecture embraces the circumstance that the camera is a bidirectional recording device that retains not only what is in front of its lens but also the position, action and interaction of its operator. Therefore, they do not look at the single image but examine a mesh of multiple overlapping cones of vision to unfold the relations between single shots and to decode what they reveal other than visual proof. The complexity of this work lies in stitching together the findings of various sources. '*Evidence assemblage* must necessarily establish relations between, say, digital photographs, material ruins, remains of ammunition, and human testimony,'[53] director Eyal Weizman recalls. In its painstaking sleuthing, the team relies especially on citizen-generated data and reaches out to the crowd for investigation and archiving propositions.[54]

In 2014, Forensic Architecture investigated the killing of two Palestinian teenagers by Israeli security forces during a protest in the West Bank. By analysing all available visual and audible footage from that incident, the research team was able to convict a border police officer of the illegitimate and intentional killing, although the military tried to cover up the crime. Later the officer was arrested and charged with manslaughter in at least one of the two cases. This investigation and its success were only possible due to the presence of recording devices and the variety of images taken and published from various points of view. What has been concealed was again made visible through the meticulous reading of these images; however, the same images might also have been used to incriminate Palestinians of stone throwing. In the end, it depends on the way these images are being read, and by whom and for what purpose they will be instrumentalised.

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49. Make America Great Again was a campaign slogan used by Donald Trump.

50. John Berger, *Understanding a Photograph* (London: Penguin Classics, 2013), 53.

51. Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (New York: Zone Books, 2018), 97.

52. Weizman, Forensic Architecture, 30

53. Weizman, 58.

54. As in the development of the Grenfell Media Archive or the investigation into the killing of the Greek LGBT activist Zak Kostopoulos.

ASYMMETRY

The presence of digital recording devices in everyone's pockets might indeed have democratised to some extent the modes of *image production, distribution, archiving and interpretation*. And yet, at the same time, these devices have become prime tools for snitching on and surveilling others, whether on behalf of the state, political parties or other entities. Even though techniques for gathering and examining visual evidence are now accessible to a broader range of people, one needs to be sceptical about the possibility of subverting and redirecting the monitoring gaze by adopting such techniques according to one's ethical compass. Empirically speaking, the sovereign, oppressors and autocrats have always been more successful in appropriating such tools for their goals. The power attributed to images has no constant unit. An image's power depends on who is in front of and behind the lens, as well as who is reading the image. The technology applied in this process is deeply enmeshed, owned and controlled by the military-industrial complex and private enterprises, which causes a severe asymmetry in access when it comes to the quality, quantity and agency of such imagery, to the detriment of the oppressed and surveilled. Those who might think that civil sousveillance and institutional surveillance balance each other out will likely be met with disappointment, since it is more probable that participatory sousveillance among various social bodies will begin to occur. If, in the panopticon, the prisoner did not know when the guard was watching, now one does not even know who staffs the watchtower. The questions of who, when and how might even become superfluous with the production of subjects which are compliant with such a rhizomatic panopticon. Discourse about whether the use of such technologies and techniques can be considered 'good' or 'bad' remains peripheral when the very existence of this technology implies the possible plenary monitoring of a society and thus is enough to cause the panoptical effect.

One needs to scrutinize who really needs to fear the consequences of recording and being recorded and which actors might hold the upper hand. However, there is certainty that images, regardless of the intentions with which they have been produced, disseminated and archived, contribute to surveillance and investigations *de toutes les couleurs*. The important work of Bellingcat and Forensic Architecture should not make one forget the negative concomitants and downsides of crowdsourced investigations, which persist no matter who performs them. Improvident participation in crowdsourced investigations might

be only a stone's throw from their legitimation, which will ineluctably lead to an increase in policing measures, surveillance, sousveillance and information asymmetry.[55]

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[55]. The imbalance in knowledge between those who own the data and the subjects of the same.

THE ARGUMENTATION MACHINE

KARINA ZAVIDOVA

Designer and researcher, Karina Zavidova owns her surname as a dot-com domain and a gmail account. Intrigued by the ephemeral web tokens and vagueness, she is particularly interested in working with subjects and fields which are considered uncreative. Trained as a graphic designer she currently operates as a studio, solo investigator and a writer, while obtaining a graduate degree in Design from the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam.

Imagine a square watermelon. Or a bonsai tree. Or a pear, growing inside of a bottle. To grow, a plant needs soil, nutrients, sunlight and water. A gardener could have dropped a seed in a dark corner but chose a sunny terrace. The sprouting begins; it is irreversible. And then comes the bottle. To continue its growth, the plant has to adapt to the gardener's idea of beauty and their notion of value. Choosing a direction in which to spread its leaves, the plant learns about its environment despite having very minimal means for understanding what shapes it. It is unaware of the megastructure that holds the world that hosts the terrace and the flowerpot. Who is the owner of the property? Who is the gardener? How much is the rent? As a lousy gardener, I wonder how my plants survive my deadlines and the lack of care that comes with them. Somehow, they keep sprouting, blooming and, eventually, bearing fruit. Leaving my garden, I move to my desk. I am writing about how a creative practice comes to life.

The composition of the soil is a blend of dreamland (affect) and datatown (fact). *Datatown is based only upon data. It is a city that wants to be described by information; a city that knows no given topography, no prescribed ideology, no representation, no context. Only huge, pure data.*[1] Envisioned in 1999 by MVRDV, 'Metacity/Datatown' ponders the possibilities and dangers of such a city and the agenda that derives from this numerical approach. Are we in a dreamland yet? the 'huge, pure data' asks. *Datatown is based on an extrapolation of Dutch statistics. Though the Netherlands today seems a dreamland for economics, culture, and production, it remains suspicious to follow its doctrine. But the accessibility of statistical information makes it a useful instrument for extrapolation.*[2] Twenty years later, the dreamland relies on data. The tools of quantification are used to make abstract and immeasurable words such as 'innovation' into points that can be scored by those wishing to enter the country.

How does one label themselves in the midst of the sprouting-settling process? The term *migration* mostly focuses on movement and mobility, while *immigration* is used to describe a person entering the country with the intention to remain. The global definition of *immigration* by EMN (the European Migration Network) specifies that it is *the act of arriving in a State with the intention to remain for a period exceeding one year.*[3] The period of one year is important, as

1. Winy Maas, Jacob van Rijs and Nathalie de Vries, "METACITY / DATATOWN," MVRDV, https://www.mvrdv.nl/projects/147 metacity--datatown-, accessed January 23, 2019. Based on the French word sous, meaning 'below'.

2. Maas, van Rijs and de Vries, "METACITY / DATATOWN."

3. "immigration", European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/immigration-0_en, accessed January 23, 2019.

in the Dutch system this is the period given to a non-EU graduate in which to become a (highly skilled) migrant by satisfying all the requirements for one of the residence permits issued by the IND (Immigration and Naturalisation Service).[4] The same period is given to a start-up to become of 'essential interest for the Dutch economy' and profitable enough for the migrant entrepreneur to apply for a residence permit as a self-employed business person.[5]

A creative practice run by a non-EU citizen in The Netherlands (like myself) is shaped by two forces that are not eager to acknowledge each other's existence—the creative field itself and the immigration policies of the country where it is based. These are two systems of value, and attempts to satisfy the requirements of both are often mutually exclusive. Being in-between these two systems, it is very hard to understand your own value. In order to simplify the situation, assigning yourself zero value seems to be a solution. But it's a trap.

Maybe this text exists because I spend too much time observing plants instead of studying the market and focusing on producing work that will meet its demands. I will not be using this text to defend myself. Still, becoming of a value to Dutch society as a 'creative' is arguably more complex and much more interesting than the prospect of achieving success by replacing one's own autonomous work with commercial assignments. Getting paid is great, but it doesn't always lead to accruing value. Immigration law has its own definition of the value a migrant brings to a country, and it is not only about income.

There are people who wake up and check their stocks while having their first cup of coffee, learning how the price of their possessions has changed overnight. I wish a similar service was available for checking my own value, so I could have a better understanding of the situation, in between visits to lawyers. I wonder if lawyers actually benefit from the cryptic way information is presented to their clients, or whether their work might improve if a client was a bit more literate in that sense. Just as I wish to connect with lawyers not as one of their cases but as a researcher, I am also looking to enable positive, active relationships with the complex of texts that regulate my professional life (and my personal life, because a decision one way or the other, that I can remain in the country or should leave, changes everything) instead of looking at it as an obstruction.

If I am the square watermelon, we can imagine that the legislature is the gardener who puts me in a box and the creative field is the

force of nature that tells me to grow, no matter what. But there are two boxes, and I cannot grow into both and still maintain a pleasant shape. 'Natural' processes in the creative field are often highly toxic practices. Financial compensation for work often follows the same logic as the evaluations made by the immigration service: only counting work that produces outcomes (and not the hours of research and lost assignments, or the hours put in writing applications, at graduate internships, etc.). What is also interesting is that art schools chose, after the arts budget cuts in 2013, to continue developing as widely international 'creative hubs' or 'think tanks'.[6] As a non-EU student, a human and an investment, do I bring more profit to the school than my peers? I don't think so. It was explained to me that every European student is partly funded by the EU, so if I had a different citizenship the total amount of money received for the tuition of my group would not change (but I would have to pay less)—the only difference would be in the ratio of private payments to state-funded.[7] The Modern Migration policy (MoMi) was also introduced in 2013, changing the way educational institutions were authorised to apply for non-EU students' residence permits. Instead of having their residence permits extended as their studies progressed, students would now have to receive one residence permit for the full period of their study that could be withdrawn if they failed to receive the sufficient amount of study points: *If progress is less than 50 % (for no excusable reason as indicated in the WHW-law) the student must be reported to the IND and the VVR (residence permit) will be withdrawn.*[8] While my European peers could fail and redo the year, I no longer had failure as an option, and my grade became my main value. The funniest thing now is that, if I think about it, the migration policy

6. Flexing my expat swag, I reach for an article from the New York Times titled "Dutch Art Scene Is Under Siege". Written by Nina Siegal in 2013, the article gives an overview and talks about the impact of these cuts: *Since the 1970s, and particularly in the '80s and '90s, artists and cultural organizations across the Netherlands were supported almost exclusively by the state. There is almost no culture of private sponsorship and corporate financing for the arts is limited. From 2012 to 2013, federal financing for the arts dropped by 22 percent, or €238 million, while local, regional and provincial governments account for an additional €232 million decline in subsidies.* Nina Siegal, "Dutch Art Scene Is Under Siege," New York Times, January 29, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/30/arts/30iht-dutch30.html.

7. I am not going to look into that, as it would make this a completely different text. Plus, a certain level of naivety about how your school operates definitely helps with your studies.

8. This is an excerpt from an email I received from the international office of the KABK (the Royal Academy of Art), where I studied for my BA degree in graphic design from 2012 to 2016.

4. "Work," Immigration and Naturalisation Service, https://ind.nl/en/work, accessed January 23, 2019.

5. "Start-up", Immigration and Naturalisation Service, https://ind.nl/en/work/Pages/Start-up.aspx, accessed January 23, 2019.

prior to this change was never explained to me when I moved to the Netherlands to pursue my bachelor's degree. It is possible that the conditions would be the same: no sufficient grade = no extension of the residence. But what induced such a panic amongst me and my non-EU peers when the letter was received that we thought we could redo the year and after the policy change we learned that we couldn't. Maybe we never had this possibility, but we wouldn't know. What is interesting is that the fear of losing what you already have (the residence permit until the expected end of your studies) is much bigger than the fear of not acquiring something (not being able to apply for an extension). Hello, my name is Karina, and three years after graduation, I identify as a 7 out of 10, in accordance with the grade I received for my bachelor's degree.

Do educational institutions realise that they are involved in a system aimed at protecting the country's job market from foreigners? There is nothing wrong or weird with that, but, after almost two degrees, I don't think art schools fully realise the extent to which they are embedded in restrictive immigration policies. Running an art school is no easy task, and while inviting non-Europeans to establish their professional identities inside of the country, institutions do not openly reflect on the issues that arise with labour migration.[9] After graduating, the 'creative' has to deal with the concept of a practice that is not grounded in practicalities. Within the institution, the enthusiasm of the 'creatives' is often perceived as the evidence of the demand of the market. Seeing *enormous* enthusiasm as *huge* demand, there is no need to trace how the legislation itself informs the notion of value. Hoping that our Instagram followers one day become our clients, we, art school people, are constantly *producing*, being told not to get famous immediately after graduation (as one can get spoiled and relax) and to prepare to earn a living somewhere else. Also, who needs to learn to read *legalese* when the system of reputation building, endorsements and networking creates its own values, which have little to do with profitability? Looking at the words used to evaluate creative practices, there is no doubt that *ambition* and *talent* are two terms that are very present. It is also in no doubt that art school graduates can innovate.

Innovation and hybridity are the terms widely used to actualise projects, whether they are conceived at the TU (Technische Universiteit) or the art academy. But at what pace? Let's take the start-up residence permit as a statement. In this permit, the immigration authorities pronounce that 'it is possible to build a great product *and* get it recognised as innovative in a few years'. Is this a realistic scenario?

Given that artistic practices seem relatively stagnant and the tech sector is booming, these states are seen as constants—i.e. one was always failing while the other was always progressing—and not as just points on a timeline, throughout which the trajectory of each field has a multitude of ups and downs. Take AI, which is now considered so widely successful that even art projects dealing with the subject get funded. The field has had two major periods of stagnation—Oh God, I need a synonym here!—the so-called AI winters of 1974–1980 and 1987–1993, along with several smaller periods when the field was not considered of any value and wasn't funded.[10] Blinded by rhetorics, we, insecure young professionals, lose our common sense. We want it all now. We want to speed date our business partners, and we are looking for that 'Uber but for x' formula. As an outsider to *all things successful*, I often catch myself thinking, 'I just need to find a partner/funding/legal expert/consultant, etc.—that must be it!' That's a trap too. On paper, *arts and culture* as a field has little to do with *enterpreneurship*, but what interests me is that both recommend that one considers oneself as a project, which is not that far away from looking at yourself as a case. Evaluating oneself through the lens of immigration law, it makes more sense to use an established template, such that an artist paints, a writer writes and a scientist does research. Still, I want something else: my very own template and the power to question the 'terms and conditions' of my practice. Am I ambitious or delusional?

The notion of ambition I use comes from a letter written by the Minister of Economic Affairs to the Dutch government one year prior to the creation of a special residence permit for startups in 2015. *Ambitious Entrepreneurship, An agenda for start-ups and growing businesses* was written by Henk Kamp and issued by his ministry in 2013 (what a year!).[11] In the letter, the word *ambition* itself is not defined, but looking at the definitions of *ambitious entrepreneurship* it is easy to understand why the field of art is not *ambitious*. I use the word *art* here to intentionally detach a practice like mine from the term 'creative industry', which is an umbrella term used to host a variety of occupations with very different financial models, such that performance art stands next to software development. In the attached booklet, companies drawn from the predefined 'top sector' are listed as examples of what it means to be innovative and what it means to be an entrepreneur. Here are two quotes from the aforementioned letter:

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9.   Maybe because, thanks to MoMi, the chances of a non-EU student actually graduating and starting a career have been reduced.

10. "AI Winter," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AI_winter, accessed January 23, 2019.

11. Henk Kamp to the House of Representatives, "Ambitious Entrepreneurship, An agenda for start-ups and growing businesses," July 28, 2014, Ministry of Economic Affairs, https://www.government.nl/documents/parliamentary-documents/2014/07/28/letter-to-parliament-about-ambitious-enterpreneurship, accessed January 23, 2019.

Ambitious, growth-driven entrepreneurs are crucial to the Netherlands. In this context I define ambitious entrepreneurs as those developing a new business or business activity with a view to creating as much new value as possible, which is manifest in innovation, new jobs, internationalisation and growth

The Netherlands wants to become "the place to be" for many promising and talented Dutch and foreign workers who are starting their own companies because they contribute to our prosperity and our competitive position.

According to this letter, being ambitious means being growth-driven, innovative, international and focused on services that are so urgently needed that they will provide new jobs. What is particularly interesting is that the minister also writes that in the early stages, start-ups are not ready to prosper and to generate jobs, but they remain promising and therefore should be helped. What fascinates me is that this letter invokes a loop: 1. Innovation is defined; 2. Facilitators are created; 3. They host projects that fit the profile of point one; 4. Non-ambitious projects cannot enter the loop. Now, as someone who appreciates rhetorics, this is a game I want to play.

Welcoming talent? A comparative study of immigrant entrepreneurs' entry policies in France, Germany and the Netherlands[12] is a 2018 article by Dr. Tesseltje de Lange that explores admission policies for non-EU entrepreneurs who want to start a business in or move their business into the European Union. *Selecting immigrant entrepreneurs is a specific and understudied policy strand in the battle for talent*, the abstract tells us. Though, as a non-lawyer, I doubt my own capacity to fully understand this paper, I find it incredibly interesting and would still like to mention it. First of all, it explains to me, a noob, what happened after the start-up visa was introduced: five years later, there is still a strong focus on start-ups and entrepreneurship. The value system has not taken a 180-degree turn since 2013, and entrepreneurs are still for the most part understood to be *foreign talent* rather than *spiritual counsellors* or *employees in the Asian catering industry* (these are actual types of residence permits, see the footnotes).[13] This article also gives the most recent Dutch definition of 'top sectors':

Innovative are e.g. activities in the context of the Dutch Top Sectors which include water management, logistics and agriculture, self-developed new products or services, original approaches to sustainability problems and social innovation.

France defines innovative in relation to the tech sector while the Netherlands allows for a broader definition, including innovations in logistics and agriculture. The wider definition of what qualifies as innovative is obviously more welcoming.

The term *talent* is not defined, but it is possible to assume that it is an amalgam of ambition, innovation, entrepreneurship and few more ingredients (persistence?). In the arts and humanities, *ambition* and *talent* are often perceived of as kinds of character traits—either you have them or you don't. Still, the word *talent* does appear in grant titles (such as the *talent development grant* awarded by the Mondriaan Fonds), which means that being talented not only means being 'gifted' but also being able to write good applications and business plans. Another commonality between becoming a *foreign talent* and trying to make it as a 'creative' is that, in both cases, talent is a complex of characteristics, an identity that can be constructed and enforced through facilitation and could be possibly trained like a muscle.

As the website of the Dutch immigration service does not present information in the most accessible of ways, iamexpat.nl tries to fill the void by publishing articles written by lawyers. *Dutch residence permit for artists and musicians on a self-employed basis*, by Ester de Vreede, explains the process of applying for a so-called 'artist visa': *To be eligible for a Dutch residence permit for artists and musicians, Immigration Services will be referred to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences for an assessment of cultural importance. The Ministry has discretion in this matter and the criteria for assessments are not always clear. However, when an artist is selected to work for a Dutch cultural institution, this is considered to be decisive.*[14] What is *cultural importance*? And if I gain value by being affiliated with or facilitated by an already trusted institution, does it mean that I am an early stage startup? This is a shocking realisation.

But why, as someone trained as a designer, have I been sucked into this subject? I think it is because, in order to remain credible, my work (or the work I hope to be doing) depends so heavily on trends—guidelines and templates of how things should look—that I have trained myself to see everything as a thread of arguments. After diving into *ambitious world* I re-appear on the surface, gasping

12. Tesseltje De Lange, "Welcoming talent? A comparative study of immigrant entrepreneurs' entry policies in France, Germany and the Netherlands," Comparative Migration Studies 6, no. 27 (September 2018), https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-018-0092-4.

13. "Employee in the Asian catering industry," Immigration and Naturalisation Service, https://ind.nl/en/work/working_in_the_ Netherlands/Pages/Employee-in-the-Asian-catering-industry.aspx, accessed January 23, 2019.

14. Ester De Vreede, "Dutch residence permit for artists and musicians on a self-employed basis," IAMEXPAT, May 23, 2017, https://www.iamexpat.nl/career/employment-news/dutch- residence-permit-artists-and-musicians-self-employed-basis.

for air. What exactly am I trying to do here?[15] Definitely not legal self-help. But I have noticed a few issues that I can work on. I find it particularly harmful that oftentimes a 'highly skilled migrant' exists in a filter bubble of migration, discussing migration-related issues only with fellow migrants and excluding colleagues and other professional connections from the narrative. Obtaining a residence permit is discussed through the perspective of each person's own case, which often ends with experienced migrants saying to newcomers that it is impossible to get one. Generally, I want the subject of 'who gets to stay and who has to go' to become a pragmatic discussion, where I can talk about work planning, scheduling, calculating potential risks, etc. One of the few things I can do is to try to poke that filter bubble. But it is also important to note that migration is not the only bubble in which I find myself: there is also a filter bubble of the creative field and the tight group hug of my peers, whom I appreciate wholeheartedly. There are great discussions, great people and carefully curated reading lists. (In order to appreciate the good stuff, I'll leave out the toxicity for awhile). My job is to collide these filter bubbles. I am developing a method to understand policies and to work with these 'terms and conditions', to enable my voice to be heard and to have conversations about a subject that I find truly, truly interesting. Every time I am puzzled, I ask myself: How *exactly* does this work? And then I begin to work towards obtaining an answer, or at least an understanding of the direction in which to dig.

Coming from the creative field, I am taught to see policies as boring, not interesting, harmful. Why are we taught to ignore the paperwork and not to engage with or befriend it? Partly by absurdifying the situation and partly by taking it very seriously and reaching out, I am building an argumentation machine.

'It is good to have some hope', I say to myself, from time to time. Not as a spiritual act, but as one of a series of reminders: it is good to exercise, it is bad to skip meals, hope can save your life, without oxygen you suffocate. In communicating my obscure obsession with Dutch immigration policies, I have come up with a field of study for myself. I take a deep breath and say, 'I research labour migration in the creative field'. It sounds serious enough (especially for an art school student) and I can always elaborate if it is too cryptic. Every other day I want to quit, as my own research screams at me, 'You're not gonna make it!' But I always come back for the thrill of discovering how abstractions become flesh and how what once seemed solid can become thin, runny and slippery, like an uncooked egg.

15. I mean 'here' as in this text, this subject, this practice of mine, which is (temporarily?) based in the Netherlands.

After hours, when I let my mind wonder, I keep thinking about a story I heard an ESA (European Space Agency) scientist tell at the space agency's open day in Noordwijk. We, visitors, were crowding to take a peek of an anechoic chamber—an enormous room, many metres high, with walls covered in some kind of a spiky construction, that is used to test antennas. Once I stopped staring at the walls, I looked at the table in front of me and noticed a life jacket and a man standing next to it. Curious about the purpose of the jacket, I asked him why it was there. He told me that his team is currently working on equipping the jacket with a transmitter that sends a signal to a satellite, so a person stranded at sea can be located and rescued. The jacket has a button that, when pressed, sends a signal to a satellite. Then, the satellite sends their coordinates further, passing them to the final destination, the rescue team. What I found particularly touching was that he told me that his team's current goal is to enable the satellite to send a signal back to the jacket so that the person who's stranded can know that a rescue ship is on its way. Why? Because it gives hope to that person stranded at sea. He said there are statistics about hope. There's evidence showing that if a person in distress knows that the help is on the way, 'they die less', even if nothing else in the situation changes. Hope enters the scene of a catastrophe to give those who are stranded an extra life.

IN BETWEEN

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A NON BINARY DIARY

ROWENA BUUR

Rowena Buur (they/them) was born in Alkmaar, the Netherlands in 1990, and lives in Utrecht. They use their design practice as a method to deal with reality, a reality where identity and redefining identity is the main focus.

APRIL 22, 2018

It is a sunny Saturday morning and I'm walking through the market in Utrecht (In the Netherlands), searching for some fabrics and wire. An older lady with grey hair is standing behind a stall while I am looking through her stuff. I look up and see her taking a puff of her rolled tobacco. She looks at me and asks, 'Are you a boy or a girl?' She laughs, and I give her an uncomfortable laugh back. I turn around and walk away. 'So, tell me!' she says out loud. 'You don't have to be ashamed…' I keep walking and do not reply to her. This makes me think about Chimamanda Ngozi and her book *We should all be feminists* (2014). *These are little things, but sometimes it is the little things that sting the most.*

In my mind I replied ten times to her. How could she be so rude? What difference would it make if I were a boy or a girl? It's none of her business anyway! The binary of male and female is not that black and white, one can exist between and go beyond. This encounter happened half a year ago, and at that moment I was pretty confused about my gender (I am a bit still). Therefore, the fact that even strangers have asked me the question, 'Are you a boy or a girl?', makes me even feel more confused. It makes me wonder, who am I? What am I?

JANUARY 2019

To be honest, at this point in my life, I do not fully identify as male or female. Sometimes I am neither, sometimes I am both, and sometimes I feel more as a man until it is 'that time' of the month. Period. Then it's clear: my body is female. But what does my mind tell me?

From the day we are born, our genitals label us as male or female. But it starts even before that. For example, there is currently a hype around the so-called 'gender reveal parties'. During these celebratory parties parents reveal the sex of their unborn baby. Actually, the name 'gender reveal party' is not even correct, as your gender and sex are two different things. For me this is the easiest way to explain it: *sex is between the legs and gender between the ears.* The sex that is assigned to you at birth, male or female, is based on your genitals; gender is based on how you feel on the inside. You can be born as a woman but on the inside feel like a man. Yet a lot of people still believe that there are two genders and two sexes, both stable, fixed and rigid. In my case, I believe that any person should be able to freely construct their own gender and, consequently, use the pronouns that make them feel comfortable.

I once had a conversation with my colleague and friend Ada Reinthal, who said, 'You can see gender as a color spectrum.' Using that metaphor, I could say that there are a lot of different colors that

transgress male and female binaries. Hence, I think that the idea of the color spectrum is a great visualization of gender; it contains an infinite amount of colors that blend into each other.

We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us, but actually it's a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time, so to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start.[1]

So, if nobody is really a gender from the start, why do we keep reproducing male and female binaries?

1994

This is me in my grandma's backyard.

I grew up in a pretty normative family, and I did not have role models that could be seen as having set an example to me—even though, I did admire my dad and wanted to be like him. The reason I took my father as a role model was that I really believed that he was strong. But now, when I look back, I realize that in many different ways he was not strong. Maybe he had physical strength, which would have allowed him to win some fights. But, emotionally, he just could not express himself, and he turned his frustration into violence. For a while, I learned from him how to hide my feelings, to pretend that I was strong. Hence, in many ways, I became like him. Because:

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1. "Your behavior creates your gender," Judith Butler interviewed by Max Miller, Big Think, January 13, 2011, video, 3:00, February 18, 2011, https://bigthink.com/videos/your-behavior-creates-your-gender.

If we do something over and over again it becomes normal. If we see the same thing over and over again it becomes normal.[2]

Toxic masculinity:unemotional, violent and sexually aggressive behavior

AUGUST 18, 2018

It is a sunny summer evening and with a friend I decide to go for a run. Eleni lives in the center of Utrecht and we start running from their place. As we are standing next to a parked car, about to leave Eleni's place, they bend over to tie their shoe. Two cis males are approaching the car while one of them is on the phone. I can hear the conversation. 'Of course we go to the gym tonight!' The friend who is walking next to the one on the phone replies, 'We'll just light up this joint.' He looks at Eleni and says, 'Nice blue hair.' Eleni doesn't hear him, and I do not reply. We continue walking, but we hear the guy say: 'Is it a boy or a girl?'

Within my private spaces, being myself is fine. Most of the people around me are very supportive, for them it does not matter if I want to go out with a big blond wig and a moustache or if want to be a unicorn. But when I go out of my private spaces and reach the public space, whether this is online or offline, the story changes. Cherríe Moraga: *My lesbianism is the avenue through which I have learned the most about silence and oppression, and it continues to be the most tactile reminder to me that we are not free human beings.*

In the last two years it is not only my lesbianism but also my gender that has become something through which I have learned about silence and oppression on a daily basis. Being in public spaces forces me to continually make decisions related to my gender. For example, if I want to make an online appointment at the hairdresser I have to fill a form that forces me to pick between male or female. If I go shopping for clothes, I go directly to the men department. It has started to feel normal. But what do I do if I have to pick between the dressing rooms, men's or women's? Public toilets provide the worst encounters for me. They are spaces that I sometimes try to avoid because I'm not always patient enough to explain that I was born with a vagina. Queer and Gender Studies theorist Jack Halberstam calls this special crisis 'the bathroom crisis'. He explains that, *a social subject is in a public place and is faced with the choice, men's room or the women's room, and there is no other option. Because of*

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2. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists* (New York: Fourth Estate, 2014).

the wide range of gendered expressions, public bathrooms have become overloaded in a way. The crisis about the bathroom is a reflection of a larger crisis in relationship to the gendered body. Gender is no longer relevant, the easy way to solve it is to offer gender-neutral bathrooms. The way they use gender for toilets is no longer relevant, the thing it does is confuse people.[3]

NOVEMBER 16, 2018

Let's go to an autumn evening in 2018. I am in Brussels for a few days with people who are part of my master's program. We are in a pub drinking beers and I have to go the toilet. When I walk into the toilet the security guy walks after me. He points out that I am in the wrong one. I ask him, 'Do you want to see my boobs?' Most of the time I can ignore this sort of situation, or say something like, 'I know…', but this time I couldn't. I feel like iO, when they say that

There is no time of the day if I'm in public where there isn't somebody trying to figure out what I am, that's exhausting. Sometimes you have the energy to be gracious about it when a kid goes, 'Mommy, what is that?'[4]
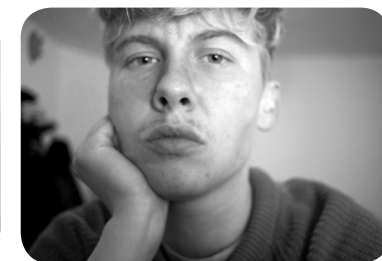

NOVEMBER 5, 2018

I am at home, looking at myself in the mirror. With one hand, I squish my boobs a bit flatter. The oversized t-shirt is already hiding them to some extent, and luckily my boobs are not that big. I'm not unhappy if I look in the mirror. Some days I even tell myself: you look good ;).

I suffer from unrequited self love. I love myself, but I don't love myself back.[5]

In the last three or four months I have started wearing a sports bra to make my breasts flatter. It feels more comfortable to do this. I was not sure if I felt uncomfortable with my body, but if I look at my behavior, I have started hiding my boobs. This is a sign that tells me that perhaps I don't like them. Do I want to have top surgery? I wonder. At this moment, I cannot answer that question, but I am going to find an answer.

Right now, I would describe myself as non-binary, which means that I can identify as both male and female at the same time, or neither of them, or on some days male and on some days female. It doesn't mean that it will always stay like this; gender is fluid and it can change along the way.

I am flesh, bones.
I am skin, soul.
I am human, nothing more than human.
I am sweat, flaws.
I am veins, scars.
I am human.[6]

All I need is time,
a moment that is mine.
While I am in between.

[3]. "Jack Halberstam: 'The difference between male and female does not hold anymore'," interview, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, video, 10:28, March 1, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtYaUQ66sp0.

[4]. "A Boy, A Girl, A Gender Revolutionary: iO Tillett Wright," interview, StyleLikeU, video, 14:30, January 26, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PhEppdwArA. iO Tillett Wright is an American author, photographer, TV host, and activist.

[5]. Andrea Gibson

[6]. "Human", track 10 on Sevdaliza, *ISON*, Twisted Elegance, 2017.

JANUARY 26, 2019

I can feel it when my period is coming. Yesterday I had a horrible headache, my vagina felt different, like, more open, and my legs heavy. Also, my mind is heavy, I am worrying much more, and the smallest thing can make me cry. It feels weak to be in this emotional state. When I was younger my dad would tell me that crying is for pussies—something that got stuck in my mind. I have started to realize that the pussies are the people who hide their emotions. From experience, I can say that this hiding or holding in of emotions can develop into frustration, anger and, in the worst-case scenario, aggression toward others.

At this point in time I would not mind living without my period. Tampons and pads are fucking expensive. It has been a year since I stopped feeling the need to have children. It suffocates me when I see the people around me who do have them. Most of their days seem to revolve around 'the kids'. For a long time, I pictured myself like that, and maybe in the future I will get back to that picture. Who knows? For now, I think I have another purpose in life that does not involve carrying around a mini me.

It's not that I feel a great need to get rid of my period, like I feel for my boobs. But as I said, I wouldn't mind if they where not there anymore tomorrow. There is only one way to get rid of my period and that is going on testosterone. In the past one or two weeks I have allowed myself to think about and research testosterone (t)… Before this, it was a no-go in my mind. I just couldn't let myself think about it, which probably has something to do with transphobia. I know that t has several effects, and I am not sure if I would feel comfortable with all of them. For example, getting facial hair is something I wouldn't like. I love my soft face right now. I've also heard that there is a chance that you will get more aggressive and impatient—definitely a no-go for now. I was aggressive when I was younger, and now I am scared to become like that again. I would prefer to be a bit more emotional—and once a month being over emotional, when I'm on my period—than aggressive. I also think that being sensitive and emotional creates more connections between people. The positive effects of going on testosterone would be getting rid of my period, a change in my body fat, and more muscles and power. Another effect would be getting a lower voice, which I am not sure if I would like or not. Right now, people tell me that my voice is nice to listen to and that it calms them down. It looks like going on t is a no-go for now. Let's see what the future brings.

DEEP LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS

SASCHA KRISCHOCK

Sascha Krischock is a graphic designer responding to the political and aesthetical shifts of everyday life through technology. To make kin with our networked surroundings he probes the subversive potential of computational defects in which graphic design becomes conscious of its potential for shaping space and human interaction.

Inside the Tesla X

The experience of driving the Tesla X (Color: White; Model: 2016, 3 Backseat Version, Falcon Doors) at the very moment when it switches into semi-auto mode and the buzzing video game-like 'dump wump' resounds and your attention shifts towards the blinking light blue 'auto' widget on the 32-inch touchscreen in the middle of the dashboard and the crisp highway illustration transforms into a corridor on the GPS navigation application, down which the car icon and thus the passenger are pulled along at a constant speed, is one of pure alienation yet also one that affords a familiar feeling of empowerment, of the development and enhancement offered by the machine.

However, this extension of both human cognition and emotion comes at a cost: the interfaces of the machines that act upon spaces inside our cities demand both control and sensation while also changing the role of their human adapters completely.

INTRODUCTION

This essay, 'Deep Learning from Las Vegas' aims to *deepen* an understanding of what it means to live within interfacial conditions by looking at how images and mental maps of corridors, highways, parking lots and forgotten alleys are changing and how a constant flux of automated platforms, behavioural data and algorithmic systems is paving the way for an *augmented* model of space and perception in living spaces.

Digital technology extends power and understanding, but when applied unevenly it also concentrates power and understanding. The history of *augmentation*—from cogwheels to microprocessors, from Aspirin to *LinkedIn*—is not merely one of upskilled machines slowly taking the place of human inhabitants of the city. It is also a story of the concentration of power in fewer hands and the concentration of understanding in fewer heads.

Recent technological monopolies, which have taken charge through the application of data science and technological embeddings, have concentrated power and knowledge while scripting a mediality of the city that has led to populations, machines and the spaces between them becoming altered in ways that go beyond any former understandings of life in urban space.

This means *shifts* in both how the senses of human and non-human entities are stimulated and how communication is transformed

by dominant authors. One of the consequences of these shifts is that information, at once both graphical and spatial, has become the main mediator in urban space, overcoming physical and moral limits to shape and automate human behaviour and emotion.[1]

In order to examine these *mechanical mirages* and *data morganas* of everyday urban perception within the context of the current high-speed framework, in this essay these new phenomena will be compared with observations and efforts drawn from civic infrastructural transformations of the past. Technical and political processes concerning the use of land and the design of the urban environment have long traditions of observing composed living formations and distributing the underground outside of presumed structures. Two main models of city exploration will illustrate this *shift* while simultaneously offering *cracks* and plausibilities to react within: *Psychogeography—Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography* (1955)[2] and *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972).[3]

LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS

In *Learning from Las Vegas*, Denise Brown and Robert Venturi depicted their beloved Las Vegas as loud, noisy and eclectic. It was surrounded by an icy desert of 'whateverness' and a joyful ignorance that stood for the end of controlled modernist beliefs from an urbanist standpoint.[4] This multicoloured epicentre of medial overload *longed* for change in terms of how and from where information could be transmitted and received. This change would take the form of a liberating feedback loop in which the main streets of the city, the architecture, and ways of making architecture visible were designed in the interests of a semi-human entity: the driving passenger.[5]

'Nobody really sees the building anymore. In this city everybody sees the sign.'[6]

1.   Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2018).

2.   Guy Debord, *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*. Les Lèvres Nues #6 (Paris, September 1955)

3.   Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972).

4.   Venturi, Brown and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*.

5.   Stephen Graham, "Cities in the Real-Time Age: The Paradigm Challenge of Telecommunications to the Conception and Planning or Urban Space," *Environment and Planning* 29, no. 1 (January 1997).

6.   Venturi, Brown and Izenour, 48.
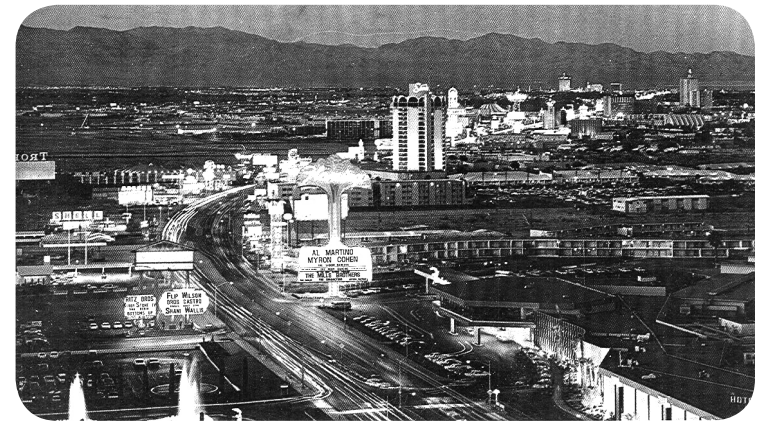
Postcard "Air View of the Strip, Las Vegas", 1986

Structures once designed to be visited and to contain consumption become decorated sheds. Venturi writes: 'a 10-thousand-dollar building with a 100-thousand-dollar sign.'[7] Symbols become more important than the physical forms of buildings. With this the materiality of the building almost disappears behind a totally iconographic form of communication, behind highway notifications that arrive at top speed while swishing from A to B.

The Las Vegas citizen's car became essential for navigating through the symbolic sign systems made for high-speed recognition but also rendered the unmediated person impaired when it came to experiencing and decoding their immediate surroundings. Spatial alienation due to lack of mediation became the pervasive architectural paradox of Las Vegas, and eventually, our daily lives as users. Venturi and Brown's observations in Las Vegas serve as tangible proof that modes of communication developed through new technologies are able to dominate space in an ambient manner and alter vast quantities of data from which the critical production of knowledge then becomes increasingly difficult.
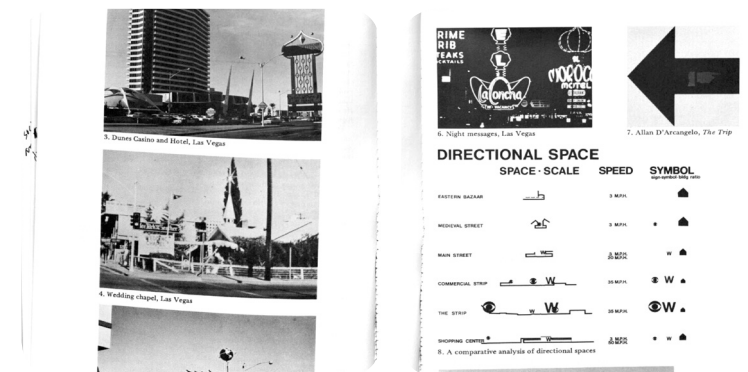
Infographic from "Learning from Las Vegas" 1972

7.   Venturi, Brown and Izenour, 48.

Crossing Cupertino Drinking Cappuccino

I'm getting used to this feeling of ghost riding while being on the right line. Crossing the Apple Park in Cupertino along some dusty diners, lots of flashy billboards. Another one. Another one. Spotify connected, Weather forecast popping in. Apple Park looks like an update of the Pentagon, somebody says. I do agree, after I've checked what it looks like via a search engine that gives me pictures of it taken from an aerial camera. On the highway though, at a hundred miles an hour, it looks more like a giant grey wall than an oval. Then there comes an advert. And another one. All those billboards. Psychedelic colours mixed with the slick new iPhone X. I've seen it already, just last week in Amsterdam. On top of these billboards: the title of the product in their new in-house font, 'San Francisco', created some years ago to liberate themselves from 'Myriad Pro'—less crisp on retina screens. The new Apple Keynote took place here just two weeks ago. When Tim Cook presented the newest hardware update, the ARKit, at the annual Apple summit in 2017, he used a demo that showed a coffee cup appearing on the table staged on the stage—transforming the Cupertino stage into one of the many offices in the valley. It was noticeably clear that augmentation would serve to summon West Coast work ethics in offices all around the world—even back at my Dutch apartment, it kicked in powerfully, like double espresso vision.

Demonstration of "ARKit", from Apple Keynote 2017

AUGMENTED SOLUTIONISM

This iconographic perception of space is deeply connected to the history of augmentation itself. Described as '*Make (something) greater by adding to it; increase*' by the Oxford Dictionary,[8] *Augmentation* is in its functional origin a prosthetic toolset that was developed in US military research centres shortly after the Second World War to *trigger*, *track* and *predict* useful information in an intuitive manner with projecting or monitoring technology. This can be traced back as early as the twelfth century, where *peep sights* and *iron sights* appeared as add-ons, first for bows and later for firearms, allowing the human eye the possibility of condensing visual reality for better aiming. These violent add-ons, supplementing sensory organs and military machinery, are installed *on top of* or *within,* building a mesh between body and machine that results in an advantage over the enemy via an increase in speed, recognition or automation.[9] The most aggressive examples of such add-ons are the Head-Up-Displays (HUDs) and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) monitors that, though they are still being developed, are already in use today in Europe, Japan and the United States.

Silicon Valley's tech-singularity later adapted knowledge gained in the course of these developments to create slick, privatised Augmented Reality, 'AR' for short, in the 2000s—a service mostly associated with smart-device cameras/screens as a second layer or overlay of rendered information. With the newly defined 'AR', the medium mutated semantically towards a multi-sensory spectacle in the fields of mobile entertainment and low-brow science, marketing itself as Mixed Reality, Hyperreality or another form of superficial extension to what was already in place.[10] This 'AR' means that the photorealistic imagery known as CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) has moved from the screen- and image-based distance of light projecting cinema and online streaming imagery—where it appears asynchronous, anchored and interlinked—to the existing spaces of daily routine, as a *shady* interface, always rendered and reacting.It is at this point that *Pokémon-Go-Go-Gadget* moved into the centre of global mass media attention and was declared to be both a sensational and social milestone, while at the same time demonstrating the drastic territorializing abilities it was always capable of.[11] A whole new generation of research labs [12] and speculative fantasy centres[13] emerged, united by the general consensus

8.   "augmentation", Oxford Dictionaries, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/augmentation.

9.   Ivan Sutherland, *The Ultimate Display*, 1965

10. Sarah Murthi and Amitabh Varshney, "How Augmented Reality Will Make Surgery Safer," Harvard Business Review, March 20, 2018, https://hbr.org/2018/03/how-augmented-reality-will-make-surgery-safer.

11. JV Chamary, "Why 'Pokémon Go' Is The World's Most Important Game," February 10, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jvchamary/2018/02/10/pokemon-go-science-health-benefits/.

12. "Research – MIT Lab", MIT Media Lab Research, https://www.media.mit.edu/research/?filter=everything&tag=augmented-reality.

13. "SNDRV", Sander Veenhof, http://sndrv.nl/.

that we are living in a world that is so unequal and unchangeable that it can be only enriched through high-fidelity simulations and helpful projections in which technology itself works as a 'palliative and a pacifier'.[14] Augmentation in this sense has become a new tool for the problem-solving and daily life-enhancing designers of the twenty-first century as they seek to further develop the spaces of Western cities, taking individuals' excessive data use and converting it into intrusive simulations for the good of the city and the population therein.

This new solutionism has become the new standard in general methods of private urban planning. The assumption is that the motors of global economic wellbeing are cities, and that cities are only developed through the incorporation of superior technological engines in their own right.[15] Consequently, *augmented solutionism* seeks to nurture and maximise the capacity of every user (and the tools aggressively embedded in them) to function at their peak. Fundamentalist and dogmatic strategies—in which the dominated user is sucked into interactive simulation software that adds, mixes or subtracts sensory elements from an interfacial context while performing themselves as applications and experiences of a psychological and hypnotic nature—become common practice.[16]

ACTION SCRIPTS

In his lecture *Crisis of Graphic Practices: Challenges of the Next Decades*, the pop artist David Rudnick states:

> So, the crisis of graphic design lies in the fact that today we are moving away from a reality in the modernity framework, where the audience is just an observer. Now we ourselves have become the protagonists: we are turning into the main characters of what is happening around us. People themselves create the content that they want to see. They form the architecture of the world and break it into pieces if this architecture loses its actuality.[17]

14. Adam Greenfield, *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life* (London and New York: Verso, 2017).

15. Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge: Polity Books, 2012).

16. Benjamin Bratton, "The City Wears Us. Notes on the Scope of Distributed Sensing and Sensation", *Glass Bead*, 2017, http://www.glass-bead.org/article/city-wears-us-notes-scope-distributed-sensing-sensation/?lang=enview.

17. David Rudnick, "Crisis of Graphic Practices: Challenges of the Next Decades" (lecture, Strelka Institute, Moscow, August 11, 2017).

Rudnick illustrates the changing orientation of power—from the designer's top-down view towards the first-person perspective of the individual. By underlining the fact of how closely graphical and interfacial experiences are entangled with an augmented everyday reality, he expresses both a warning towards his professionalised colleagues from an earlier era, while at the same time considering the newly found space-crafting abilities of the user within this technological spiral. The enhanced role of the application and interface designer, who competes against the less reflexive and reciprocal mechanics of communication software, is in transit here: the most opaque and immersive apps and machines become the most frequently embedded and are accepted by their users as leaps of freedom.

Minecraft and *Tension Flow* become the moral standards of these high life structures and notification road trips that are the actual main characters—they seem to offer the user liberation and possibilities to focus on their own ego-centric vision of an urban space as a reaction towards the old 'lectric united city. But while the graphical user interface (GUI) designer or application designer becomes a newly hatched urban planner in this messianic scenario, the roles of the citizen and of city infrastructure are actually turned upside down. While Rudnick thinks it is the user that is in control and has the power to extend space, it is actually the application that makes this possible. Thus, it is software and non-human agents that are in full charge of the future constructions and passageways of tangible space and are thus able to ensure stable foundations for themselves. The Tesla car, the application and the software embedded into the city play the main roles and experience a drastic extension of space while letting the user believe they are the centre of attention, though all the while they are in reality passively watching the machine learning, performing and stimulating.

SITUATIONISTS INTERNATIONAL

When the Situationists under Debord explored their Parisian neighbourhoods, they montaged the space by splicing paper cut-ups, making paintings on top of printed maps, and adopting various forms of wandering and strolling around. In doing so they created designs for a new urbanised space, one that promised better opportunities for lives lived through pure expression and joy, escaping predetermined paths and existing borders.

Their methodical mixture of subjective and objective knowledge was perhaps both as effective and collaged as that found in the augmented city of today, yet quite the opposite effect now occurs: the inhabitant no longer frees themselves by following a 'rather

pleasing vagueness'[18] but rather follows technological trends and applications as a form of existential extension, in the hope of escaping or redirecting daily life. Situationist city cut-ups are as effective as any current mapping service or behavioural data application at overtaking rational metrics with intuition-like metaphors and intrusive interfaces. Thus, the augmented interface in this sense uses the methods and terminology of an intuitive, undetermined experience, which is the same language used by the Situationist International. The word *experience,* in the profession of a *UX designer*, is reappropriated, given a new meaning; the reimagined relationship with the city is a spectacle of augmented authenticity and freedom that in reality creates a shadowy spectrum of tools and possibilities for rearranging all motives of spontaneity and explorations of space.[19]

In fact, with these augmented technologies that alter reality, modes of spatialisation seem, when compared to Debord's analogue walking practices, radically transformed. These new modes form connections that overcome the metrics of space—the psychogeography of the current century—rendering communication in experiences of immediate intensity rather than via a process of unfolding that takes place over extensive chunks of space. The augmentation of space unfolds or actualises a virtuality of socio-spatial practices—practices that appear to be 'idiotic' and nonsensical to the functionalist logic with which they are built.[20]
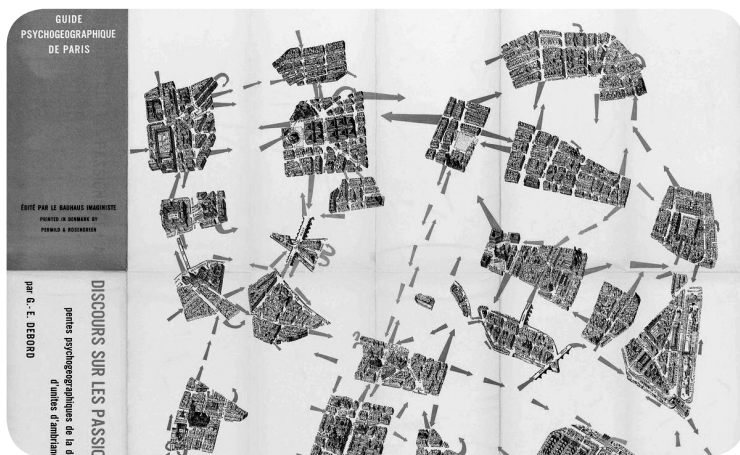
Guide Psychogéographique, 1955, Front Cover

18. Guy Debord, *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*. Les Lèvres Nues #6 (Paris, September 1955)

19. Martijn de Waal, *The City as Interface: How New Media Are Changing the City* (Rotterdam: nai010, 2014).

20. Hélène Frichot, Catharina Gabrielsson and Jonathan Metzger, eds., *Deleuze and the City* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).
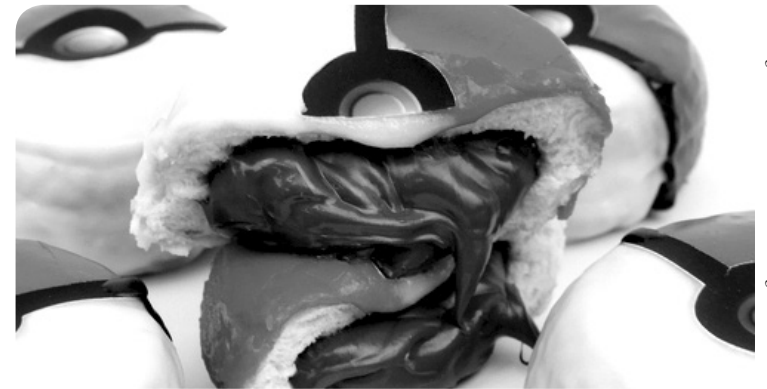
Doughnut Time "I Pika Choose You Doughnut", 2016

AUGMENTED PLACES

In the current setup, it seems like it is virtual space in which these medial changes are taking place—but it is in the old-fashioned physicality of the streets and sidewalks that this augmentation is able to *capture the flag* of another spatial system. In order to deliver a slick performance, cities 'bodily' structures are reshaped by modes of construction or intervention. In order for those mediated tools to perform best they still require access to the existing urban area—for example, the selfie-spot square meter inside touristic museums[21] or the ancient first era augmentations known as QR codes,[22] which push other text- or image-based content to the sides of text-columns in order to accommodate their required level of visibility.

The *Doughnut Time* shop in Sydney, the Uber arrival point at Schiphol, and the Tesla charging lots of the Bay Area are all hardware components of an existing augmentation—add-on areas allowing powerful software solutions to perform smoothly.

As human-exclusive zones, they are not infiltrated by the human messiness that is the consequence of the unpredictability of citizens. In fact, Tesla charging spots have become more social versions of gas stations, allowing moments of chit-chat and time for strolling around at top-level parking areas while waiting for the vehicle's battery to be filled again.

21. "Visiting the Rijksmuseum—Frequently Asked Questions," Rijksmuseum, https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/organisation /frequently-asked-questions/visiting.

22. Peter Kieseberg, Manuel Leithner, Martin Mulazzani, Lindsay Munroe, Sebastian Schrittwieser, Mayank Sinha and Edgar Weippl, "QR Code Security," https://www.sba-research.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/QR_Code_Security.pdf, Conference Paper, June 2014

DHL Vision Picking Interface Detail, 2017

The mechanical solutions in the current wave of distinguishable gizmos—such as *Google Glass, Magic Leap* or *Hololens*—have all been commercial and socially tolerable failures due to their extreme visibility.[23] The full potential of augmented exploitation mechanisms can only be attained efficiently when their power structures are fully hidden or transparent (and thus invisible). This opaqueness ironically then becomes a method for gaining knowledge—disguising itself as a function in the service of personal satisfaction. The outward appearances of *Google Glasses* (visible camera, no manual actions needed) and the *Waymo* car (big camera on top, unfamiliar shape of the car) are, in stark contrast to Tesla's car models, largely unacceptable to the eyes of the general public in Europe and the United States.[24] Such mechanical solutions too easily fit into a real-time parable-like picture of the hierarchy of technological exploitations.

It is no wonder then that technologies such as these are reborn inside centres of production and profit as *nutshell* versions and are there accepted as highly visible accessories and prostheses. It is inside the manufacturing and logistics centres of *DHL* and *AGCO* [25] that these wearables have become mandatory for workers—their use aimed at increasing working efficiency and morale by spicing up menial work with the introduction of extreme and perverse regimes of gamification and the on-the-go production of behaviour statistics.

23. John Naughton, "The rebirth of Google Glass shows the merit of failure," *The Guardian*, July 23, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/23/the-return-of-google-glass-surprising-merit-in-failure-enterprise-edition.

24. Simon Romero, "Wielding Rocks and Knives, Arizonans Attack Self-Driving Cars," *New York Times*, December 31, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/31/us/waymo-self-driving-cars-arizona-attacks.html.

25. Naughton, "The rebirth of Google Glass".

Here the shift in spatial utilization is crystallised—medial intentions and capabilities are no longer blurred but accepted and abused by all actors involved.

Waiting outside the car

Time to leave the Elon Muskle-Car. Those plastic chairs are strangely not made for long-distance rides and my back hurts like I've been riding a horse that has run out of power. We do a quick stop at a fast food place twenty minutes outside of the city centre. Turn off the motor with a tab, open the doors slowly via a press of the circular button. Then, looking around: two men are sitting on white plastic chairs and talking to each other. Cannot understand them. Next to them, on the left, a blue car, scratched and wrecked. It has no wheels except for the front-left one. Next to that, on the right, a women just stands; it looks like she is waiting for something to arrive. There is somebody hammering in the background, I now realise, leaning towards the car, which feels cold and dusty. Actually, the car is extremely dirty after our one-hour drive. Behind the car, on the right, there is a big empty space, a void, which looks like a trash pile. All kinds of American weeds are growing here, and at the far end of this empty space I can see a betonized brownish wall covered with graffiti and tags. One says, 'stay pumped', which I take a picture of but don't really understand.

BUGGY ENDINGS

Spacial and interfacial authorization and an obsession with analyzing human surroundings produce the data sets from which augmented skylines can construct themselves in the most conducive manner. Yet scientific advancement and algorithmic versions of the city miss something vital about human nature: the wackiness, the pettiness, the stubbornness—all traits of creatures whose motivations cannot be fully described or thought of in terms of practical benefit or economic cause and effect.

Like the language of this pronouncement, the future city is rendered banal, bereft of humanity. It has no lived-in streets, nothing warped, no snags or obstacles, no street vendors or people schmoozing, no intricate ballets or spontaneous improvisation, no beats, no musty bookstores—only smart technology, algorithms and mathematical models.[26]

26. Andy Merrifield, *The Amateur: The Pleasures of Doing What You Love* (London and New York: Verso, 2017).

What makes the city so liveable and unique as a cultural agglomeration of beliefs and autonomous power? As Apoorva Tadepalli puts it, '*We do not live in a city where it is possible or even actually cool to totally avoid human contact—we live in a large, dense city that is full of unpredictability.*'[27]

This illegibility is the source of most potential inside the urban sphere. These are the spaces outside the calculation—the underground, the stinky sewers, feted pubs and funky-smelling holes—where people discuss the traumas, dreams and stories that cannot be *out-rendered* and *knowledge-farmed*. The *Autopiloto* Project,[28] through which I had the chance to experience the autonomous car, invited several people from Silicon Valley to speak about their experience of the accelerated urban projects that are currently being developed and tested in the area, with the idea that they will soon be extended internationally. Conversations about *pedestrian chicken* (jumping in front of autonomous cars) and hacking and then tuning up *Waymo* and *Tesla* cars were fruitful demonstrations of how to *open the hood* of stable augmentation processes. The shakiness of these people's actual lives made clear that, just like in Brown and Venturi's manifesto, even while travelling at high speed something beautifully ugly can emerge.

Leaving the City
Heading for the airport. I am realising now just how Hollywood-esque this whole event has been. I feel like an actor who has just finished shooting a movie, leaving the green screen set behind with the next script in his hand. Exiting the Lyft car (ordinary taxis are already suppressed here) in an area designed specifically for them, checking in via an interface, entering the immense vehicle, looking for my seat. Didn't get a window place this time but they have new films on the screen. Watching the movie Alice in the Cities by Wim Wenders from 1974. In one scene, the two main characters bet on whether or not one of them can turn out a light on the skyscraper next their apartment just by blowing out air. By knowing the building's lighting schedule, the character succeeds. There is no Wi-Fi on the plane. Falling asleep.

27. Apoorva Tadepalli, "Crystal Visions," *Real Life Mag*, September 13, 2018,https://reallifemag.com/crystal-visions/.

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WITH THE INTENTION TO DANCE IN THE KITCHEN FOREVER

TESSA MEEUS

Tessa Meeus is a designer working around the themes of illness, vulnerability and the political context of ill bodies. As a method, she questions the power the maker holds towards its subject. The embedded attitude she takes creates a way of observing the environment on a daily basis, by just being there. Understanding the bureaucratic and social structure of a biased position always happens outside office hours is most important to her work.

MOVING IN & TWINKLING EYES

April 2017

When I was moving in, the ladies in wheelchairs in front of the entrance to my new building were for the most part only interested in my boyfriend.

> *'The gentleman is moving in?'*[1] one of them asked Pepijn, with twinkling eyes.

> He answered, *'No, no—the lady is moving in,'* and smiled politely.

> *'Oh.' The twinkling disappeared quickly. 'Floor?'*

> *'The first.'*

I'm one of the 'young ones' at the former care home. Independent residents are now able to rent its vacant studios, which are no longer suitable for people requiring twenty-four-hour care. There are people from all sorts of vulnerable backgrounds living in the building's seventy rooms: students, incapacitated people, interns. From now on, I am part of this inclusive community.

It feels as if I live in a public space, only it's less free. Here, my anonymity feels non-existent, just like it did in Rotterdam-West. I hide, feel looked at. I hear everything in the corridor, including my eighty-year-old neighbour's parrot. The bird makes the sound of a busy telephone line on repeat all day (and night). It smells like weed. People are curious, on the edge of being distrustful. Should I tell everyone who I am, say 'Hi,' and introduce myself to all 250 people living here? The old might appreciate it; the young might laugh in my face.

My new home is about to celebrate its fortieth birthday. A reminder of this is the 'secret' code for opening the doors of the closed floors. The code is 1979, probably the year residents moved in. In the middle of the south of Rotterdam, 250 people could grow old together. Every time life expectancy has increased, housing for the elderly has changed. After World War II, social and economic trends changed the position and role of the elderly. The old people's home was, in the Netherlands of the 1960s, a relatively easy design solution to a problem created by a scarcity of space, growing life expectancy and individualization. The reconstruction and secularization that took place after World War II went hand in hand, after the 1960s, with the growing individualization of society.

1. Ms de Graaf, ex-resident, loved to smoke at the front door.

The growth of the Dutch population demanded extra housing for young families. This resulted in a society where young and old would only meet within families. Together with the rise of the new medical specialization of geriatrics,[2] elderly people were offered housing that came with services such as private rooms, on-site care, leisure activities. These homes were presented as utopian places in which to grow old gracefully, with meaning. There have been a lot of variations and there has been much progress made on those initial designs from fifty years ago. But the consequence of the ideas behind those designs are still felt in the form of separation from the public sphere, from able-bodied daily life.

Of all stages of life, old age has stayed abstract the longest to a millennial like me. This makes sense: it takes a long time to arrive. Everyone wants to become old together with their loved ones, family and friends. Everyone has the intention to still dance in the kitchen. Then, far from now, we'll be retired and we won't have to work, so we'll have time. And if we were to become disabled—that's just bad luck, so fingers crossed it never happens to us. Though, as the theorist Robert McRuer explains, 'Disability is the one identity that each of us will, at some point in our lives, inhabit.'[3]

If this point is inevitable, why is my able-bodied working world so separated from the worlds of disabled people and older people? Is it impossible to get in touch with an identity that you do not share in the current moment but will likely in the future?

THIS CARE HOME IS NOT SEXY, IS NO PLACE TO BE: MEETING OUTSIDE MY AGE-BOX.
[separated by ability]

September 2018

I arrive at home one night after yoga. Someone is ringing the bell at the front door.

'I'm here for Mrs. van Gruijthuizen,' he says.

'Ah, I know her, she always draws with us on Friday.' I tell the man she is very precise and draws everything with enormous focus. He tells me he gets an e-mail every week about the programme.

'It's the same every week. I know she can still draw; that side still works,' he says.

It is completely shit, completely sad, to see your loved ones fade, even if you are not also already in pain yourself. Mrs. van Gruijthuizen suffers from Alzheimer's. With his comment, 'that side still works,' he measures her decline and the amount of rational knowledge that remains in her. It's like how people talk about what Rotterdam was like before the bombing, or Berlin right after the wall fell, with a romantic sense of nostalgia. I don't know her from before. I don't feel the burden of losing her step by step. He assumes I work here; I assume he is Ms Gruijthuizen's son. We label each other without thinking. I kind of want to tell him that I don't work here, I live here, and I like to draw with the people, as a volunteer. I *want* to be here. But I don't tell him. It's impossible to do so without defending myself or becoming a weird Robin Hood superhero. The assumption that you would only want to be here if you worked here is telling. In what other situation would the old and young meet without being family? Might they become friends just because they happen to meet somewhere? Not often. There is nothing to learn, nothing to see, nothing to gain here. Not sexy; no place to be.

Johanna Hedva points out in *Sick Women Theory* that the political meaning of an ill body conflicts with Hannah Arendt's definition of the political body. 'If being present in public is what is required to be political, then whole swathes of the population can be deemed *a*-political, simply because they are not physically able to get their bodies into the street.'[4]

This thought also applies the other way around. What is my 'politically and economically able body' doing in this place where time has a very different value, where time is not even a factor?[5] Little moments of alienation, like the meeting with Ms Gruithuijzen's visitor, point to the feeling that the healthy body should be separated from the ill.

2. *Andere Tijden*, "Oud zeer: zorg voor bejaarden", directed by Reinier van Hout, written and researched by Mirjam Gulmans, aired December 11, 2014, on NPO2.

3. Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 198.

4. Johanna Hedva, "My Body Is a Prison of Pain so I Want to Leave It Like a Mystic But I Also Love It & Want It to Matter Politically" (lecture, Women's Center for Creative Work, October 7, 2015).

5. Jauk, the daughter of Mevr. Tichelaar, resident of the second floor

THE ANIMAL KINGDOM CONVERSATION: HOW THE STRONG AND THE WEAK ARE DIVIDED BY THE LAWS OF NATURE, ACCORDING TO ANNA (87)
[separated by religion & Darwin]

'The animal kingdom is way less brutal than the human kingdom,'[6] Anna (87) tells Anne (96). Let me describe the room. The typical drawing class, four people, sit at a table. Three of them are in wheelchairs. One of them is well over ninety, another one just over sixty. Anne and Anna both live on the fourth floor. Anna: 'You know, animals only kill because they're hungry, because they need to eat. People can murder others, but that's not what animals do. Animals don't kill.' Anne agrees. She loves nature and animals. At least on paper, they are beautiful and sweet. Anna goes on. 'They don't discriminate, they just eat the old ones. Or the weak ones.' It is silent in the room. Anne, Rob and Arnold, all in wheelchairs, don't say anything. I don't know why, I also don't ask. The silence is a bit awkward.

Does Anna realize that if this logic was applied to them, they would all have been dead by now? I am surprised and decide to wait for the others to respond and to maybe say something about people being animals too, or about people having the ability to care for other humans even when they are not their children. I think: If the goal is to let the fittest survive, why do we have the ability to care? God and Darwin were not really on the same page with regard to this topic. When evolutionary instincts tell us to eat the weak, the Bible tells us to care. In both cases, the weaker animals should be separated from the healthy ones. Either to eat them, or, as in Christian tradition, to bring the weak together so that they can be cared for more efficiently, close to the church.[7] But I don't say anything. Nothing happens. They listened to her, now we all listen to the silence.

'So you think people act completely differently to animals?' I ask her.

6. Anna, ex resident of the fourth floor, knew everything about everyone, had notifications on her phone of the news.

7. *De bosatlas van het cultureel erfgoed* (Groningen: Noordhoff Atlasproducties, 2014).

'Yes', she says. *'They have no consciousness, therefore they are not mean. People can be mean.'*

'Well, that's true', I say. *'People can be mean.'*

AN ABLE-BODIED PERSPECTIVE ON HOUSING AND SPACE
[separated by working society]

I was invited to a workshop on rethinking the public area of the (care) home, along with representatives from the housing corporation, the municipality, and care organizations, as well as three other independent residents. We had apple cake; everyone introduced themselves. I saw one of my neighbours, Martin. In groups we worked on ideas for how to rethink the existing space.

A sample of comments heard during the workshop:

'Maybe we should think of it as a hotel. All sorts of people could have short stays. Old people, young students, refugees. The public space can function as a lobby.'

'We could ask start-up companies to have their offices here, to create a lively atmosphere on the ground floor.'

'Upstairs will remain the care home for the elderly.'

'Let's make it a home. It is a house, like yours or mine.'

'The ground floor will become a market square where people can shop for second-hand goods. We could create another entrance door, in that way we can create a shopping street.'

'Why don't the younger people eat with the older people?'—'What time are you open?'—'Until 6:30.'—'The young people have a different lifestyle, they are very busy. The old are not that busy, that's why they don't mix. The lifestyles are too different.'

The three younger residents who were there were Martin, one lady that lives on the ninth floor, and myself. All of us live here independently, with our different 'vulnerable backgrounds', but not on the floors where the nursing home is located. More importantly: neither the residents of the nursing home nor their representatives were there. Had we already forgotten our interesting but complex mix of backgrounds, even on such a small scale? In this workshop

it seemed completely acceptable to think for other people without them being in the room. Would we have done the same if they had been ninety-year-old millionaires?

The design of pre-WWII care homes was based on class and illness, and something of this remained after WWII. When it comes to growing old with meaning, there are a lot of possibilities for the wealthy. There are residencies, robots, and care homes designed especially for veterans or artists. The relationship between having privacy when you are ill or old and having wealth is an old and normalized one. The more money you own, the more privacy you can buy, the more care, and the more human you are for longer—until you die. It's not all retired people whose identity and humanity is in jeopardy as they grow old, it's the sick and therefore poorer older people.

Even though everyone is vulnerable, in this moment, the people in the workshop space are not. We circle around the kind of function this place could have, mentioning labels from hotel, to working space, to mall—all good intentions, all public functions. I wonder why we can't make this a house, not a public but a private space. We cannot turn a shelter into a hotel, or a hospital into a spa. It's possible to label it as such, but for whom? The presence of the people for whom this is already a home would have made clear what its actual function is; their absence made clear how easy it is to reason from an able-bodied perspective.

The name of the inclusive project in which I live is at this moment: 'Together and Different'. A new layer of branding creates a politically correct proof of a narrow-minded view of vulnerability. McRuer calls this the 'cultural compulsion' to see everyone that differs from the norm in terms of lack, loss or pity,[8] creating distance between the ill and the healthy, with the ability to 'work' as the main criterion deciding acceptance or rejection. The design of our house and of future houses like this should stake claim to the diversity of health and embrace vulnerability. Healthcare is not just a service for the ill, we all are forever in need of care and support.[9] Being 'in healthcare' is not necessarily a sign that someone is a victim, or that they are losing, strange or lost, and these houses should also not be designed as such.

8.   McRuer, Crip Theory, 172.

9.   Hedva, "My Body Is a Prison of Pain."

THE CASE OF THE ALZHEIMER'S PYJAMAS: INCLUSIVENESS FOR A DAY
[separated by working society]

An article taken from the Dutch news service RTL in February 2018 has the headline: '*Alzheimer's Patients Respond Well To Night Nurses In Pyjamas.*'[10] The article says:

In an English nursing home in Eaglescliffe, they have used 'the pyjama method' for a while now. Mostly people with dementia would feel at ease if the night staff is wearing their pyjamas and dressing gowns at night. Patients are able to distinguish night and day better. A dutch nursing home in Epe did a pilot last night. This was only one night with positive results, board member De Vries says, I need more support for the idea within the organization. Until then, this pilot will remain an experiment.

The economic model of healthcare makes quite sure that people lose power over their personal preferences when they come to live in an institute. It is simply easier if everyone eats the same, wears the same, drinks the same. Parts of a human identity get lost along the way. This has somehow led to distinctively different worlds, such that we lose sight of the fact that *all* people keep their days and nights apart by light, darkness, sleep and dress codes. How do you sleep at night? In a white uniform?

This example is one from a larger body of experiments carried out in different fields in which the transformation from a working life to a life with illness is the subject of research. Looking from a privileged point of view (that of someone able to work) at a less privileged life (that of someone notable to work). The results are published as news or art. I find it problematic that projects such as these remain experimental. This story is brought to a wider audience while the condition of the portrayed community stays the same in the long term. For me, the question is: can a (visual) story bring awareness to a new audience while at the same time producing positive change for the subjects of that story?

Aside from the temporary effect of these studies, I am also interested in the position the maker takes towards the portrayed community. One example is that of the Rotterdam-born photographer Stacii Samidin, who was involved in gang violence in his youth:

10   "Verplegers draaien nachtdienst in pyjama: 'Beter dan afstandelijk zusterpakje',"RTL nieuws, February 13, 2018, https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/editienl/artikel/3854511/verplegers-draaien-nachtdienst-pyjama-beter-dan-afstandelijk-zusterpakje.

This world I was part of is always part of me, no matter whether my body is there or not. The world is built up by stereotypes—like, we all know them. In my work Societies, I show the world beyond the stereotypes. I want to show the beauty [and] that these worlds exist beyond criminal activity I want to show the complete world, the guy behind the smile, or the handkerchief.[11]

Stacii Samidin doesn't have to overcome these biases; he didn't have them in the first place. He only wants to show his audience. Honesty about your background and an awareness that you cannot represent every community with the same depth seems to be the key. There are artists like Renzo Martens[12] that perpetuate oppression on purpose. Martens, as a Dutch man, recreates his own role, that of the Western oppressor. With his 'enjoy poverty project', he enlarges this role. He constructs the discussion from his unapologetically powerful position in an art and design context. He plays with the idea that artists can always overcome racial, class or economic background biases.[13]

I believe a mutual interest can overcome these biases to a certain extent. In my case, that interest could be creativity. For the other independent residents that live here, smoking bridges the gap, or football. Receiving care and vulnerability forces residents into commonality, but the losses people experience don't necessarily connect them. When I leave to do groceries, I am used to the comments on my folding bike, my hair, my pace of walking, my stressed face, the fact I don't wear a scarf when it's cold. I'm thankful for the perspective given to me, even though I can escape, while others can't. When I see an ambulance in front of the door, I cross my fingers that no one has died. In the drawing class, they make fun of me. 'I will go write a book about you now,' Rob jokes. We talk about creativity—sometimes while I make coffee, sometimes while I film. This common ground, zooming in on the local conditions, is crucial to being able to connect and improve the environment.[14] Care and social relations are connected. Giving energy is what makes the atmosphere alive. It's not about experimental inclusiveness for a day at a time but a diverse community where mutual interest is the driving force for connection.

11. *De Nieuwe Maan*, "Van crimineel tot fotograaf" (an interview with Stacii Samidin), aired November 23, 2018, on NPO2.

12. Roos van der Lint, "Wij zijn allemaal Marie-Antoinettes," *De Groene Amsterdammer*, November 8, 2017.

13. Alexis Frasz and Holly Sidford, *Mapping the Landscape of Socially Engaged Artistic Practice* (New York: Helicon Collaborative, 2017), 22.

14. Jeanne Van Heeswijk, "On community development by co-production" (lecture, Design Indaba Conference, February 28, 2013).

REPRESENTING VULNERABILITY: LIVING A DAY-TO-DAY CULTURE
[separated by representation]

In *They Must Be Represented*, Paula Rabinowitz explains how certain traditions in documentary film are based on Karl Marx's ideas about the inability of minorities to represent themselves politically. 'The bodies we see as bodies, with the exception of our children and lovers, are those of performers, athletes, stars, or victims—spectacles.'[15] In these traditions, the bodies of those who can be considered victims are represented by the bodies of those that cannot be considered victims. This way of thinking results in exoticizing modes of representation, varying from exhibiting people as 'freaks' (whether consciously or not), to placing otherness on a pedestal or normalizing otherness.[16] Even though showing one's own vulnerability is valued as a higher goal of art and design, it is still controversial, and subject to our cultural compulsion to categorize and reason through lack, loss or pity.[17]

Deformed or Sweet?—August 2018

Together we looked at a hyperrealist sculpture at the Kunsthal: Rob and Anne, members of the drawing club; Anke, the drawing club teacher; and myself, as a volunteer. It looked like a fairy-tale baby with blonde hair and a trunk; you could hold it in two hands. The baby was sleeping. The description on the wall by the art piece said: 'It is attractive and repulsive at the same time.'

'I think it's artistic, but for me the body is deformed. The artist must have had an experience in his life with a deformed child,' Anne said.

'It has something sweet to it,' Rob said.

'What makes it sweet?' Anke asked.

'The little trunk maybe?' Anne has made up her mind. This one is not her favourite. In the exhibition there were only hyperreal sculptures,

15. Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 209.

16. Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, "Seeing The Disabled: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography," in *The New Disability History*, ed. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: NYU Press, 2001).

17. McRuer, 172.

though some artists took the liberty of mixing their imagination with hyperreal bodies, while others didn't, only reflecting the models' bodies as they were at the moment of depiction. What is old? What is young? What is deformed? I think: Our modes of looking at bodies do not really depend on the state of the body of the spectator. You can be in a wheelchair yourself but find another body 'deformed'. When looking at other bodies, we depend on the belief that any body is natural in its form, and should have a talking, seen and respected place in any institute or culture. If you reason from difference, there will never be similarities, and representations will continue to emphasize difference in ability.

Back home, I am fascinated by the number of clocks on the different floors that nobody seems to notice have come to a stand-still. Everyone asks all the time what time it is, and at the same time everybody is always forgetting, so they'll have to ask again anyway. Time doesn't pass quickly. Nor does it fly. The memories in people's own worlds stay alive, play on repeat. *Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be*—you'll hear this on a random Tuesday morning. Sayings like, *for the concert of life, nobody gets a programme,* are found all around in people's rooms. The development of culture shapes things backwards and inwards, Benjamin Button-wise, nostalgically, based on the memories and adventures of the past—related to the family or to memories of wild times. *The future's not ours, you see. What will be, will be.* They've seen it all. I wonder how this will work when my generation grows old. Will we listen to underground music and use Instagram stories to share pictures of our food? Will we still have a culture that connects us at that point, one which we are part of as creators or spectators? Or will we all stay connected to the mainstream culture of our youth? The cultural signs of subcultures, like shared music tastes, dress codes or uses of language are mostly hidden in this place instead of celebrated.

Some people tell me they don't like the classical music of André Rieu or André Hazes; others adore Feyenoord. Some love Rotterdam; others don't. They love abstract classical music or the Rolling Stones.[18] 'Playing Bingo and Dutch folk music is not my thing,'[19] they say. Memories are what everyone holds on to: something you can happily look back on. It's like playing your favourite movie for the twentieth time: you can fast forward to your favourite part.

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18. Rob, resident of the eighth floor, had wild times before his illness, loves the Rolling Stones. And he loves women.

19. Ms. Pet, resident of the fourth floor, knits paintings of Dutch masters.

'We are the people of the day,'[20] Anne tells me, after she had just told Arnold that Anna had died. This is possibly a good standpoint from which to form an inclusive (sub)culture or an activist group. Things can change within an hour—not from day to night but from alive to dead. 'I'd rather draw something so I don't have to think about that.' Some people choose this standpoint, simply because it's too confronting to face mortality. I guess showing vulnerability is not held highly as a goal in this scene. This is the culture of living day by day, which is accepted as a process of *filling the day*, as finding distraction from illness. Next to the function of distraction from pain, these conversations, drawings, memories, music and other crafts can bring personal perspectives to this environment, which can play a role in allowing people to feel they have ownership over the space and representing stories of vulnerability for those who work in the house, for healthy visitors, and for society.

WHEN I'M DEAD—SEPTEMBER 2018
[death is a part of life]

'I have such a beautiful drawing that Rob made. "You won't get those", I tell my children. "Only when I'm dead!" Truus, the proud owner of Rob's work, walks out of the room. Arnold is chuckling.

'Why are you laughing?', I ask. I'm really curious. He's always funny and I kinda need a joke. He is quiet for a moment, breathes in at his slow pace. He starts talking.

'Only when I die?[21] He breathes out and in again. 'Or only when I am dead?' he asks, lightly rhetorical.

'Good question,' I say.

'One says, "When I am dead," but of course you just die, only your body is left, there is not much to be anymore.'

'Right.'

'It is when I died,' he says, determinedly.

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20. Anne, resident of the fourth floor, hates the elevator but loves to draw animals and nature.

21. Arnold, resident of the seventh floor, into word jokes, sometimes signs his drawings 'pykaszo'.

TESSA MEEUS

'That was a very clever wordplay,' I tell him. The combination of the present tense and 'dead' is a bit off, if you think about it. When I'm dead is a very common saying. You yourself cannot experience being dead while alive. What are you when you are dying? Would when I died make sense? I am dead. I was dead?

I think you can only think of this when death has meaning in life, when it's not an obstacle but a scenario you think about on a Wednesday afternoon. It's so normal to become dead. I laugh with Arnold. He's a genius.

19/04/2019
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(log in 11:05 12/05/2018—Fitness4me XL, Bos en Lommerplein 92, 1055 EK Amsterdam, NL)

"*Miquel Hervás Gómez (Terrassa, 19 April 1985). Handy graphic designer currently studying a MA at the Sandberg Instituut and 2015 BA graduate of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie. Freelancer based in the WWW, working as a technic assistant at the GRA Bookbinding Workshop*[1], *running* <u>*PUB*</u>[2], *while being member of fanfare inc.*[3] *and Carne Kids*[4]."

"(ʻ °□°)ʼ ︵ ┻━┻." (ʻ °□°)ʼ ︵ ┻━┻. Accessed December 03, 2018. http://www.miquelhervas.com/.

(log out 11:50 12/05/2018)
(log in 12:30 23/01/2019—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

[1] "Book Bindery." Accessed January 23, 2019. http://www.binderij.rietveldacademie.nl/

[2] "*PUB is an interdisciplinary initiative started by students of the Sandberg Instituut in 2017 to structure and establish a publishing practice at their school. PUB functions as a hub and a platform to identify interdisciplinary connections and accelerate collaborations amongst students or third parties.*"

"PUB.sandberg.nl." Accessed January 23, 2019. https://pub.sandberg.nl/

(log out 12:44 23/01/2019)

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(log in 17:20 14/11/2018—Oosterpark 6, 1091 AC Amsterdam, NL)
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3 *"fanfare inc. is an ongoing investigation into nomadic conditions of design labour. With a collaborative approach, the research embraces several points of view, through interviews and both visual and written contributions. Each year a new nomadic exhibition edition and chapter of the series is produced, and involves a large amount of new design contributions. In line with the nomadic focus, fanfare inc. is presented in different international contexts."*

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"fanfare Inc." fanfare Inc. Accessed December 03, 2018.
http://fanfareinc.world/.
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4 *"Carne Kids is a interdisciplinary design studio based pretty much in the WWW but also in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Cape Town, and Munich."*

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"Carne Kids at Work." Carne Kids at Work. Accessed December 03,
2018. http://www.carne.work/.
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(log out 17:22 14/11/2018)
(log in 12:13 26/10/2018—Oosterpark 6, 1091 AC Amsterdam, NL)
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My life is an email.

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(log out 12:19 26/10/2018)
(log in 12:30 23/01/2019—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)
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Today, I decided to cancel a field trip to Utrecht, and instead, to stay at home and catch up with all the stuff I keep postponing by prioritising—from hot to hottest. Laundry doesn't do itself and the dust dunes in my apartment are starting to walk and talk.

Usually, though not always, it is about time and space. Concentration and inspiration are hard to obtain and coordinate. Sadly (or not), it's not just about opening the laptop and looking at your screen.

There is something else to it. Not everything is an impressionist painting, where in one instant stroke, energy and colours can meet.

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(log out 16:36 26/10/2018)
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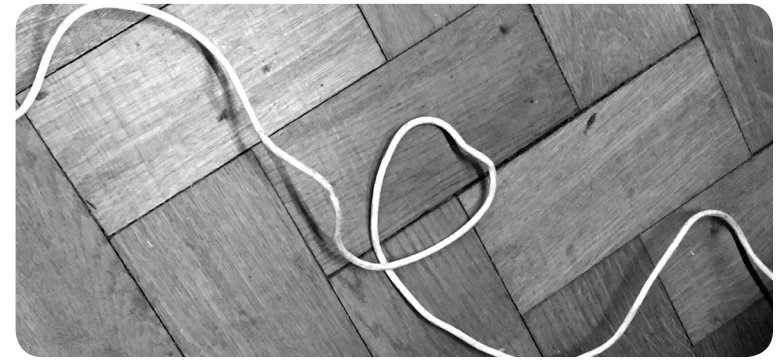


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(log in 14:15 26/10/2018—Oosterpark 6, 1091 AC Amsterdam, NL)
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I just noticed that the yellow of the battery icon is the same as one of the yellows on my Google Calendar.

Is that that a sign? If so, it's only that I have 15 per cent, and that 15 per cent reminds me: I should start writing.

> *"In a culture and society where speed, action and questioning are perceived as a slowing down, a dragging of feet, the athletes of hesitation are considered annoying characters indeed."*
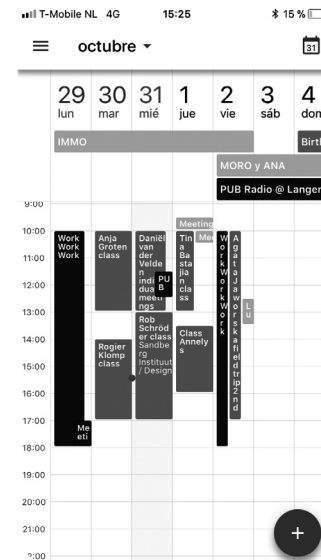

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Lauwaert, Maaike, Francien Van Westrenen, and Leo Reijnen.
Facing Value: Radical Perspectives from the Arts.
Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017.
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(log out 14:40 26/10/2018)
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(log in 16:21 20/02/2019—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

I use the time it takes to put the clean clothes on the drying rack as a *pausa*.

(log out 16:36 20/02/2019)
(log in 16:14 12/11/2018—Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Fred. Roeskestraat 96, 1076 ED Amsterdam, NL)

"Of course I am working even when it looks as if I am not working. And even if I am not working and it looks as if I am not working I still might claim to be working and wait for you to work out what objective signifiers actually point towards any moment of value or work. This is the game of current art. Art production and work methods are not temporally linked or balanced because the idea of managing time is not a key component of making art, nor is it a personal or objective profit motive for artists. Unless they decide that such behavior is actually part of the work itself."

Aranda, Julieta, Brian Kuan. Wood, and Anton Vidokle. *Are You Working Too Much?: Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art.* Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011.

Split   screen.

                                    Mulllllllllllllllllltiple tabs.

Ping and Pong.

                    Phone and Laptop: both screens, one cloud.

(log out 17:28 12/11/2018)
(log in 16:54 25/11/2018—Sandberg Instituut, Overschiestraat 188, 1062 XK Amsterdam, NL)

Somehow, every time I go to do groceries, I cannot shop for more than my immediate daily needs. Producing a long-term shopping list requires energy that I don't have. Instead, I prefer to spend that energy going every day.

Usually, I use the way there either to make the phone calls or to create a temporary mental to-do list, deciding how to structure my day's workflow.

(log out 16:58 25/11/2018)

(log in 18:14 12/11/2018—Bus 357 direction to Amsterdam Worldwide, Herengracht 414, 1017 EJ Amsterdam, NL)

My heart has been broken into seven pieces like Yugoslavia.

(log out 18:20 12/11/2018)
(log in 18:56 05/11/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

Why, when I ask people how they are, do I always get the answer: busy or really busy?

(log out 18:57 05/11/2018)
(log in 12:12 24/05/2018—Sandberg Instituut, Overschiestraat 188, 1062 XK Amsterdam, NL)

The business of being busy, just because, as if it were a natural state— that's the answer I receive every day, everywhere, from everyone: teachers, friends, colleagues, comrades, my partner… We have embedded the state of being busy into our daily lives to the point that if you are not busy, you are probably in depression. Something is wrong with you.

(log out 12:40 24/05/2018)
(log in 18:37 05/11/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

"Contemporary art's workforce consists largely of people who, despite working constantly, do not correspond to any traditional image of labor. They stubbornly resist settling into any entity recognizable enough to be identified as a class. While the easy way out would be to classify this constituency as multitude or

crowd, it might be less romantic to ask whether they are not global lumpen freelancers, deterritorialized and ideologically free-floating: a reserve army of imagination communicating via Google Translate."

Aranda, Julieta, Brian Kuan. Wood, and Anton Vidokle.
Are You Working Too Much?: Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011.

Precarity
Прикаритет
pré-retraite
Vorruhestand
Varhaiseläke
jubilación anticipada
Prepensionamento
early retirement

Translated by Google Translator.

(log out 18:40 05/11/2018)
(log in 18:57 05/11/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

The creative millennial as the ultimate agent. In and out of universities, where the comfort zone is restricted to our laptops and our desks. There are not many spaces for encounters. At the Sandberg, every department has its own fully booked agenda.

Fair enough.

But then, funnily enough, spaces where people can casually interact organically hardly exist. No set scenario. Not at Christmas dinner or at the introduction day.

(log out 18:57 05/11/2018)

(log in 16:01 18/12/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

"Why is the rabbit in Alice in Wonderland so stressed? Looking at him running, I' am reminded that I should be too. After all, I have a paper to handle by a date which is not likely to move according my preferences. But I find the white rabbit fascinating. I have no clue where he is running towards. I speculate he might neither be totally aware of the underlying reasons behind his restlessness towards an undefined request for punctuality. Behaving like an automation, a body that forgot to question his own agency, running towards something being the purpose in itself."

Girard-Meunier, François. *Time management and the self*, 2018.

(log out 16:10 18/12/2018)
(log in 12:00 07/11/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

At the moment, parallel to this MA programme and its regular classes, symposiums and workshops, I work sixteen hours a week for a salaried job and take different commissioned assignments as a freelancer. I'm also part of three collectives: PUB, carne kids and fanfare inc. My roles, both at the Sandberg and in PUB, have shifted in the course of every project that we've started and carried out. I've gone from being a designer, producer, and bureaucrat, to a radio operator and a facilitator. I'm always working as a link, which is an organic position, changing to suit new necessities and future plans. I shouldn't forget to mention that I also have domestic responsibilities to deal with, a family to visit in Barcelona, and a relationship that demands time and care.

(log out 12:32 07/11/2018)
(log in 11:05 22/01/2019—Fitness4me XL, Bos en Lommerplein 92, 1055 EK Amsterdam, NL)

🎵 *BRRRRR BRRRRR BRRRRR BRRRRR* 🎵

(log out 11:50 22/01/2019)
(log in 12:00 07/11/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

Trying to understand my multitasking skills, I realized that 'in-between spaces' are my natural habitat. They're places where I feel weirdly comfortable. It's like running in a multi-track long-distance race where the lanes are overlapping discontinuously as time progresses.

It is necessary every time to acclimatise myself to different people, places, tasks and procedures.

(log out 12:32 07/11/2018)
(log in 22:10 07/11/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

I find cleaning the dishes refreshing.
There is a meditational quality to it.
It's a satisfactory act that makes me disconnect.
Sponge and Bob, Bob and Sponge.

"*SpongeBob SquarePants. SpongeBob, a tiny yellow sea sponge who lives in the submarine small town of Bikini Bottom, loves to unreservedly greet any new morning by exuberantly chanting: 'I'm ready! I'm ready! I'm ready-eady-eady-eady-eady!'*
He then usually spends his day working in a dingy fast food joint, the Krusty Krab, where his remarkable talents at frying patties are shamelessly exploited by the owner, a Scrooge-like crab. This exploitation has no impact on SpongeBob, however, since frying patties happens to be one of his most favorite pastimes. He effectively lives a free and happy life because, coincidentally, he does what he loves to do, and as such the idea that he may have reasons to feel alienated never dawns on him."

Tell Me What You Want (what You Really, Really Want).
San Francisco: Bonhams & Butterfields Auctioneers, 2015.

(log out 22:15 07/11/2018)

(log in 11:54 15/05/2018—Oosterpark 6, 1091 AC Amsterdam, NL)

Before graduating from my BA, I faced the double-sided flexibility of the contemporary designer.

On the one hand, you get to work on interesting cultural projects (where there's not much money involved) and you are expected to deliver a complete performance.

Like a Swiss Army knife.

Low budget, high attitude.

(log out 12:32 15/05/2018)
(log in 14:27 20/01/2019—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

♫ *Mind your step* ♫

(log out 14:30 20/01/2019)
(log in 11:54 15/05/2018—Oosterpark 6, 1091 AC Amsterdam, NL)

On the other hand, you have to take commercial clients, and then there's no longer creativity and freedom, only money.

(log out 12:32 15/05/2018)
(log in 16:16 28/11/2018—Sandberg Instituut, Fred. Roeskestraat 98, 1076 ED Amsterdam, NL)

The last job I did for an agency was making internal PowerPoints. Nobody cared.

After fifteen years without ever having to deal with PowerPoint, I was asked to work with it.

Snapping, everything was snapping and making me nervous. In three weeks, I made enough to pay the Sandberg's tuition fee, and I quit.

(log out 16:30 28/11/2018)
(log in 11:54 15/05/2018—Oosterpark 6, 1091 AC Amsterdam, NL)

The limits are stretched and your flexing skills stressed. It is at this point that I started to wonder whether or not it was a compliment to be called multifaceted.

"Of course I am working even when it looks as if I am not working. And even if I am not working and it looks as if I am not working I still might claim to be working and wait for you to work out what objective signifiers actually points towards any moment of value of work."

Aranda, Julieta, Brian Kuan. Wood, and Anton Vidokle. *Are You Working Too Much?: Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art.* Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011.

(log out 12:32 15/05/2018)
(log in 12:05 23/05/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

"The language of empowerment is used to promote the idea that students can construct and continuously reconstruct their 'self' in order to render them attractive on the labour market."

Kelly, Susan and Graham, Janna, eds. 2017. *Training for Exploitation?: Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education by Precarious Workers Brigade. Foreword: Silvia Federici.* London: Journal of Aesthetics & Protest Press, 2017.

(log out 12:07 23/05/2018)
(log in 13:17 12/05/2018—Ferdinand Huyckstraat 6, 1061 HW Amsterdam, NL)

To understand better the actual source of my hardcore multitasking capacity, I listed in chronological order all of the jobs I had ever performed (and could still remember):

- *(1999) Balloon inflator for City Hall*
- *(2001) Painter assistant*
- *(2002) Newspaper nightshift delivery person*
- *(2002) Waiter*
- *(2003–2007) Draftsman*
- *(2007–2010) Technical assistant in engineering office*
- *(2010–2011) Check-in and breakfast attendant in a hotel*
- *(2011–2015) Canteen tender*
- *(2012–2014) Artist assistant (x2)*
- *(2014–2016) Art Gallery assistant (x2)*
- *(2015–Now) Graphic designer, freelance*
- *(2015–Now) Bookbinding technical assistant*
- *(2016) Painter*
- *(2016) Graphic design intern*
- *(2017) Graphic designer, freelance, at agency (x2)*
- *(2017–Now) External guest tutor*

(log out 13:30 12/05/2018)

(log in 14:19 03/12/2018—Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Fred. Roeskestraat 96, 1076 ED Amsterdam, NL)

"My subject of investigation, or at least one among several, is rather the more nebulous question of the 'romance' of this style of working, and how this romance is translated at an institutional level so that it functions as a kind of dispositif, a self-monitoring, self-regulating mechanism. Foucault describes the dispositif as 'a thoroughly heterogenous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures [...] the system of relations that can be established between the elements' (Foucault 1980, p. 194) Creativity is designated by current modes of biopolitical power, as the site for implementing job creation and, more significantly, labour reform; it is a matter of managing a key sector of the youthful population by turning culture into an instrument of both competition and labour discipline."

McRobbie, Angela. *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

(log out 14:22 03/12/2018)
(log in 14:04 20/11/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

Like an open Wi-Fi, which will only give you access to the internet if you publish an advertisement to your Facebook or LinkedIn account.

(log out 14:14 20/11/2018)
(log in 12:58 08/11/2018—Sandberg Instituut, Overschiestraat 188, 1062 XK Amsterdam, NL)

While I take a shower and hang the laundry, I will boil some potatoes.

My calculations say that the sum of the laundry and shower time is exactly twenty minutes. If something gets in my way, the consequences will be seen in my dinner. Vapor times and precisio

Sometimes, I wonder when all this desire for optimization will start to play against the optimization itself.

Dress me quick because I'm late.

(log out 14:49 08/11/2018)
(log in 16:32 02/01/2019—Barcelona Airport T1, 08820, Barcelona, SP)

I have some wishes for 2k19: 'to learn how to say "No", and 'to be more precise and critical about breaks.'

(log out 16:42 02/01/2019)

(log in 16:00 19/05/2018—Fitness4me XL, Bos en Lommerplein 92, 1055 EK Amsterdam, NL)

Today, we still don't know what the consequences will be in many aspects of the freelancer adventure. Working spaces are not anymore what they used to be. At the moment, the range of possible physical office spaces is blurry, distorted and deformed. Your desk can extend to the tram, the Albert Heijn *kassa*, and the waiting room.
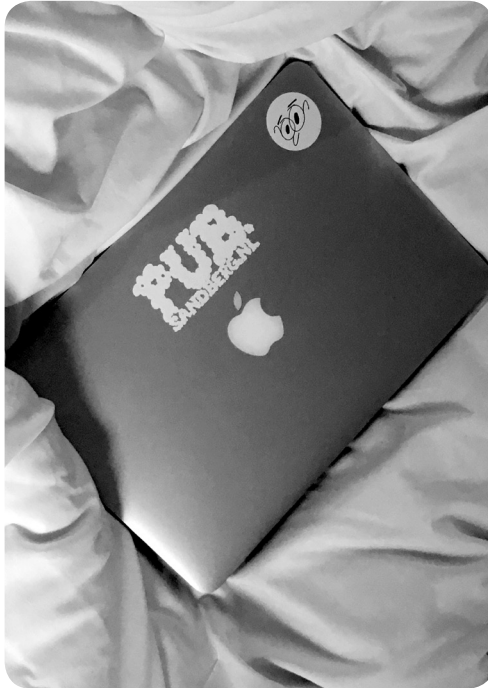
(log out 16:22 19/05/2018)
(log in 14:31 15/01/2019—Fitness4me XL, Bos en Lommerplein 92, 1055 EK Amsterdam, NL)

We had Silvio Lorusso at class today. I found loads of overlaps between his practise and mine… I had many things to talk to him about. But before I could have the chance to say anything, we had already run out of time.

Instead of starting my commentary at this point, I preferred to propose another meeting.

> ENTREPRECARIAT—Siamo tutti imprenditori. Nessuno è al sicuro. http://www.krisispublishing.com/product/entreprecariat/

(log out 14:41 15/01/2019)

(log in 11:59 23/05/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

> *"It is hardly news that globalized space affects the cultural economy, and vice versa. Indeed, although locality and location still matter, our lives are becoming increasingly dominated by movement. Even so, the intensity of these changes has varied from person to person and job to job: while average working norms are still adjusting to these rapidly changing conditions, the creative fields have been quicker to respond and adapt to the increasing possibilities of networks, collaborations and flexibility."*

> "fanfare Inc." fanfare Inc. Accessed December 03, 2018. http://fanfareinc.world/transportation.

A contemporary expat that only feels at home while crossing international airspace. It used to be only then that I would set my phone to flight mode. Now I've also started to do so when going to sleep.

> *"In theory of affordances, any function of an object is relative and dependent on its environment and context. In line with this thought, toolness can be applied to any object. A tool tells stories about its producer, as well as its user. The tools we develop, the tools we use, the tools we bring with us, all reflect ours current surroundings. As such, tools are the result of thinking form, function, time, and outcome together. When labour becomes nomadic, tools adapt. When nomadic tools develop, labour follows. Tools follow function"*

> "fanfare Inc." fanfare Inc. Accessed December 03, 2018. http://fanfareinc.world/tools.

(log out 12:39 23/05/2018)

(log in 12:12 24/05/2018—Sandberg Instituut, Overschiestraat 188, 1062 XK Amsterdam, NL)

Design something nice and keep calm.

But most importantly: Why do we have to be SOOOO passionate about our work?

A stock image of a creative freelancer smiling. Get home, open your laptop, and answer those emails while you cook a quick and tasty pasta pesto.

(log out 12:40 24/05/2018)
(log in 00:04 14/11/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

And the handmade fortune cookie tells me… 'You won't check your emails for 2 days'

(log out 00:07 14/11/2018)
(log in 14:27 20/01/2019—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

♫ *Gate change* ♫

(log out 14:30 20/01/2019)
(log in 11:17 20/05/2018—Ferdinand Huyckstraat 6, 1061 HW Amsterdam, NL)

It looks as if being busy is a sign of a healthy, successful and fruitful life. Naturally, we start to occupy ourselves in order to make a living or to grow as a professional. In the self-employed world, this order can be easily flipped. As in Stockholm syndrome, priorities change. We can never have enough. Never not working, our shift is never over.

> *"Neoliberal subjects can be exemplified as rational self-interested beings (homo economicus), for whom every choice comes down to a cost-benefit analysis, one that might maximise their potential as both consumer and producer."*
>
> Kelly, Susan and Graham, Janna, eds. 2017. *Training for Exploitation?: Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education by Precarious Workers Brigade. Foreword: Silvia Federici.* London: Journal of Aesthetics & Protest Press, 2017

Unread terms and conditions are a metaphor for our contemporary app-life, in which we freely become start-up employees and are rewarded with an intrusive and aggressive daily workflow. All this happens in the free Wi-Fi area of a branch of Coffee Company.

Burn out, sleep in.

> *"In a culture and society where speed, action and questioning are perceived as a slowing down, a dragging of feet, the athletes of hesitation are considered annoying characters indeed."*
>
> Lauwaert, Maaike, Francien Van Westrenen, and Leo Reijnen. *Facing Value: Radical Perspectives from the Arts.* Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017.

(log out 11:46 20/05/2018)
(log in 9:28 16/11/2018—Fuchs, Londerzeelsesteenweg 1, 1861 Meise, BE)

Flexing my knees,
in a flexi bus.

No joke. FlixBus drivers now sell soda and chocolate bars while driving.
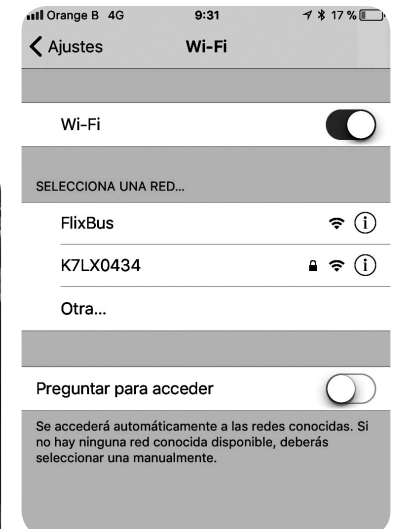
The Wi-Fi area escorts me, which makes me feel safe and comfortable. I even consider the idea of production (breaking news!), and I start with the easy task of answering an email while also listening to a radio broadcast, straight from San Francisco, about self-driven cars. If you aren't distracted enough, it's your choice.

(log out 09:46 16/11/2018)

(log in 12:40 08/11/2018—Bus 15 direction to Gerrit Rietveld
Academie, Fred. Roeskestraat 96, 1076 ED Amsterdam, NL)

*"Commoners initiate processes and push the world in
a specific direction, but they do so in the hope that others will
appropriate, take over, and continue these processes. Stealthy,
slumbering, underground, and under the skin: these are the
characteristics by which an ideology spreads and persuades
the best. It's called poetica."*

Dockx, Nico, and Pascal Gielen. *Commonism: A New Aesthetics of the
Real.* Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018.

(log out 12:42 08/11/2018)
(log in 2:40 08/11/2018—FEBO, Stadionplein 132, 1076 CK Amsterdam, NL)

(log out 2:41 08/11/2018)
(log in 17:58 14/11/2018—Uniqlo, Kalverstraat 11, Rokin 12, 1012 NX
Amsterdam, NL)

I went to get some Basics. Japanese Heattech told me I should care.

(log out 17:59 14/11/2018)
(log in 21:19 21/12/3018—Airbus 320 direction to Barcelona Airport T1,
08820, Barcelona, SP)

I just realized that I can also work on my .doc while not being
connected to the cloud. Nice one, Google Docs. At the moment,
I'm writing these lines on my way to Barcelona for Christmas, literally
in the clouds.

Today, my holidays and rest time start… but that makes me
question: how much time/energy does it take to really switch
to resort mode?

I still feel like working by *causa*-effect.

(log out 21:28 21/12/3018)
(log in 14:37 25/11/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

Do you ever have the feeling that, if you close all your tabs, there
will be no turning back?

(log out 14:37 25/11/2018)
(log in 11:05:30 12/05/2018—Fitness4me XL, Bos en Lommerplein 92, 1055
EK Amsterdam, NL)

Essay powered by iPhone 6s, Google Drive, Google Calendar and
MacBook Pro 13inch, wherever I go.

(log out 11:50:23 12/05/2018)
(log in 12:55 18/11/2018—Trouringhstraat 14, 1055 EN Amsterdam, NL)

Special thanks to
Google Drive, iCal, WhatsApp, Dropbox, LinkedIn, WeTransfer,
Car2go, Deliveroo, iMessage, Airbnb, NTS, Google Calendar,
Flix Bus, aaaaarg.fail, Buienradar, Firefox, PayPal, the Vueling app,
Google Maps, Uber, Signal, the App Store, the Weather Prediction
app, the Transavia app, Google Chrome, Red Light Radio, iPhone 6s,
Gmail, Safari, Soundcloud, Citationmachine.net, Thuisbezorgd
and the EasyJet app.

(log out 12:57 18/11/2018)

(log in 11:54 15/05/2018—Oosterpark 6, 1091 AC Amsterdam, NL)

    miquelhervas.com
    carne.work
    fanfareinc.world
    pub.sandberg.nl
    binderij.rietveldacademie.nl/

(log out 12:32 15/05/2018)
(log in 12:50 18/11/2018—Carrer d'Arquímedes 263, 08224 Terrassa, SP)

Bonus Track *:)*
♫ Lemme hear ya say yeah (wow)
Lemme hear ya say yeah (wow)
No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no ,no ,no, no there's no limit
no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no there's no limit
No no limits, we'll reach for the sky
No valley to deep, no mountain too high
No no limits, we'll reach for the sky
we do what we want and we do it with pride
Lemme hear ya say yeah (wow)
Hard to the core, I feel the floor
When I'm on stage, yo, you answer more
I'm on the edge, I know the ledge
I work real hard to collect my cash
Tick tick tick tick take your time
when I'm goin' I'm goin' for mine
Open your ears and you will hear it
I tell you this 'cause there's no limit
No, no, no, no, no, no, no ,no ,no, no, no, no there's no limit
Ow, hey…♫

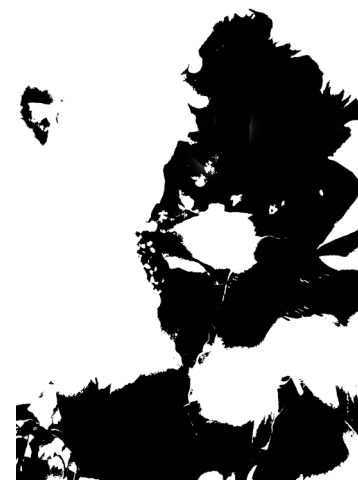2 Unlimited, No Limit, Byte Records, 1993

(log out 12:51 18/11/2018)
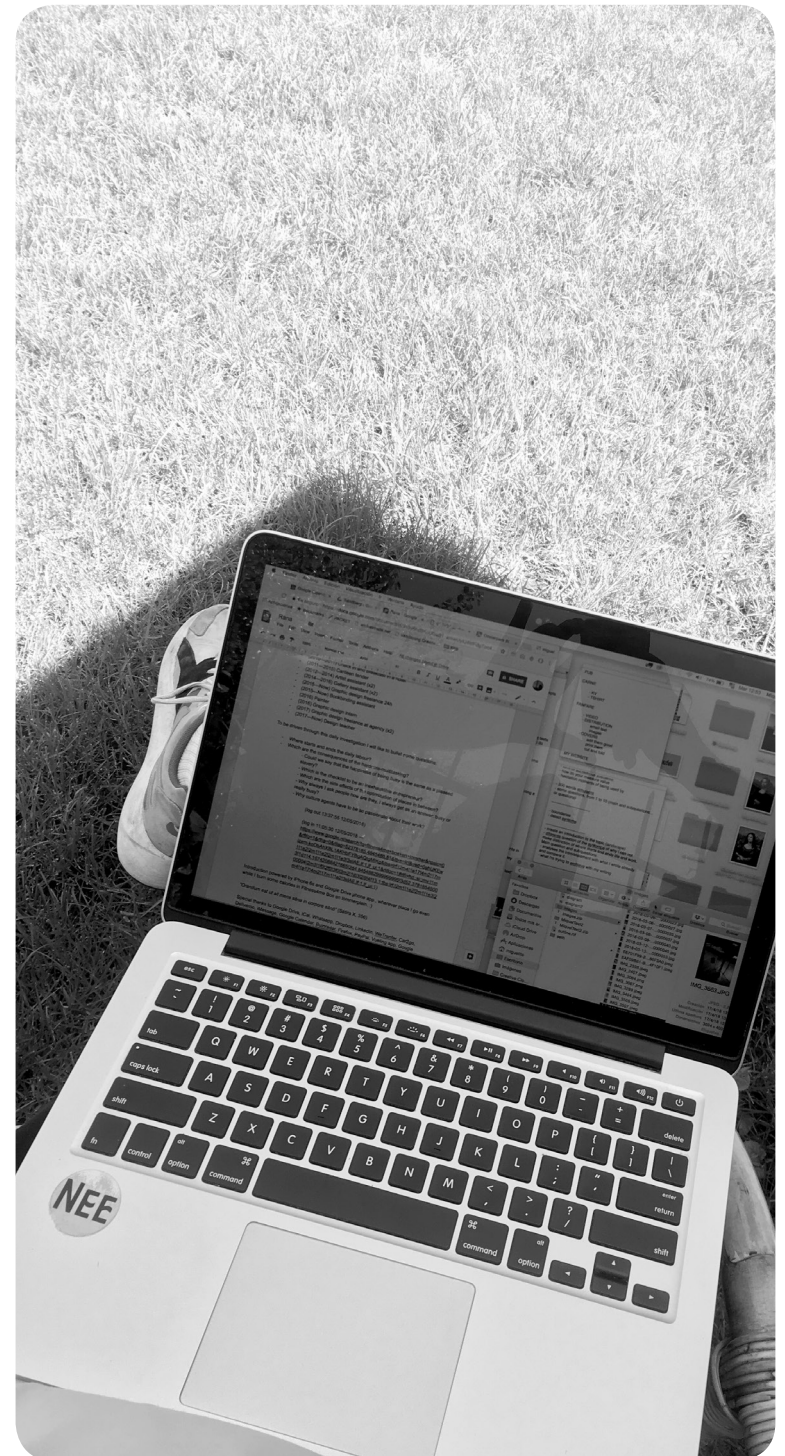
HOT AIR—SOME MUSINGS ON COMMUNICATION AND ITS EXCESS

SAMULI SAARINEN

Samuli Saarinen is a graphic designer from Finland (mainly) working with the mediation of language, as well as, the language of mediation—in practice: reading, discussing and designing (mostly) written—and more often than not, printed—text.

The shit of language ● Communication, or, the economic
function of language ● The Sense-making Regime (expulsions;
the political system of sense-making) ● Hot Air (opacity;
life-style) ● Fine art of the abject ● Baseness

*When we characterize talk as hot air, we mean that what
comes out of the speaker's mouth is only that. It is mere vapor.
His speech is empty, without substance or content. His use of
language, accordingly, does not contribute to the purpose it
purports to serve. No more information is communicated than
if the speaker had merely exhaled. There are similarities be-
tween hot air and excrement, incidentally, which make hot air
seem an especially suitable equivalent for bullshit. Just as hot air
is speech that has been emptied of all informative content,
so excrement is matter from which everything nutritive has
been removed. Excrement may be regarded as the corpse of
nourishment, what remains when the vital elements in food
have been exhausted. In this respect, excrement is a representa-
tion of death which we ourselves produce and which, indeed,
we cannot help producing in the very process of maintaining our
lives. Perhaps it is for making death so intimate that we
find excrement so repulsive. In any event, it cannot serve the
purposes of sustenance, any more than hot air can serve those
of communication.*

In his best-selling essay, *On Bullshit,* philosopher Harry Frankfurt
sets out to expose and discredit what he considers "bullshit" in lan-
guage. The main sentiment expressed in the essay corresponds to a
fairly uncontroversial, common-sense understanding of language,
and bears no urgency to be explored here in length. However, in
a passage that seems like almost a slip-of-the-tongue, he happens
to present an intriguing idea deserving of a closer look: "Hot air"
is said to have no *content* and no *purpose to serve*; it carries no
information whatsoever and is ultimately compared to shit (as in:
dysfunctional, useless, waste). This *hot air* is presented as superfluous
to communication: *an excess.*

However, by deploying the metaphors of flatulence and feces as
vehicles for moral denouncement, Frankfurt makes a hasty judgement.
What he fails to recognize is that shit is an integral part of the "process
of maintaining our lives", not simply an unwanted residue of it. Not only
is shit a concept rife with metaphysical subtleties, intestinal matters
seem to be enjoying a newfound public appreciation (as demonstrated
by the phenomenal commercial success of the book *Gut* by Giulia
Enders). As popular science now tells us: *the gut is our second brain!*
Excrement is even inserted back into the body for medical purposes.
It seems like the "corpse of nourishment" is back to haunt us.

In bringing shit and language in close proximity, Frankfurt provides an interesting conceptual tool—or weapon—for interrogating exactly this "communication" he himself so fiercely defends.

Communication is often imagined—not least by professionals in the business of communication—as a simple economic operation not too different from a monetary transaction. Messages are exchanged between a sender and a receiver like packages traveling through a tube or electronic bolts through an fibre optic cable. Any interruption from the outside is considered noise—an *unthinkable* scandal.

The binary of sender/receiver is predicated on a prior separation. As its constitutive act, communication creates a *disconnection* with the promise of eventually bridging it. A communicant is secluded by definition. The message, the "content" of communication is imagined somewhere in the depths "beyond" its material mediation, untroubled by earthly muddlings. Here, language is severed from its *lived experience*, its *life-style* and its bodies; it's a voice without lungs, a mouth without the gut.

Communication assumes a chronology of temporal linearity: an irreversible direction and a predetermined sequence. In the light-speed of incessant exchange, proximity is supplanted by speed. As it's abstracted into information, language is reduced to commensurable digits in a *general equivalence* of signals—measurable, computable and transmissible data.

This is not to say that communication is somehow not *real*, devoid of *meaning*. If nothing else, communication is obsessed with "meaning"—or as the specialists would have it, "communicable content that corresponds to reality with an almost mathematical inevitability". The task of communication is to *make sense*—herein lies the limits of communication. Everything that doesn't immediately make sense is marked as irrelevant, waste: *Hot Air*. In making sense, something is lost. To render something communicable, *an excess* first needs to be excised.

Communication makes sense of the world by creating it in its image. It assigns meaning in its circular logic: what counts as communication is that which is communicable. Language is conceived of as serving a purpose, of being functional, workable—in short, *useful*. In turn, everything that hinders its proper functioning is deemed useless. Communication is language *put to work*.

Contrary to what some well-rehearsed Marxist critiques would claim, communication does not attain its economic determination—its abstract code of equivalence—in commodity exchange. Perhaps counterintuitively, the economic function of communication originates in its supposed *use-value*, its determination to make sense. As usefulness is (retroactively) assigned as its sole purpose—its only

imaginable horizon—language enters the economy *as the resource* of communication. Left unused, language would spoil—*turn to shit*.

The fact, stated and overstated so often it has become a platitude, is this: With communication being a central factor of production in contemporary capitalist societies (as a site of production, its source of appropriation and as a commodity being produced), *power consolidates itself in communication*. Communication is also a medium through and by which controls are imposed, as well as the object of these controls. Here, control does not automatically involve blatant coercion, physical force or spatial enclosure (although, the threat of violence in its various degrees is always and ultimately implied in any rule of law).[1] Governance, as it's exercised in and through communication, is determined to *manage* the flux of social contingency by measuring, calculating and predicting *risk*.

In order to monitor this restless flux in real time—interpret and keep track of it—an inventory of possible outcomes must be established: *a map* on which events get played out. Governance must adopt a tunnel vision of simplification in order to maintain "an absolute correspondence between the map and the territory". Everything is classified according to predetermined categories and reduced to what is readily identifiable—*translatable* according to a pre-given code.

To the *managerial gaze*, the world must first appear as entirely knowable, that is to say: *transparent*. The task of contemporary governance is to *make sense* of its subjects, to render them *legible*.[2]

The *regime of sense-making* is an aggregate of apparatuses that regulates the flows of information by imposing policies and protocols on every level of human interaction. It comprises different, even conflicting, techniques, tendencies and modalities, and operates on

1. To not buy in to the hype, it must be stated that disciplinary forces of brute violence and spatial enclosure have not disappeared, they are now only augmented and extended by more subtle systems of control. To imagine that life (as the site of social practices, power, production…) now only exists in communication networks would not only be a position of total political impotence and absolute submission to control, but also that of glaring privilege and wilful ignorance.
   More often than not, governance sets the conditions and marks it's targets for a more explicitly violent intervention. This is the case in police violence and incarceration, but also in the vicious circle of economic dispossession—debt and/or penalties—default—debt collection… finally resulting in an intervention by the State and possibly imprisonment.
   These processes are brilliantly explored (in the context of the United States) in great detail in *Carceral Capitalism* by Jackie Wang.

2. The notion of legibility is here used as introduced by James C. Scott in Seeing Like a State and further elaborated by Jack Halberstam in The Queer art of Failure.

different scales and registers ranging from micro-political interactions and affective encounters to social engineering and geopolitical manoeuvres. As its groundwork, the sense-making regime defines the *field of validity*; it sets the conditions for knowing and establishes what counts as knowledge in the first place—and, by extension, what is considered thinkable, relevant, productive, sane, smart, rational; what and who matters; whose knowledge? While the system aspires for totality—seeks to integrate everything in its machinations—that, which hinders its proper functioning is marked as dispensable. Sense-making is a push-pull process of inclusion and exclusion.

Instances of this exclusion range from simple dismissal and discrediting to outright violent expulsion and forcible silencing. Examples of this might include, but are not limited to: *the discourse of racial exclusion that has accompanied, justified and enacted the colonial project; suppression and weeding out of unorthodox, non-modern or non-western knowledge practices as heresy, blasphemy, superstition, magic—or simply, as primitive; vilifying of accents and dialects; wiping out of entire languages; geographical renaming; imposition of standardized grammar, formal language, etiquette, academic requirements; manufactured illiteracy, as well as, imposed literacy; archival erasure; erasure of gender expressions and identities that don't conform to the heterosexual matrix; suppression of behavior that doesn't adhere to public morals or standards of normalcy, doesn't mix—can't be assimilated; dismissing and belittling an argument as emotional—and then—minimizing and delegitimizing an expression of emotion as sentimental, romantic, impolite, out of line, inappropriate, overreacting, annoying, threatening, hysteric, cringy—or simply, feminine; a medical discourse that establishes who's perceived as sane, healthy, normal—capable of speaking for themselves; the stubborn adherence to the supposed objectivity of abstract reason: insisting on the petty formalities in the structure of an argument, nitpicking "logical fallacies", etc.; dismissal of lived experience; reducing an actual human being into data, a talking point, a rhetorical prop, a variable in statistics, an object of knowledge…* A list of examples would be endless, as language has been a central tool, form and site of oppression and exploitation (as well as a site of struggle) throughout the (ongoing) history of what can be called colonial modernity.

The *political* system of sense-making is predicated on what can be *recognized* as a *legitimate* expression of political will; which political expressions count as *meaningful*; who *deserves* to enter the "*demos*" as a *political subject* packed with political agency; who is informed enough, equipped with enough of the right *kind of knowledge,* capable of making an informed decision—the right

decision. In order to make political demands (to express *legitimate concerns* to whom the right to represent political will is delegated to) these demands need to be *sensible*, *reasonable*. That is to say, they need to correspond to *a pre-given code* of what's politically possible, realistic—*what already makes sense*. An intervention by anything that is not already present in the circuits of the political system of sense-making is denied entry, considered *unthinkable*.

Is it any surprise that the destruction and looting of private property as part of riots is denounced by political leaders and pundits as "senseless violence"? These acts are "senseless" in so far as they don't adhere to any preordained vocabulary of legitimate political gestures and are thus illegible and unfathomable through the lens of political sense-making. Our baffled commentators are right: Fucking shit up really does not *make sense;* it's an act incommensurable with sense-making—illegitimate, unrepresentable, *ungraspable*.

Parallel to the more obvious forms of epistemic violence, power operates in ways that perhaps appear "softer" (read: avoid the possibility of direct confrontation), but are no less consequential and in fact can be all the more elusive and insidious. Techniques of this power are what the specialists now variably call education, behavioural economics, choice architecture, UI/UX—or simply, design (bluntly: social engineering). Design is tasked with the production of structures (spatial, technological, linguistic, epistemic, etc.) in which the subject is moulded (or "nudged") into a polite communicant—transparent, legible, sensible, etc. The goal here is to create the optimal conditions for sense-making or, better yet, conditions in which it's *impossible not to* make sense. What is getting made is not sense as such, but rather, subjects that are *condemned to make sense*.

Indeed, there seems to be an imperative to communicate: to take part in the discourse, to intervene, make a statement, *put yourself out there*, expose yourself. Transparency is set as the precondition for entering the phantasmal "public sphere", the "marketplace of ideas" or "agora"—to give the concept some of that ancient charm.

If the regime itself appears completely opaque from the standpoint of its subjects, it's only because power now resides on the surface of the Total Design. That is to say: *power is infrastructural*. Perhaps Earth is not in fact hollow, hiding some great conspiracy beneath its veneer, but flat—*a vast impenetrable screen that paves over every hole, dent and cavity, only occasionally interrupted by checkpoints…* All jokes aside, despite its claims for seamless and ubiquitous totality, the sense-making regime is *patchy*. Outside, in-between, after, before, beneath, above and beyond it remain hot pockets of air. Sense-making is essentially a process of *translation* across these patches as well as

between their interior and exterior.[3] The economy of sense-making is ultimately dependant on this "outside" as its *condition of possibility*. Without it there would be no source of further extraction or room for growth, "creativity" or "progress". As with bodily metabolism in relation to nourishment, Hot Air is to the sense-making regime both its invaluable resource and its waste.

The boundaries of sense-making are not to be understood here solely in spatial terms; they are also temporal and epistemic. The distinction between sense and its outside is not as clear and rigid as conventional wisdom would have us think—the frontier of sense-making shifts constantly in convulsive spasms, expanding and retracting like anal sphincters gasping for air.

Hot Air cannot be *defined*—made sense of. It can only be *noticed as it occurs*, as it appears as a fissure on the surface of the sense-making regime—as sparks of impact. Its contours develop as the ghostly retinal afterimage of communication. If Hot Air appears as a negation—*everything communication is not*—it's only because the regime of sense-making constitutes itself by excluding everything that is not communicable. Hot Air is not a sub-genre of communication, a specific tone of voice or a different "sound". It runs parallel to, but is incommensurable with, communication. Hot Air can't be *grasped*; it can only be *enjoyed while it lasts*.

There's a peculiar interplay between Hot Air and communication. As an intrinsic potential in all language, Hot Air pre-exists sense-making and *sets the conditions of its possibility in the first instance*. It's the sticky mossy underbelly of the sense-making regime, the symbiotic gut flora of communication, an alien parasite. Hot Air is already there, present in language before it's assigned a "purpose to serve"; rendered communicable—*put to work*. It loiters in the night before and after communication. It's the nap of reason (producing monsters). Communication can only be extracted, distilled, carved out from Hot Air by force. In turn, Hot Air betrays communication by eluding it. It destabilizes, disorientates and distorts information. It remains hopelessly unemployable—*unworkable*.

Hot Air is not an absence of "meaning", but an excess to and of it. An uncontainable overflow, an unpredictable discharge. Against the poverty of communication, Hot Air is flamboyance and *luxury*.

It's the sticky remainder left of communication; left of any *center*. That is to say, it doesn't admit to the *primacy* of any center, be it of sender or receiver, of a knowing subject or of the object of its knowledge.

3. In her book, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing uses the metaphor of "translation" in describing how, in what she calls "salvage accumulation", capitalism extracts value across "patches" of capitalist and non-capitalist spaces and spheres of influence.

Hot Air can be vague, *general* to the extent of being irrelevant; imprecise and hazy; an inaudible murmur; a peppering of empty phrases; a reckless shot from the hip—it might miss the mark entirely or hit all over the place by accident. Idle blabbering; rapid babble, hard to keep up with—*hölynpölyä!* A careless slip-of-the-tongue; mindless drooling and ecstatic shudder; spam, spasms. Zoned out…

Or maybe Hot Air is something so specific, so particular, that it lacks any common denominator; immeasurable and thus irreducible to a general equivalence of digits. It corresponds to no standard, codex or format. It doesn't translate and is hopelessly lost in translation; loss of resolution. It's a wasted breath; a joke everyone missed; a confession met with an awkward silence; a boring dream. Message sent, received and seen but not answered; a blinking cursor. A knowing look: a secret, an in-joke; conspiracy. Mixed feelings and doubt; a rumour. It's clueless and can't be reasoned with.

Hot Air is *opaque*. However, this opacity need not be a hardened shell, an impenetrable armour or the final stronghold.[4] It's the opacity of a semipermeable membrane, a leaky tissue that can be sunk through with prolonged contact.

To describe Hot Air as "vapour" would give the wrong impression. Hot Air is not light but immensely heavy. It's not above and *beyond* communication; it lies on top or sits at the bottom. It's the sediment of sense-making. If communication seeks to penetrate to the depth of things by means of rational reasoning, Hot Air privileges florid expansion in a *baroque* fashion. Hot Air is *ornament*—lichen on the ruins of communication. If, in communication, "content" is imagined floating somewhere "beyond" material mediation or immediate experience, Hot Air assumes no such transcendence—*it naively takes surface for what it is*.

Hot Air is *down-to-earth*; this is to say, it's not a celestial being. It's always embedded in a *particular*—and as such, singular—*life-style*, inseparable from its world: its objects, its moment in time, its bodies. *Hot Air is fatally stuck with a voice*. However, this "voice" cannot be possessed, as if it was tinned inside a self-encased bourgeois subject. It's not a signal shot into outer space—a cry into the abyss—but a knot in a weave constitutive of its ties. This voice whistles through the pores of its material community. *It's meaningful only where it's shared*. Hot Air can be out of tune, but never out of touch.

As the knowing subject has no privileged access to Hot Air, it loses its designation as the Center orbited by (supposedly mute) knowledge-objects, inanimate *things* to be discovered, collected, made sense out of and put to good use. Hot Air is not exclusively

4. Here, the concept of "opacity" echos the notions put forth by Edouard Glissant in his book *Poetics of Relation*.

a human affair—*objects talk back!* This, of course, terrifies the dispassionate spectator and our fellow materialists alike. "Is this nothing short of fetishism?"

There's a long tradition of fine artists digging through shit in search of "abject material" to incorporate into their practice; in fact, that's how art maintains it's vitality. Whether it's driven by a genuine appreciation for smut or vulturous opportunism matters little. Deliberately or not, really-existing art operates as an *agent of capture* in the last instance. Previously discarded or neglected material is incorporated into dominant sense-making practices by means of *artistic appropriation*. Even the smallest art spaces run the risk of serving as laboratories and showrooms for future appropriation, and ultimately, enclosure and accumulation. Here, artistic discourse functions as translation between the outside and the inside of the economy of sense-making, potentially extending the field of valorization across the entire expanse of social life. To the fine artist everything appears as "material" to be incorporated into their practice—a gargantuan reserve of potential for valorization—and thus, the inaugural move towards its privatization.

Some writers more attentive to the shortcomings of fine art propose that the more nebulous concept of "poetics" ought to take up the task of "language beyond communication". Poetry is often posited in opposition to the reduction of language to communication in a cultural environment oversaturated with information. "Bifo" even goes as far as to assert that what we are experiencing under communicative capitalism is nothing short of "semio-inflation", the decreasing stock-value of "meaning" in an age of superfluous and superficial information. Here, supreme "meaning", as epitomized by poetry, appears as the *gold standard of language*. Again, the question is framed as one of quality (depth) vs. quantity (surface), and our poet remains captive to the metaphysics of "content". Moaning about "excessive amounts of communication" is a position as reactionary as it is elitist. It amounts to little else than a limp nostalgia for the good old days of incontestable "truth", stable signifiers and symbolic coherence. An excess of communication remains to be banished.

What high culture fails to stomach is the obscenity of Hot Air, its menacing baseness: *its filth*.

Hot Air is not to be mistaken for a simple protagonist. As with all waste, there's a real danger of contagion and contamination, of soiling, of things turning to shit. Hot Air is risky. An eruption of Hot Air can be a sight of marvel or a catastrophe; an entropic collapse of language. Hot Air can be coarse and vile and unruly; unreliable and lazy. It refuses the assertive positivity of communication, its hygienic pathologies and the compulsion to participate. Hot Air owes

no explanation; it doesn't snitch. It's unwelcome but *sticks around*.

There's an irreconcilable ambiguity in Hot Air, an inherent negativity: lollipops and crisps but also haunted attics; immense joy but also dread; comradery and rivalry; broken windows and smashed ATM screens, but…

Hot Air interrupts the ossifying of any "truth", melts it, throws it up for contestation; keeps it wet, up for grabs but slippery to hold, fleeting—*in flight*. The space for difference and conflict is kept open. The world remains incomplete, unresolved; in flux. *It's in the making as it is unmade.*

-     The main sentiment expressed in this text echo the writings of Georges Bataille (especially as read through the works of Tere Vadén and Antti Salminen) as well as those of the anonymous group Tiqqun (especially the essay The Cybernetic Hypothesis). Also Situated Knowledges, the landmark essay by Donna Haraway, has served as one of my main points of reference.

EATING FLOWERS

—

GUILTY PLEASURES

LUCIE DE BRÉCHARD

Lucie de Bréchard (1995) is a French designer living and working in Amsterdam.
With a work infused by her own aesthetic obsessions, she writes and performs within cross-medium
installations, bridging the false dichotomy between the personal and the political, proposing
unfamiliar curves of criticality within the design field.

This text is deeply inspired by The Passion According to G.H by *Clarice Lispector and Audre Lorde's* Sister Outsider. *It has been fed along the way by* The Dialogue of Two Snails *by Frederico Garcià Lorca,* The Mushroom at the End of the World *by Anna Tsing and numerous generous talks with Rana Ghavami, Tina Bastajian and Petra Van Barbandt among others.*

PROLOGUE

The Resistance in me is bruised from trying to achieve academic and dry critical thinking. The Resistance in me is strained and wounded from refusing to let go of my Eros. Forced to cope with the global battlefield of survival, the Resistance in me refused to make room for trouble, mystification and vagueness.

Writing between the actual, the political and the imaginary, the Resistance in me will try to embrace a position that does not hold itself outside of Time and History, to analyze my aesthetic desires and cherished visual reflexes, underlining what I care and crave for, playing up and pointing to my abstractions. In order to be able to say, *'I care'*, the Resistance in me will have to draw attention to childhood stories, plants around us, corrupt systems of fear and forgotten tales, as well as small gestures of love, education, tradition, guilt and self-reflection. Learning to look at, being transformed by. As my inner movements, capabilities, moods and conditions are subject to constant change, and as several emotions and angles can arise and exist at the same moment, I'll be writing on behalf of three alter egos, trying to embrace these capabilities without putting one in the front of, or erasing, the others.

'Eco Psalm'

Christians thought it pagan to worship the tree, the earth
and now it's (almost?) too late to renegotiate that mistake
—Steep-sloped hillside, aster-strewn, defibrillate at noon
The run off of hard acid rain crying down the grassy face
of the actual—while ladies take the luxury of apostasy
we are all going down the rabbit hole of pain whether we
like it or not—on unbornout urban myth the the water
goes round the other way on the other side of the equator'

`Lee Ann Brown`

SOGGY CORPSES

When I was young and not able to understand why certain things
are forbidden, I used to eat flowers. I remember being particularly
drawn to one kind that had a creamy white bulb in its center, and pink
towards the tips of its five petals. I would pick the flowers that had
leaves of wide enough diameter to allow other organics to be rolled
up inside. I would then place them on the soil as amuses-bouche
on a platter and, once the composition was satisfyingly organized,
eat them one by one, trying to analyze the taste, the texture, and
the look of each before and after rumination. The process was very
strict. I had to go slow so I could taste every layer, each bit of the
hybrid matter, in order to compare it later on with the intuition I'd
had while making it. I would not swallow them for fear of getting
sick and therefore getting caught. My body had to stay safe and
sound for the ritual to keep going, as I knew that I had to perform
the act secretly, even if at the time I couldn't grasp the reason why
it was not allowed, why it was unspeakable. To not voice the rite
was to keep it in the body itself; voicing it would have made the
excitement of the forbidden fruit melt away. Therefore, I would
simply place them back on the organic platter after mastication,
observing what the act of chewing had done to them. The flowers
emerged wide open, looking like they had swallowed themselves.
The soil ended up covered by these sacrificial lambs, which rested
on the dirt, sharing the same distances between each other. One side
of the plate was reserved for the already eaten flowers, the other for
those to come. In rumination, the color of the petals would melt in
grayness, as my teeth would rip off their patterns, leaving marks,
uncovering veneers, transforming the plants' original aspects. The
mud and the dirt would melt into the sacrificed dish, making it
unclean in the primal sense, pushing this inhibited act again into
the private sphere, guarding the secret feast ritual with the pristine
state of my well-being.

All around were serene noises, scent of trees, little surprises
among the vines. The whole garden crushed by the eve faster
instants of the afternoon. From where did that half dream
come that encircled her? Like a droning of bees and birds.

Everything was strange, too gentle, too big.

`Clarice Lispector, Daydream and Drunkness of a Young Lady, 25.`

CLACKING MOLARS

Because, in this act, my satiation was born out of not-knowing,
I hope that mapping the complexities of my aesthetic[1] desires won't
kill my darlings. I could take pleasure in the ritual because I did not
try to understand it and therefore avoided self-consciousness by
embracing the primrose path. As the worst achievement, the most
absurd aim, would be to empty out pleasure with hyperawareness,
proposing Telluric Moves in order to claim power back is also an
attempt to experiment with pure joy and satisfaction within the
realms of image-consciousness, meaning: you can still be aware
and not deny pleasure. I wish to press the matter, release it from
its condition, just as I ripped the flowers from their original aspect
with my teeth; Polished Aesthetics need to be wrung out, their
slickness squeezed out, their capitalistic imagery purged like so
much sweat.

The result was *messy*. Dampness, compost and messiness are
often represented as unclean, as going against the slick, the glam-
ourous, the comfortable, the safe.[2] But in messiness things melt with
each other; it is a plea for the miscellaneous. In moisture, things

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1. `'Up there in the sky there is no need for aesthetics.`
   `Here on earth people seek the beautiful because it vaguely`
   `reminds them of the good. This is the only reason for`
   `aesthetics. They're the reminder of something that has gone.'`
   `John Berger, `*`To the Wedding`*`, (London: Bloomsbury, 1995).`

2. `'Shine and shininess are characteristic of surface effects, of`
   `glamour and spectacle, of bling-bling contingency, of ephemeral`
   `novelty, value added, and disposable fascination. Shine is`
   `what seizes upon affect as its primary carrier to mobilize`
   `attention. Shine could be the paradoxically material base of`
   `an optical economy typically (mis) understood as being purely`
   `cognitive or immaterial. Even at an art fair or Hollywood gala,`
   `surface effects are widely deployed while being categorically`
   `condemned to the domain of inconsequential superficiality,`
   `for shine is also persistently unwilling to compromise speed`
   `for substance, surface for depth, attractiveness for soul,`
   `effect for content, projection for stasis, inflationary wealth,`
   `success, and splendor for reality.' Tom Holert, "The Sunshine`
   `State," e-flux, no. 61 (January 2015), https://www.e-flux.com`
   `/journal/61/60987/the-sunshine-state/.`

can still grow, move, interact; they are not anchored, numbed or rooted in time. To introduce messiness as one of a kind is therefore to consider it as precious, rare, valuable. A gem surrounded by vagueness, shining amid the trouble of sweet nausea.

> Worried, she looked around. The branches were swaying, the shadows wavering on the ground. A sparrow was pecking at the dirt. And suddenly, in distress, she seemed to have fallen into an ambush. There was a secret labor underway the garden that she was starting to perceive. In the trees the fruits were black, sweet like honey. On the ground were dried pits full of circumvolutions, like little rotting brains. The bench was strained with purple juices. With intense gentleness the waters murmured. Clinging into the tree trunk were the luxuriant limbs of a spider. The cruelty of the world was tranquil. The murder was deep. And death was not what we thought.
>
> Clarice Lispector, *Daydream and Drunkness of a Young Lady*, 26.

It is impossible to establish any kind of measurement of 'the enjoyment of' or 'our satisfaction with' aesthetics, in the same way that we cannot establish contact with the subject. This un-graspability of aesthetics finds itself in messiness, and in moistness: it is too saturated for us to grasp and too liquid for us to hold completely in our hands without it slipping, slurping throughout fingers and palms.

The Fruits
Stalking the bolds and the braves,
Transparent hills and glazed behaviors.
The inflatable and the gastric.
bobbing up and down,
silk strollers and baby-boomers
swimming against plastic dunes.

Left on the marble counter, a glass of red
Flat, round, and empty.
Big boiled sweets,
Brisk tonalities and seashells.
Bathing in honey,
and in the oil that did not gush,
enlarged,

fulfilled in human guilt,
A taming mask on a dog.

CLACKING MOLARS

These Polished Aesthetics, swarming with slickness, are ignorant visual fantasies, maintaining the digital culture of visual pleasure as a system of oppression, ignoring its sociopolitical context and its intrinsic layers of meaning. Theirs is the dream of a clean-land relayed by a mono-narrative of time, blinded by privilege and leaving no spare space for the bodily reality of life. The image is slick, flawless, clean. These are aesthetics that suppress any vital 'flaws' while enhancing an ecological power.[3] By suppressing any organic feeling, these visual candies ignore, or worse, act as simulacra, guises, mimicking the context of 'how things are made', hence veiling their erotic value.[4] As in compost, the Middle Voice knows no hierarchies: it goes against cartesian and linear thinking, even in its own identity.[5]

3. 'These renders succeed in entrancing the human eye by being a mix of alien and familiar; by being both a lure and untouchable , unrealistic object, something that seems to come from elsewhere.… This otherness hints at the power of larger forces than the self, a sensation that can temporarily skew reality and create an awareness of the temporal limits of one's body and the normal flows of visual processing.… Shininess seems to demonstrate value and entice lust … often imparts a sense of rarity or ecological power, and wetness is usually a kind of vital interface.… Contemporary products also tend to employ many of the same fetish textures and forms—glossy, biomorphic, etc. The effect aims to express this same creature-hood: the appearance of intelligence so advanced that it appears as a living, adapting process.'

   Kari Altman, "Soft Brand Abstracts: Closer than ever before," Requested and commissioned for PLATFORM by the Hirshhorn Museum & Goethe Institute, curated by Melanie Bühler, Nov 2012

4. 'It has become fashionable to separate the spiritual (psychic and emotional) from the political, to see them as contradictory or antithetical. "What do you mean, a poetic revolutio- nary, a meditating gunrunner?" In the same way, we have attempted to separate the spiritual and the erotic, thereby reducing the spiritual to a world of flattened affect, a world of the ascetic who aspires to feel nothing. But nothing is farther from the truth. For the ascetic position is one of the highest fear, the gravest immobility. The severe abstinence of the asce- tic becomes the ruling obsession. And it is one not of self-discipline but of self-abnegation.' Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkley: Crossing Press, 1984)

5. 'The only danger in all this is that the virtual could be confused with the possible. The possible is opposed to the real; the process undergone by the possible is therefore a realisa- tion. By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is actualisation. It would be wrong to see only a verbal dispute here: it is a question of existence itself.' Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013), 211.

To produce compost, pick a backyard. I would like to read *backyard* as I read *background*, and *picking* as *embracing*, *being fully immersed in*. As compost is made of layers of matters synthesizing with each other, it is defined by the experienced, in the sense that every part is communicating with each other within a known context in order to create a third substance, that which is wished for. And that which is wished for only appears after things are left to mingle for a time in their self-produced heat, creating a new kind of matter, accepting the unknown, the unsolved, as empowering. To embrace the Middle Voice is to embrace compost as a ritual of digestion. Eating flowers without swallowing, not considering matter to have only two ends—the intact and the eaten—but instead focusing on the half-ruminated, embracing intermezzos, considering the halfway point of a staircase a possible destination.[6]

SOGGY CORPSES

I would then organize them from the most damaged to the best preserved, establishing a time-lapse of the destruction of bodies by another body, poring over details and wounds, finding redemption in the idea that I had created the hybrid.

Ripping my tongue on my hard palate, clacking molars, I was observing a gaze that would later on become mine. Transcendence would come to me and to the mouth itself. The masticated white matter placed carefully on the soil and the sour taste covering my tongue would together come to me as the most delicate vision of the afterlife that I could have ever witnessed. The sogginess of the corpse after ingestion gave me joy and made me proud, as if I had created beauty myself. Real things had to coagulate, like rotten fruits embedded in spittle or other organically saturated layers.

The hybridity of the carcass was messy enough for me to make it mine. Putting the protoplasm in my mouth, there would be no difference between it and myself, and the un-cleanliness of the act would be erased by the extreme beauty that it would create. Finally, my body soaked in organics would generate a new kind of joy, almost a kind of winsomeness. I would stare in silence. The lambs would sit still, returning my look, making the purest and most subtle sound, as if their petals were fighting against sticky saliva

6. 'The nomad has a territory as he has points between which he travels. Going from one point to another. The water point is always a step, it is reached in order to be left behind: every point is a relay. This in-betweeness embraced by the nomad allows him to enjoy both an autonomy and independence.'

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), 380.

to open again, to be re-born. They would become something else, and I would have a say in their path as I became their mother—this would sustain me as I gave and relished life within my own moistness. Ignorance and destruction turned into motherhood, and motherhood turned into power: the act formed by the physical ended emotionally, deeply born under mis-understanding. Rooted in the erotic, strength came from the pure capacity for joy. I would wait for my breath to come back to its initial state before rushing back into the house, leaving the ritual inside the outside, keeping motherhood to myself. Because I had been soaked in the matter once, the spell would last in the crude and in the raw, silently vibrating in my prior life, half-swimming.

The Fruits
A stagnant wheel,
slowly growing in the reflection of your ocular globes,
the prolific, the multiple.
The sensuousness,
the smooth polish of your coat,
surrender, surrender
you said,
drowning.

Genuine feelings and bathroom tiles.
The airport gaze
Rendering perfect curves,
Silicon guts and murky jewels
Muttering secrets in the mist,
Some ashes or some sand,
Lush the grapes
Where the brick gleams yellow.

SOGGY CORPSES

I had performed the forbidden act, meaning not giving sense to what I saw, not understanding what I got myself engaged in. Not that I refused it, but the image itself made me full and satisfied. I enjoyed every part of it, but my brain remained empty of any sounds that could explain the attraction. My belly was full of slickness and blossom, and it was enough. Enough for me. Enough, in the sense that it was good for the day and my eyes could close rested: it was an acceptable amount. My ability to sense the colloidal and liquid substance of the organism would be enough to provide me the ability to plunge myself in the miscellaneous: a love so great, where things could just enjoy themselves and where a ferocious

joy would overtake me. Because my pleasure was firmly outside any form of self-negation or flagellation, and a stranger to any system of capitalistic consumption, my sinless thirst became a bridge between the spiritual and the political from which I could rise up empowered.[7]

Later on, rolling the fibers of the carpet around my fingers, I would learn that I could possess beauty myself by alienating an already complete entity, a done matter, and that the only reason for possession was creation and that ugly walls could be solved by an awareness of their state and that decay did not necessarily mean death. By boiling plants, free, in the open, I could own. I could remove entities from their condition, that of being fixed objects, in order to possess them. If I focused on the step rather than on the destination itself, it was mine, it belonged to me; I owned, I had Capital. My own little bourgeoisie, my own sacred relics. And for these I had to move towards a controlled abstraction, a loss of the self in the lyrical and the poetic. *So long, good luck.*

CLACKING MOLARS

Now, as I am not a child anymore, as I hopelessly fail to describe my attachment to these matters, I want to reclaim slickness, moistness, dampness. I want to claim power over the aesthetics that made me feel delight itself and raw satisfaction. Claiming power over liquidity and wetness, over flowers and saliva, over bodily matters and ecological virtue, to get them out of the Capitalistic sphere, to re-integrate them in the pure-beauty of the Middle Voice and of speculative time, as one bathes in ice to be regenerated, I need to commune with yet another mouthful in order to explore my pleasures and relocate my desires within communities of resistance—in things I believe in, in the causes of joy, fairness and whatever else, even if only clumsily so, and in ways weakened by my own ignorance. To amuse myself is (*not only*) not enough.

> *But life made her shiver, like a chill. She heard the school bell, distant and constant. The little horror of the dust threading together the underside of the oven, where she discovered the little spider. Carrying the vase to change its water—there was*

the horror of the flower surrounding languid and sickening to her hands. The same secret labor was underway there in the kitchen. Near the trash can, she crushed the ant with her foot. The little murder of the ant. The tiny body trembled. The water droplets were dripping into the stagnant water in the laundry sink. The summer beetles. All around was a silent, slow, persistent life. Horror, horror. She paced back and forth across the kitchen, slicing the steaks, stirring the sauce. Round her head, circling, round the light, the mosquitos of a sweltering night. A night on which compassion was raw as bad love. Between her two breasts sweat slid down. Faith was breaking her, the heat of the stove stung her eyes.

Clarice Lispector, *Daydream and Drunkness of a Young Lady*, 26.

Even if cherishing aesthetics in ignorance seems unavoidable, I wish to re-integrate my composted wishes for beauty into radicality and care, into a conscious path of empowerment via and for beauty, for the shine, the erotic and the polished, to bring them back from the Artificial Oasis they're drying and dying in, to re-integrate the condition into its own situation.

I want to feel the unreality of reality again. And by feeling the unreality of reality, I mean feeling the lack of something that could have been mine. As these aesthetics are appropriated by Capitalism, they become the Artificial Oasis: advertising fertile ground in arid areas, but not actually producing it. The Artificial Oasis uses liquidity and wetness as conditions without embedding them within its situation—that situation being the inhumanity of Capitalism, which is defined by unfree labor, bureaucratic rationality and mass production, amongst other things. Even if I do find satisfaction in looking at this Artificial Oasis, I want much more than it provides: I want to find redemption through the re-use of its values, and forgiveness in the re-appropriation of images used solely in the capitalistic field, promoting a system ignoring messiness, not-knowing, and personal matters. And for this I will need to redefine my desires in the same way that I ate those flowers: ruminating on, analyzing, looking at and learning from them. I'll need to introduce Telluric Moves in order to re-appropriate the Artificial Oasis' gaze, and to ruminate, as if becoming one with them: blurring the distinction between my identity and theirs until we become one composted matter, a third apparition—the Middle Voice. This is the treasure that I am seeking: a diversity that, being inherently plural, goes beyond and within its contextual sphere, promoting fluid entities rather that strict categories.

[7]. 'The world looks at itself in me. Everything looks at everything, everything lives the other; in this desert things uno things. Things know things so much that that's… that's what I call forgiveness, if I want to save myself in the human world. It's forgiveness itself. Forgiveness is an attribute of living matter.'

Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H*, trans. Ronald W. Sousa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

The Fruits

Extraction and consumption,
A printed curtain, showing with vigor
Epicurean pleasures, slipping through,
Hot liquor, swollen,
Dripping.
Wax, Gel, Silk,
and Oysters,—A suitcase.

Gore-tex phantasm and Waterproof fantasies
Ripen into the sacred and into the one-of-a-kind,
The revenge of nature tied into a knot.
Goodbye dirt,
goodbye dust,
Still-life(s) of my own nostalgia.

CLACKING MOLARS

Introducing a multi-channeled consciousness that would see Polished Aesthetics as simply the purest visual capacity of an image, avoiding neoliberalism's unique history and its monopoly over the narration of time—just as liberal-humanism separates the body from the mind, as if the body is only be a shell for consciousness and lived experiences,[8] and sees aesthetics as only a representation of politics—would be not only a mistake but also a failure of perception. It would leave no space for misunderstanding things, for the beauty of feeling lost. Not every riddle has to be solved. Again, in the same way the body is not a shell for the mind to live in, aesthetics are not containers for politics and meanings, or at least are not only containers: they are places for wetness, moisture; places where bits of things and layers of meanings mix with strata of misunderstanding, where affect and effect intermingle in the lyrical; a synergy of the actual, the political, the virtual and

the imaginary.[9] To feel, to look at the gap between the desired and the improvised,[10] to make room for the merged and the conglomerated, is to serve interpretations and divergences and therefore to make space for reflections outside and inside of what is being sold to us: to claim power by embracing it.

To present the Middle Voice is not only a way to pay close attention to my actual aesthetic cravings but is also a proposal of care, an attempt to shift my view of the past: How do I fetishize past matters and trends? Do I still succumb to the old pitfalls of authenticity? I'm trying to achieve redemption for misplaced nostalgia.

The future as seen through Polished Aesthetics is a kind of self-produced simulated world that allows us to agree on an idea of speculation—a world that we hope to habit one day. It is a shiny world where everything tends towards perfection, where dream-like aesthetics let us believe in our self-production and self-autonomy. It is a soft-power, focusing on purity, repressing the messiness of life while at the same time promoting ecological power and selling otherness through mythical, mysterious images.[11]

8. 'According to Deleuze, it is not uniquely the body or the subject, but the sensible in general that rises to the role of the recorder of experience. Experience, in this view, is not the Human accumulation of clear and cut facts but, rather, counts as the dimension of what is lived; equally, sensation is not just what belongs to the senses, but what strikes us before meaning is trapped into figuration and signification.'

M. Beatrice Fazi, "Digital Aesthetics: The Discrete and the Continuous," *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 1 (January 2019): 3–26.

9. 'Any useful system should be a system that only can be regarded as a totality, as a force field between several elements with a strong gravitational pull. As soon as any element is isolated or goes missing, the whole system is rendered useless'

Marc Boumeester, *The Desire of the Medium* (Arnhem: ArtEZ Press), 43.

10. 'In politics, I think that the question is less microperceptions than procedures, practices that are apt to produce new perceptions carrying new consequences, to produce collective assemblages of enunciation experimenting with ways of combining creation with an active, experimental taking into account of their milieu—a milieu that is by definition unhealthy—experimenting with how to "think through the middle," through the milieu, in the way that collectives for direct nonviolent action have done, knowing that the cops will provoke in any case.'

Isabelle Stengers, "History through the Middle: Between Macro and Mesopolitics," interview by Brian Massumi and Erin Manning, *INFLeXions*, no. 3 (October 2009), https://www.inflexions.org/n3_stengershtml.html.

11. 'Similarly to the abstract render, product design often aims for a sensation of newness, of "alien" provenance and end-of-world nextness that still seems somehow within reach. New materials and interfaces are proposed in these images for hype value only. Contemporary products also tend to employ many of the same fetish textures and forms—glossy, biomorphic, etc. The effect aims to express this same creaturehood: the appearance of intelligence so advanced that it appears as a living, adapting process. Yet a lot of needless or redundant mutations also make their way into the fray. Many of these products will never be made, acting as a momentary lure into branded territory.'

Kari Altman, Soft Brand Abstract, Closer than ever before Requested and commissioned for PLATFORM by the Hirshhorn Museum & Goethe Institute, curated by Melanie Bühler, Nov 2012.

And at that point, anything goes: nostalgia, excitement about the future, depression about the now, hope, hopelessness, tradition, joy, sadness, death and rebirth.

To look at what the externality of things says about their politics, to dig down, going against the core reality of surfaces, is to look at and over the view, scrutinizing images that have the agency themselves to prepare a ground for us on which to be able to feel lost again, to discover in order to forget, to be aware in order to remove the guilt from pure enjoyment. Or to solve a riddle, looking at its words and not at the answer itself.[12]

The amuse-bouche: eating without eating; bourgeois symbol of the non-need, of the non-useful; playing with the mouth without feeding it; a thing of beauty, mirroring the easiness of rich and comfortable living. As in the tradition of visual pleasure, most emergent and dominant languages can never be based on equality. Here I rest with my flowers, trying to embrace my seductions while at the same time rejecting class, observing my yearning for the rare and for the unique. Here I rest with my flowers, finding ways to remove the very Christian *guilty pleasures* from my consciousness, reconstructing my desires and my own modes of attraction and in doing so, trying to re-introduce critical visual pleasure via the messy, the smelly and the confused, going against the instrumental rigidity and rationality of the Branded Field, bringing back the transcendental affective dimension of Polished Aesthetics. I want to bridge the false dichotomy between aesthetics and the political, to build on new relationships with spirituality and care. I am swimming in Elysian Fields, being sold the glossy and the biomorphic, the vital interface, the ecological power of 3D-rendered curves.

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12. 'What is a crack? How does this propagate? How is that encountered? What brings this to a threshold, where it breaks? These are questions which demand the invention of beings, such as the crack, that are called for with a manner of being all their own, and which enter more into narratives than into deductions.… In politics, I think that the question is less microperceptions than procedures, practices that are apt to produce new perceptions carrying new consequences, to produce collective assemblages of enunciation experimenting with ways of combining creation with an active, experimental taking into account of their milieu—a milieu that is by definition unhealthy—experimenting with how to "think through the middle," through the milieu.'

Isabelle Stengers, "History through the Middle: Between Macro and Mesopolitics," interview by Brian Massumi and Erin Manning, *INFLeXions*, no. 3 (October 2009), https://www.inflexions.org/n3_stengershtml.html.

The Fruits

Mistrust and the tanning box,
candies of desire
swarming, quenching.
Hyper-evolved,
breathing grey
giving dust,
looking gold,
but smelling like its rotten
and past and squeezed,
squeezed and squeezed

The humid luxury
of loud voices

So what does it mean
if my walls are grey
and if my throat is full of broken nails
what does it mean
Motherhood
so weak
it faded with the morning

SOGGY CORPSES

While imaginary—it was a world to sink one's teeth into,
a world of voluminous dahlias and tulips. The trunks were
criss-crowsedby leafy parasites, their embrace was soft, sticky.
Like a revulsion that precedes a surrender—
it was fascinating, the woman was nauseated, and it
was fascinating.

Clarice Lispector, *Daydream and Drunkness of a Young Lady*, 26.

Earlier, as a glimmer, playing in the grass, putting dust in my throat, along with Lilas, Tulips, Roses and Orchids; later on, looking at mop-clean floors and digital fetish textures. I had begun to see without awareness, and thus delight and crude satisfaction came to me. Gratification came from richness and comfort and came back to the same place. As I fight or intend to distance myself from the powerful, who replicate, bootleg and rip-off, I fall nonetheless into the same assemblage, reproducing the pattern of a dry mono-narration. Where do my twisted desires stand? How exactly does one adapt to one's own working process? It is not about the end but rather about learning to love, finding new comforts, and hence staging my aesthetic experience, giving it the care it craves, paying close attention.

But being bugged seems inevitable. However many flowers caress my tongue, I'll always end up brushing them aside with my elbow, cold-shouldering their real state, because that's what seems to be the curse of comfort and of the well-meaning thoughts hidden under tradition, guilt, class and self-negation. Letting myself be bugged seems like the only obstacle, though I can't yet decide, myself, how to overcome it. Maybe it is only *bavardage*, bourgeois and empty. I refuse to let myself let go, for my eros has made it worse, emphasizing my desires without relocating them or succumbing to my cherished fears, even within an honest and intimate account.

However, hopefully, my inability to bedazzle my attachment will become an outline for becoming, for finding joy in progress, in nursing, in care, self-work and realization—*healing* (literally, *being made whole*), bursting out of consciousness, hybridized with joy and unapologetic winsomeness. Without pleasure, self-care and self-love, the system will no longer work. Lyricality is therefore a tool for claiming power back: it represents a conscious decision to live for and by beauty from which I rise up empowered to not settle for the merely safe, merely beautiful.

EPILOGUE

Coping does not need to be hard or else rational. It necessitates neither dryness nor coldness. The Resistance in me needs to make room for the personal, the mystical, the not-knowing, the crooked, the metaphoric, the sublime, the sweet. The Resistance in me will cope sweetly alongside the muddy path of incompleteness and uncertainty, as our knowledge can't and will never be complete. The resistance in me will sing in polyphony to find and try a new sense of my own self within an awareness of my identity desires. How did these images make me? Again, where do my twisted attractions stand? The Resistance in me will embrace riotous feelings and diso-bedience, performing new trajectories of criticality, eating flowers.

The Fruits
We died a little
looking at the hole.
Learning to love the curves
of our caves.

Replacing thoughts—putting them back.
Light on what used to be foam made it darker,
as the womb got dry, tenderly.

GLOSSARY

Clacking Molars
Controlled and rigid analysis of behaviors, forced discipline in the writing.

Soggy Corpses
Contains lyricality, controlled abstraction expressed in fiction.

The Fruits
Complete loss of self-consciousness, abandonment of fear, poetry, unapologetic writing.

Polished Aesthetics are expressed through digital rep-resentations of slickness, shininess, wetness and moisture. Polished Aesthetics use a certain set of visual features to enhance ecological power and mythical otherness while at the same time cultivating familiarity by using bodily and organic matter such as oil, milk, sperm, fruits, etc. Often mixed (or confused) with *Carnal Aesthetics* (blood, flesh, etc.).

The Middle Voice finds itself between the inside of the mind and the actual, factual world. It allows a situated complexity, a sensitive field promoting that which is experienced and conglom-erated while being aware and conscious of the Market and its tactics, countering the digital commercial landscape. It argues for collaboration, performativity, messiness. The Middle Voice prais-es the miscellaneous in order to bridge sociopolitical awareness and pure visual pleasures. It is hyper conscious of the relationalities behind Aesthetics.

Telluric Moves are slow movements of going under, digging down and therefore going against the core reality of surfaces—reaching 'beyond [the digital's] flat plane'[13] and brushing off the rhythm imposed by the digital. Telluric Moves allow me to bring Polished Aesthetics back into the affective, that which is experi-enced and conglomerated. They are a method for attaining the Middle Voice. They are the result of a conscious decision to live for and by beauty from which I rise up empowered to not settle for the merely safe, merely beautiful.

[13]. —Aden Evens, "Digital Ontology and Example," in Peter Gaffney, ed., The Force of the Virtual: Deleuze, Science, and Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 147–168.

The Artificial Oasis is the sweat from the Branded Field's use of Polished Aesthetics. It promotes fertility in arid areas without actually producing the wetness that is needed and is therefore an ignorant visual fantasy. The Artificial Oasis (meaning: mis-placed purity, the simulation of perfection through slick, capitalistic imagery) causes oppression and goes against, in its own nature, the Middle Voice (meaning: messiness, the core-reality of life, queerness, moisture). The untouchable, pure, authentic self is promoted (meaning the post-capitalized, post-globalized) and branded via *Elysian Fictions* (meaning: Elysian Fields, paradise after death, the promise of autonomy and the reproduction of the self). Finished products appear without backgrounds, without a backyard to be composted in. The oil that did not gush. These aesthetics have become Branding Reflexes: ignoring any political situation, history, value, milieu.

The Artificial Oasis uses Elysian Fictions to promote a past that never existed and a future that is only the lure of the Market and of the Branded Field. I would like to introduce two of its major streams: *Branded Times* and *Conscious Time*. It is important here to insist on the plurality of Branded Times as opposed to the unity of Conscious Time, a continuum in which we evolve and look at events. Branded Times look to a myriad of temporalities in order to promote Capital and ownership. Branded Times exist solely within political image manipulation and consumerism. It is possible that at some point the Branded(s) and the Conscious will cross, creating not a Middle Voice but only an unwanted in-betweenness of confusion profitable to the market.

Amuse-bouche

From French, meaning 'appetizer'. Its intention is to amuse, to play with the mouth. It is a bourgeois symbol of comfort, of non-need and of the non-useful. It plays with the mouth without actually feeding the stomach.

To make room for in-betweenness is to leave room for interpretations and divergences and therefore for reflections outside of what is being sold to us—or within it, embracing it.

INTRO/EPILOGUE/INTRO

I am truly grateful for the many stimulating conversations with these nine designers which transpired over the past several months at the Sandberg Instituut and beyond, and I have been moved by their individual and collective wisdom and generosity. It is through a deep sense of commitment that these authors excavate and nuance rather uncharted personal, political, professional and artistic territory through various modes of essayistic writing that expand the design palette. Their contributions gesture to re-think our own *raison d'etre* in the scope of shared and distant spaces, (infra) structures, and potential assemblages.

This collection of writing expands lexicons, dialogues with temporality, transgresses surfaces, problematizes visibility, and indulges rapture—a spiral of subjectivities and timely protagonists. Whilst reading through these design frictions, you might be inclined to ask: what does a square watermelon and talent (*Zavidova*); animal aphorisms and future houses (*Meeus)*; images of forlorn computer cables, an inexhaustible list of Google logins/logouts and a cryptic fortune cookie message (*Hervás Gómez*); sticky remainders and naps of reason (*Saarinen*); dystopian apps, asymmetry, and gleaning (*Trenker*); gut feelings, surface appearances and relational polyphony (*Walker*); encounters with mutable pronouns and graciousness (*Buur*); composted wishes and fluid entities (*de Bréchard*); ghost riding, *data morganas* and the suspension of belief (*Krischock*); contribute to critical design debates and practices? This is for you, our avid page turner to encounter, contest, engage, contemplate, resist and savor. Read on.

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