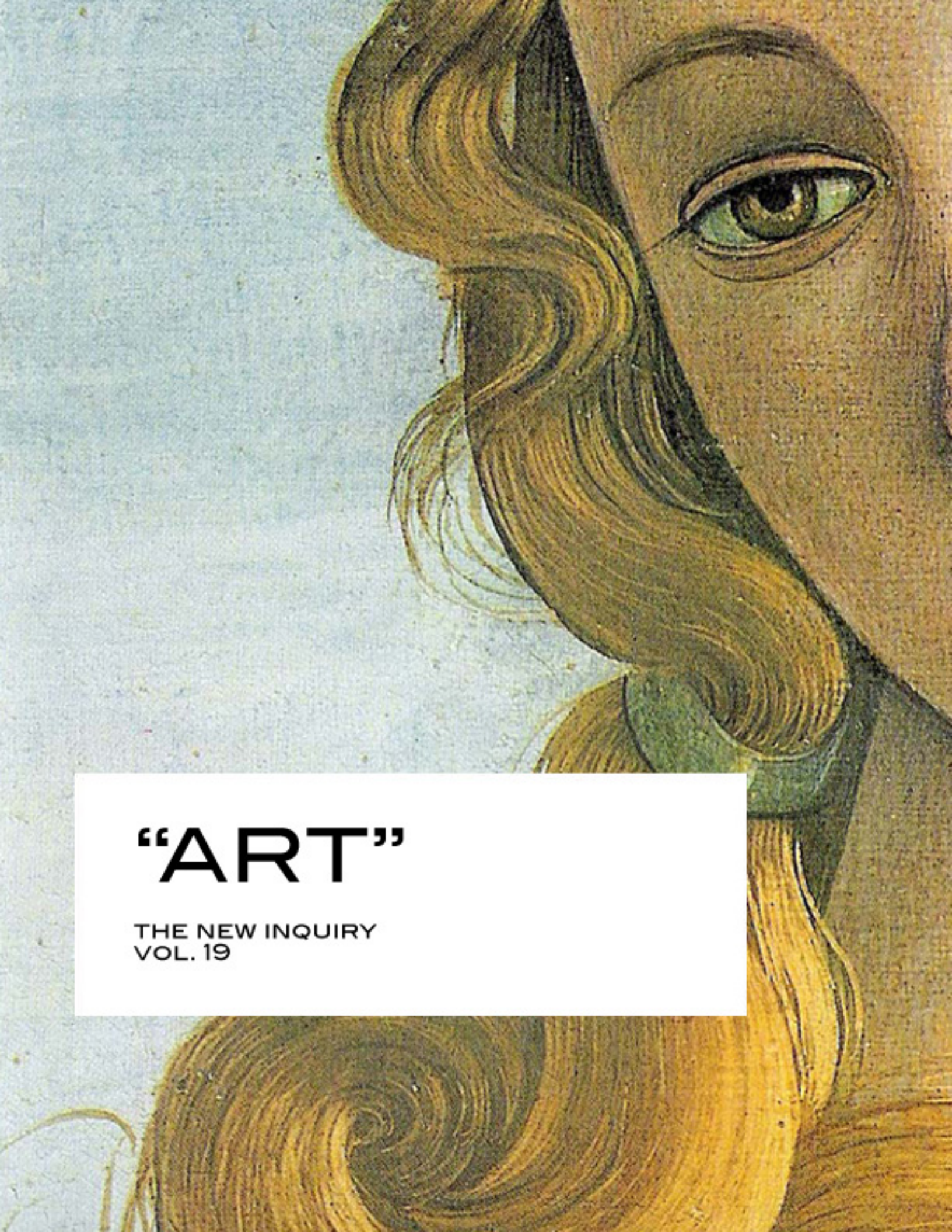

“ART”

THE NEW INQUIRY
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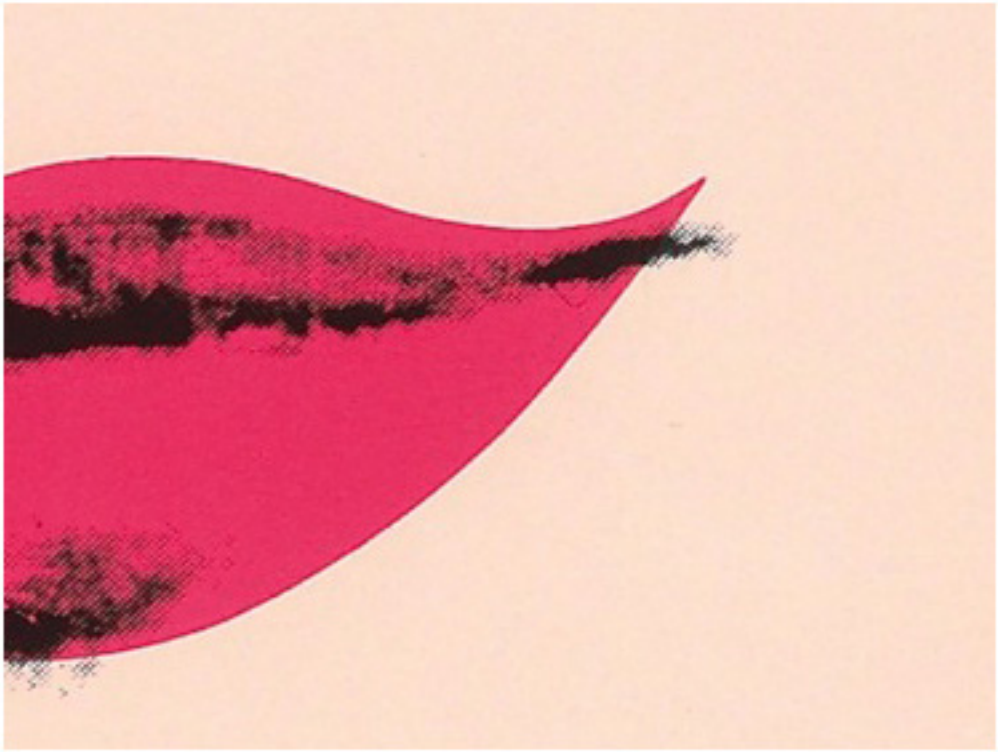
“ART”



THE NEW INQUIRY MAGAZINE

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EDITORIAL NOTE

CENTRAL TO THE project of contemporary art—the discourse about it and the market for it—is the question of what actually constitutes art this year, this week, in general. As such, it would be inappropriate to offer any kind of editorial consensus here, and indeed, the dialogue and dialectics generated by the asking and re-asking of this question account for most of this publication's content and a good percentage of all texts and artworks being circulated in and around the [art] world at any given time. Next year there could be more.

In keeping with the liquid-modern, high-accelerationist turn that defines much contemporary thinking on the production and distribution of commodities, the art world's metabolism just keeps on getting faster. The art market is the frontier of spectral, libidinal value creation, hungry and horny, as Nick Faust has it in a juicy romp through the prophylactic discourses of art history right up into a chubby, fruit-smelling, late-capitalist NOW where everything is "harsh, ethereal, fuzzy, stark, amplified, severe, ringing." A fertile slippage occurs when the spheres of knowledge and the spheres of expression begin to merge, as with the work of Nelly Ben Hayoun, (here interviewed by Deena Chalabi), whose project International Space Orchestra has several generations of NASA scientists performing and recording a high-modern absurdist opera in the SETI Institute. What happens to the recordings? Beamed into space, of course.

Artists and curators everywhere are looking beyond the white cube. The function of the gallery remains tied to the preservation of traditional art-world values in order to preserve traditional art-world models of value creation, as argued by Loney Abrams in "Flatland;" it was arguably ever thus, but in a post-Internet economy in which art is primarily viewed on-screen and online, new strategies are both possible and necessary. The alleged democratization effect afforded by networked technologies is often posited as the most significant recent development in culture and society, posing new questions—or, let's face it, the same old questions—as to where the work resides and how we should look at it. Parker Ito's *America Online Made Me Hardcore* (2013), cited in Brad Troemel's "Athletic Aesthetics," shows a digitized photograph of roses in a vase, with a rough Photoshop paint job scribbled over in yellow. Superimposed over the image, the text—a handmade font that plays impishly with that old auratic chestnut, the affect of the maker's hand. An

asshole move, but self-aware: #winning. I HEARD THAT PICASSO MADE AROUND 250,000 WORKS IN HIS LIFETIME, it reads. I COULD MAKE THAT MANY JPEGS IN 5 YEARS. AND WHEN I SAY 5 YEARS, I MEAN 5 MINUTES.

Abrams claims that "the digital photographic image can be understood as the homogenizing, ubiquitous medium of our era." Further, by having access to audiences and networks online, artists can represent and promote themselves, relying less on "market-driven galleries and institutions that restrict artists' freedom to produce prolifically and radically." Certainly this prolific radicality is also hailed by Troemel as the new power modus for millennial artists and culture makers in a world in which the veracity and velocity of the stream leave little room for particularity or affect, and the quantity, rather than quality, of an artist's work equates with the power and presence of that artistic project. The extraordinary labor of maintaining a near constant stream of content rewards itself, since "even less successful posts will serve to strengthen the bond between artist and audience, giving each a chance to reinforce the existence of the other—'I'm still here!' they say in unison."

Rob Horning deals with the problem of the artist as a good claims to creativity in a review of Ben Davis's *9.5 Thesis on Art and Class*. "Part of the problem with artists as cultural role models," writes Horning, "is that they authorize a general devaluing of labor by making it seem as though 'creativity' is its own reward." Pitting yellowism against officially-sanctioned protest art in "U.S.Ai," Malcolm Harris describes the myopic, short-circuited logic at work in the art world: "You can put an iPad in a blender, but you can't just take one off a store shelf to do it. You can break a Han Dynasty urn, but not a framed picture of someone else breaking a Han Dynasty urn." Art, writes Harris, is a reminder of what is and isn't *allowed*.

Since nothing means anything anymore and art only serves to co-opt or further hegemonic capitalist interests, it would be easy to forget that art was ever subversive. Yet Teju Cole and Maryam Monalisa Gharavi, writing respectively on the phenomenon of iconoclasm and "The Giant of Boston"—a mural variously interpreted as "an Al Qaeda operative, Bart Simpson disguised as a mujahideen fighter, the wife of a terrorist, a 'towel head Islamist holding a gun,' an 'allah [sic] loving united states hating individual,' a 'gay ninja,' a Taliban fighter, a 'tribute to [President Barack] Obama's birthday,' and in 'seriously poor taste'"—point to the latent power of images, and a whisper of what that power might speak. Taken out of context, Cole's embedded icons are no more or less tumblrable than the next Jogging post or space macro, but it's not always easy to disentangle graven images from flesh and blood. Despite all speculation and evidence to the contrary, art is real. ■

Jan Mytens, *Portrait of a Woman*, 1660s

Eine Kleine SpaceMusik

NELLY BEN HAYOUN *interviewed by* DEENA CHALABI

An experience designer discusses making social sculpture from NASA scientists and worms

Deena Chalabi talks with Nelly Ben Hayoun, experience designer at the SETI Institute and creator and director of the International Space Orchestra, about the relationships between art and design, science and culture, and history and the future. Ben Hayoun is a visiting professor at the Royal College of Art, the Architectural Association and Central St. Martins, and is a Ph.D. candidate in geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. The interview took place at Sou Fujimoto's pavilion at the Serpentine Gallery in London in July 2013.

DEENA CHALABI: You attended the Royal College of Art and you teach there, but you don't call yourself an artist.

NELLY BEN HAYOUN: I came from the art world initially. I started in fine arts and used to paint, but I don't think I was a very good painter. I decided to go into a more craft-based direction, which began as textile design. My discipline is design. I still think in those terms. I think about materials, about how they fit together. I think about communication.

Do you see big differences between design and art?

I wouldn't say there is a big difference these days. There's not even a question anymore about the fact that they're blurring, and I think the blurring of boundaries is actually a really good thing. There are no more pure disciplines. I am happy to exploit this, especially in times of crisis. This is how new disciplines and hybrid disciplines can arise. Ultimately, whatever I do, the aim is to communicate. The experience is for you, the public.

So what is an experience designer?

I come from this series of designers called

critical designers, speculative designers. My mentor is Anthony Dunne, who taught me while I was at the Royal College of Art for Design Interaction and who has created this whole platform for design for debate. He is really pushing the boundaries of design and reconsidering the element of fiction. Narrative is a big part of what we do, but instead of finding answers we generate questions. For example, how might the future of nanotechnology evolve? How might the future of synthetic biology evolve, and how might the public relate to it? So we try to generate these questions through design practices.

But critical design hasn't just popped up—it's informed by radical architects like Archigram, for example, in the '60s, by Italian Radical Design from the same period. Digging deep within this area of critical design, I came up with my own thing, which is the design of experiences, which for me is critical design with input from the theatrical world and the performative world. I look into improvisation and Commedia dell'Arte and think about how to implement that into design. I've been interested in the theory of theater, especially Brecht.

Who else is doing this kind of work?

Other people who graduated with me, like Thomas Thwaites, who has been doing a toaster from scratch. He has been all over the U.K. to try to make his own copper, his own plastic, and try to really think about what actually makes up a toaster. If you had to do it in a postindustrial world, what would you do and where would you start? Then you have other people like Zoe Papadopoulou and Catherine Kramer, who have been developing something that is more about the poetics of science. Daisy Ginsberg is another, looking at synthetic biology and asking, now that we can hack into DNA and modify it and do pretty much what we want, then what do we do?

Plenty of people who do similar things to you and your Royal College of Art colleagues might describe themselves as artists. Your last example reminds me of someone like Eduardo Kac, who uses biotechnology. He has worked with a genetics lab to splice a jellyfish protein and create a glow-in-the-dark bunny. He describes himself as an artist.

For me the key difference is about the communication and the systems that you try to design. I'm interested in thinking about not only the actual object, not only the situation. I think about things as a system, and how I will tackle the system, and I will think about how I will communicate directly with the public as my ultimate aim. As a designer you try to embed your systems within global socioeconomic ethical contexts. That's what I'm creating and what I'm trying to challenge. In a way, yes, artists do that as well. The question is, Do they think about it in terms of diagrams, mapping, things like that?

Can you briefly describe your process?

The process is similar in every single project. I always involve fieldwork as part of it, and that's how I source my collaborators as well. Most of the time the scientists I gather also end up performing as part of the final

experience. So for the project *Dark Energy in the Kitchen Sink*, I went to Geneva, into the Large Hadron Collider, which is a gigantic experiment over 100 meters underground, 27 km in diameter, where scientists have been bombarding protons at the speed of light in order to recreate the first seconds of the Big Bang.

When you hear that, when you think about it, the scale of it is just completely insane. All these brains, all these physicist brains trying to recreate something that took place on a giant scale and turn it back into something that they can actually operate. That's really fascinating. They want to know exactly what kind of matter is being created, so there is a really technical element of it, the scientific value, but there is also the poetic and the creative side: What does it feel like to be there when you switch on a machine like that? That they don't see.

And that's where I come on. I, and I guess all of us, would like to be there and would like to experience the thrill when you switch on such a big, gigantic machine that is filled with really powerful magnets. I wanted to deliver an experience that is as close to this as possible. So I asked, What if you could create a machine to generate the same material being created through the Large Hadron Collider but in your kitchen sink? I got physicists on board, and we tried to recreate the original experiment from 1927. We tried to gather all the tools that made this experiment happen in your kitchen. That implies taking apart your fridge, getting a really good friend who's also a nuclear scientist to get hold of some gadolinium, and so on. At the end of the day you can be there and beam some microwaves into pigeon's eggs and actually recreate a bit of dark energy. For me it was this: how is it possible to recreate a bit of the unknown while you eat your pancakes. That was the situation I designed.

So what does this achieve?

It can speak at many different levels. You can see it on an artistic level and enjoy the aesthetic of the objects involved. But you can also enjoy the scientific level. I haven't gone into the detail of it, but scientists would understand that this is the application of the Casimir experiment. Other people would see the value of the scenario, the narrative that comes with it. I really enjoy that a work can be read at many different levels.

At the end of the day you can beam some microwaves into pigeon's eggs and actually recreate a bit of dark energy

That's something about the experiences in general. You can choose to experience it physically and actually play with the things and really interact with them, and at the same time you can also decide to not interact with them. Most of the time, I want

to design and create extreme experiences, extreme scenarios, to provoke questions. Like when a volcano is erupting in your living room and you have to domesticate it, what would you do?

Well, I think of the Susan Sontag novel,* The Volcano Lover*, where the titular character is passionate about volcanoes and climbs Vesuvius several times, but he is also in love with his art collection. There is a tension between his love of nature, which he can't control but responds to quite viscerally, and his other love of these delicate human-made art objects. You seem to play a great deal with the relationship between chaos and control.
There is a fascination there, and a love-hate relationship with the volcano. Everything that is extreme has these elements, and that's what I love—this kind of tension between elements. It gives you the strongest experience.

For the volcano, the main reference was actually Sartre's play *No Exit*, when the three of them are stuck in a room and they don't know why they're all together, and it ends by saying finally that hell is other people. There is this sort of contained love-and-hate relationship described really well there. But yes, I have always been fascinated with the idea of how members of the public experience chaos within a closed-loop framework, and that comes through in other projects.

You're looking towards the future but you seem interested in cultural memory too, in activating the past.
Maybe it's because I'm French, but for me every single work needs to be associated with a historical element. I need to know where it comes from. You cannot build up a future without knowing what has come before. When you develop and design a future scenario, there are many different ways of doing it. It can be purely an image or an object, but I think the power of the experience, what is most important for me, is to engage the public physically—to have your body engaged with the question of the future. If I can make it happen—and I'm not saying I've succeeded in that but it's the whole point of my practice—to figure out how you can design future scenarios with a past and with experience as a medium. And really get people to react.

What is the International Space Orchestra?
The International Space Orchestra is an orchestra made up of space scientists from NASA Ames Research Center, the SETI Institute, which is the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence, Singularity University and the International Space University—basically the Californian community. We had Google at some point, and then they dropped out. Google and SpaceX should have been added to it because, of course, the private industry is a really big part of the space community these days. So anyway, we brought all these guys together, to play music, performing and re-enacting the drama of mission control. Specifically I got them to reenact mission control for Apollo 11, so a mission that ended well, with Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landing on the moon and actually walking. But everything leading up to that in the

control room was actually really wrong. They had alarm problems, they had fuel problems, they had all these issues. And I asked them to re-enact it.

Of course the people from the original mission control are from a completely different generation—they are all 83 years old. So this was a young generation mixed up with the older generation as well, testing how to react to intense pressure. There was a big team of collaborators who were also part of the performance called *Ground Control: An Opera in Space*. It is 27 minutes long, and it's three acts, three dramas in the control room. Then there are interludes of music by Damon Albarn and Bobby Womack. We had a Japanese composer called Maywa Denki and the libretto was written by science-fiction writer Bruce Sterling.

You have to admit, there is this huge degree of absurdity to this project.

That's the exact point. I started by saying I'm going to approach NASA by coming up with the most absurd project I can think of, like the International Space Orchestra, and follow up the information from the reception desk to the head of NASA. And in the process try to figure out, What is this agency these days? What is NASA? Because in a way we have all bought into the imaginary that they've created, around the moon landing and all that. Nowadays nobody knows the names of any of the astronauts who are on the International Space Station. Some people don't even know what the ISS is about. Nobody knows that the Mir station is not working anymore. We still live with the '80s spirit and imaginary around this. So I needed to know what is the human condition behind it. To do that, I had to come up with a project that they can really be part of in some sense.

What was your intended outcome, given your investment in the process?

There are different ways of reading a project. My personal reading is almost anthropological. I tried to figure out who this space community is, how they organize, and who they are. This meant designing microevents within NASA Ames that were complete within themselves and where each of them was given a role that is not their role in real life. For example the head of NASA wouldn't play the head of NASA, someone else would be doing it.

In these scenarios, you have to discuss with the person who is going to play the role, and that creates dialogue between people who actually had never met in their workspace—there are 2,700 people at the Ames Research Center specifically. So people had to discuss their research and sometimes fought because they said, "You're not performing my role properly," and so on. And I was really interested in that. Also in someone like John Cage—how you can design a microevent, and his special name for his instructions: event scores. When you write something and make it happen or not happen, it's like music. The action is like music. I like that.

What have you learned about the relationship between culture and science?

I think you just have to accept there are different understandings of things. That's the most difficult part. We can totally understand each other, but the way they speak about the project is so different from the way we speak about it. Sometimes it creates tension, especially when you're a control freak like I am. It can be really frustrating. I produce and direct my shows, or do a film if need be, and I can say, This is the particular imagery we're using. I can design and control the quality of the visual images associated with the project, and so there is a really strong visual identity for the International Space Orchestra. Wherever they go and speak about the orchestra, they still have that material, even if they will speak about it differently. At least we have a base.

You mentioned that you see this as anthropological research, but you're much more than even a participant observer.
But that's the thing. All of this is becoming part of my Ph.D. in geography. I'm really interested in the notion of explorers.

The relationship between geography and art is interesting—are you familiar with Trevor Paglen? He is an artist and an experimental geographer who has investigated satellites and surveillance, and recently sent images into space. He comes from a Marxist-geography background. Your discussion of the role of design also evokes for me the early 20th century Russian constructivists who wanted to move away from a bourgeois concept of what an artist could be. So I want to go back to the notion of your market. You don't design or create products—
For me the product is an event.

Right, but the notion of what a market means is one of the things that continues to distinguish design from art.
That's true.

Your work seems to buck trends on both sides—to create an event or an experience goes against the prevalence and status of the object in the categories of art and design. So how do you define your market?
Hans Ulrich Obrist just said something interesting to me. He said I was doing social sculpture. I thought that was a lovely way of putting it together. But who is my market? My audience is all of us. It depends on the site, the setting. I will use a nightclub, or even a gallery, or a public space like a park. I'll do something at a festival to get the broadest possible audience for the experience.

But where does your funding come from?
The funding is interesting, you're right. It can come from public engagement and from more scientific outreach organizations such as the Science and Technology Facilities Council and the Institute of Physics. Or it can come from art sources like the Arts Council or from the British Council design department. It just depends. For the new project *Disaster Playground* there are several partners. You have the V&A, which is more craft-based and interested in traditional design; Z33, the house for contemporary art in Belgium, which is more art-based; Broadway

Cinema; and the last partner so far, Abandon Normal Devices festival, more related to the digital.

What's that project?
It's about when things go wrong. It's about failure and catastrophe in the space program. There are many different narratives involved, but basically it's questioning the notion of catastrophe within NASA, and how they communicate it to the public and how they speculate and plan for it.

For example, there is a whole department called the Near Earth Orbit program, which is thinking about and designing emergency responses to, say, an asteroid that might hit us in 2040. So I go there and I get them to enact for me what they would do—who would they contact, how would they work, what sort of simulation have they put together? And that is when you realize the complete absurdity of what the plans are. The plans are to bombard a chunk of white paint into the asteroid to get it to slow down, to slow its velocity so that it doesn't hit us. That's the plan. So the project will have this sort of narration, mixed with the worms and other things.

The worms?
When the *Challenger* exploded in 1996, NASA was responsible because there was a structural problem. They launched the rocket, but it was too cold, and everything exploded and was destroyed. The only things that survived were these worms that were on the rocket for an experiment. And those worms are still being stored at NASA headquarters, and they're still being used for experiments. I'm investigating now how to get to these worms and find out more about them. I'm in the research-and-development phase for that project, which will take about five years and will lead to a bigger film, I hope.

How do you feel human nature is going to react faced with increased access to space?
I prefer the process of accessing the impossible than to actually seeing it happening. For example, I have an issue with the fact that the aim of the International Space Orchestra has always been about sending the music into space. We create the music, we send it into space, and then I follow up the entire process. And now it's happening. It's going to lift off on August 5—we have two satellites that are going to be broadcasting the music in space. So it's actually really happening.

But there somehow is then a big ethical question there. When you get to the point where it's actually happening, and it's not about speculation, or interrogating bureaucracy or interrogating technology, but it's actually a readymade package, it becomes a bit problematic for me. That's the same thing for space exploration in some sense. I say we should all have access to space exploration—I work as an experience designer at the SETI Institute so of course I support it, but I don't support space exploration for the sake of sending humans into space to drink Coca-Cola and do the same things that they are doing on earth, and not in a poetic way.

So what for you are the poetics of space exploration?

You're asking me what are the universal elements we should send up there. That's the Golden Record. That's Frank Drake. He is one of the founding directors of SETI and put together the Golden Record. I interviewed him about how he came up with it, and he was saying how difficult it was to make a decision about what should go on it, what should we send up there, what sort of message it should contain. I don't know how to answer that.

But I think I'm asking something else about the process. There are very complicated politics of exploration and colonization that go into the discovery of space and its imaginary as a whole. As an ethnographer of that imaginary, now that you've acted as a broker between one sphere and another, I'm curious to know what you feel is missing.

How do art and science inform each other? They're part of a whole. I don't know how else to put it, but I can talk about the challenges of the collaboration. When you work with scientists who need to learn their vocabulary and they need to figure out a bit more about the end product—that can be difficult. There's also this certain top-down approach that needs to be avoided, of "I am an artist and you are the scientist and you know about the real stuff and I don't." A lot of people are doing that, going to scientists and scaling their skills and knowledge down because they're in a new field and they don't see themselves as equals.

But that's something I've been really careful about. This collaboration only works if you have this discussion on a level playing field. So that's the way I handle it. And if someone is still using a top-down approach with me, I just don't work with him.

It needs to be critical, not just celebratory.

Yes. And you really need a curator, a quality check. My role is about this quality control for how ideas are communicated—it's someone's research, someone's life. It's not about science as much as it's about respecting someone's work.

You dedicate the ISO project to your grandparents. Why?

I've been really bloody lucky in the sense that my family has always supported my madness. Like when it came to taking things apart, throwing ketchup all over the place. I used to experiment with modeling with clay—I didn't know how to do it. So I put my grandmother into a mold made of plaster, and then we had to get her to the hospital to get her hand out because I'd used too much. Things like that. They really let me do the whole trial-and-error thing. And they always taught me to remain humble whomever you meet. My family couldn't care where I am or whom I'm working with. They went through the Armenian genocide and what is important is how you communicate memory over generations, and how you tell stories. Storytelling is a big part of my Armenian culture. That and cooking. ■

U.S.Ai.

by MALCOLM HARRIS

In America, Ai Weiwei isn't a dissident or a rebel. He's a foreign-policy asset and an artist of art's limits

"What can they do besides exile or make me disappear? They have no imagination or creativity."

—Ai Weiwei

LARGE SOLO SHOWS are risky for conceptual artists: too much coherence across the work and they might come off like a one-trick pony; too little, a dilettante. Wall after wall of polka dots makes a viewer feel like the butt of a joke called art, while a haphazard jumble of paintings, photographs, and sculptures raises the suspicion that there must be something second-rate in the bunch. An artist working in a single medium can develop themes or patterns, but for conceptual artists, their work too often collapses into a binary of one or not-one ideas. Either you can describe what they do in a sentence, or you don't bother.

Down this narrow tightrope unicycled "Ai Wei Wei: According to What?" with a balance that would make any daredevil jealous. The show appeared at the Hirshhorn in Washington D.C., from October 2012 to February 2013, before going on a tour of four other North American museums; it opens at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto later

Art under guard at "Ai Wei Wei: According to What?"
Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C., October 2012
Photo by the author

this month, and will land at the Brooklyn Museum early next year.

It's not a stretch to call Ai the world's most famous living artist, as the *New York Times* did. He might well be the best-known artist in America. While his big-name market competitors have mined obscurantism and self-parody in a constant struggle to create stakes for their work, Ai's collisions with Chinese censors make his significance readily—and internationally—apparent. CNN certainly wasn't seeking out Damien Hirst for election commentary.

Inside the exhibit, the black-and-white photos of Ai hanging out in the East Village in the '80s have an Instagram scale that's in stark contrast with the spaceless wallpapering shots of the Beijing Olympic Stadium that he helped design. One radius of the Hirshhorn doughnut was devoted to Ai's vases. Where Damien Hirst plays with diamonds, Ai toys with artifacts: a Neolithic vase with a painted silver Coca-Cola logo. Against the gallery's outer wall was the larger-than-life photo triptych of Ai dropping a Han Dynasty urn to shatter on the ground.

Though the show occupied the large second-floor gallery of the Hirshhorn (and the 12 great bronze lollipops that make up Ai's "Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads" surrounded the outside fountain in the eye of the building's hurricane architecture), "According to What?" still felt like a zoo whose big cats are kept uncomfortably close. This is, after all, an artist who once memorably filled the Tate's Turbine Hall with 100 million (possibly toxic) sunflower seeds. The expressly political balances with the innocuously abstract, but while the content is evenly weighed, the sheer volume threatens to overwhelm its bounds. It has the unnatural vibe of an all-star team or rock supergroup. Installation art, like other apex predators, demands a lot of space.

Ai is a conceptual artist in a more straightforward sense than most of his contemporaries. It's possible to place his installations in part because his more notable pieces have specific referents: a pile of painted ceramic river crabs puns off the similarity of the animal's name with the word for *harmony*—a euphemism used to justify Chinese government censorship. Thousands of crustaceans

Guarded Ai Weiwei installations
Photo by the author

abut large stacks of rebar salvaged from schools that collapsed in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, an indictment of the government's shoddy building practices and equally shoddy cover-up. Ai has been investigating the truth behind the earthquake's consequences, and he's listed the results in classically grim fashion: floor-to-ceiling names of the dead. Overhead, there curves an undulating centipede of children's backpacks, representing those lost. It's not the full piece, but the viewer gets the idea.

In Ai, American pundits find a rare bird indeed: he's a well-respected and politically conscious international artist who doesn't have a grudge against the United States. In fact, he kind of likes the good old U.S.A. In an interview with *New York Times* columnist and Inspector Clouseau of imperialism Nicholas Kristof, Ai said, "China still needs help from the U.S. To insist on certain values, that is the role of the U.S." When goaded to complain, he faults America for not dealing with China more actively on human rights.

This is certainly how America likes to think of itself—as a global force for liberal

enlightenment values like free speech—especially in comparison with China, its largest rival and creditor. But artists, including Ai, have been quick to point out the U.S.'s inconsistent moralizing. What good is artistic freedom to a drone strike victim?

As a liberal critic of the Chinese government, Ai makes a great addition to the American line. The same country—and it is very much the same country—that denied Paul Robeson his passport for fear he would shed too much light on his home uses China's refusal to let Ai attend the Hirshhorn opening as just another example of backward chauvinist totalitarianism. Wrenched from his context as an internal critic, Ai's pieces take on new meaning and a new violence. His pile of rebar wreckage tells a different story when displayed in a country that spent over $100 million remaking and watching *Red Dawn* as a paranoid fantasy about Chinese invasion.

If we think of America as a neutral space, a Switzerland for the celebration of the world's art, it blinds us to historical context. We're not that far from the time when General Douglas MacArthur told a French reporter, "Give me a handful of bombs and I'll take care of China's industrial bases." When it comes to art, Americans view themselves as cosmopolitans, citizens of the world; we forget that everyone else doesn't have cause to draw our self-serving separation between policy and pretension.

When the National Art Museum of China rises next to the Bird's Nest Stadium Ai helped design, how would Americans react if they displayed a giant posthumous show by David Wojnarowicz? How would we read a cross covered in ants in Beijing? We wouldn't see a pile of American rubble or a scorched flag in a Chinese museum as a celebration of transnational artistic vision, it would appear to us as thinly veiled aggression, as a provocation. China's motives would seem obvious and opportunistic in equal measure.

Ai is no naive painter stuck between two superpowers in a bipolar world. The artist is clear as can be about his geopolitical thoughts in *Weiwei-isms*, a poorly named collection of Tweets and other short statements turned aphorisms published by Princeton Press and excerpted in the global market's official paper, *The Wall Street Journal*. EVERYTHING IS ART. EVERYTHING IS POLITICS. is embossed on the black back cover in gold. He's up-front about the collusion between his home country and America: "Because of the economic crisis, China and the United States are bound together. This is a totally new phenomenon, and nobody will fight for ideology anymore. It's all about business."

Though the lines between nations are blurred, Ai's calculus is simple. In Weiwei-ism after Weiwei-ism, he puts freedom of expression on a pedestal. It's circular logic: artists need freedom of expression so they can further the cause of freedom expression. Art is for politics, politics is for art. He's been willing to offer a tacit endorsement of American policy—the headline on his CNN op-ed was "Despite flaws, America should be proud"—under a kind of Cold War enemy-of-my-enemy logic.

But there's more than one way to tame

Hirshhorn Museum gift shop.
Photo by the author

Democracia, *Ser y Durar*

an artist, and liberal democracies have developed their own strategies of containment for the unruly. The deal liberalism has made with art is that artists can say whatever they want as long as they don't touch anything that doesn't belong to them. And artists have to compete for attention with multibillion-dollar corporations bent on entertaining their way into viewers' pockets. That way, the risk to current structures of power is minimized without disturbing the state's ostensible commitment to freedom of expression. And when art struggles in its fuzzy handcuffs, it generates new images for sale.

For outstanding examples of tamed art, you needn't look further than the Hirshhorn's basement. There, Barbara Kruger's giant anticonsumerist slogans cover the floors and walls, MONEY MAKES MONEY on one escalator and YOU WANT IT. YOU BUY IT. YOU FORGET IT. on another. They're blunt, leaving little to the imagination; it's advertising against advertising, and good work at that. But the room's punch line is off to one side: Here the giant slogans are miniaturized and made portable on T-shirts and tote bags. You can actually buy I SHOP THEREFORE I AM on a postcard. No art show, even at a state-supported museum, is complete without the merch table.

In one of the basement projector rooms, there's a film by Democracia, a Madrid-based arts collective. *Ser y Durar* (To Be and To Last) is a video of Spanish *parkour* runners as they traverse the city outside the implied routes. It looks like a very cool Nike ad; their hoodies are emblazoned with emblems the creators explain "refer to the working class, internationalism, anarchy, secret societies, and revolution." Referring to revolution is something contemporary branding agencies are really good at: Your cell phone carrier is revolutionary, your body spray is revolutionary, your nail polish remover is revolutionary. Art, however, merely refers.

Sinéad Murphy describes liberalism's pacification of art well in her book *The Art Kettle*: " 'freedom' as a regulative ideal tends, once it begins to operate at the level of form rather than content, to reduce political action to a mere performance of action, to remake it as an 'installation' with merely aesthetic import, and thereby to manage very well its scope and its effects." Duchamp's readymades proved that, within the rules, anything could be fetishized as art, any object could become art and earn protection as such. But once a toilet becomes art, the process isn't reversible. Freedom of artistic expression is the freedom to create fetish objects, to invest a thing with enough value that it can't help but be a representation, a reference. Ai marvels in *Weiwei-isms* about what he can get away with under the label of "art," but he doesn't attempt to probe why that's the case, to measure the costs.

As a case study, let's look at Ai's *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*.

On the surface level, the photo set appears to mock artistic fetishism: Ai looks like he could not possibly give a fuck as he lets the valuable artifact shatter on the ground. There's a sublime disregard in the pictures; it's

Ai Weiwei, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, 1995

art against art like Kruger's sentences are ads against ads. But as an artist, Ai can't destroy art, he can only make more. From one urn, he gets three pictures. If I went into the Hirshhorn, grabbed one of the photos off the wall, and let it fall to ground like I didn't give a fuck, I would be arrested and taken to jail. It's only freedom of expression if you break something you own. Otherwise it's vandalism.

One true vandal, Vladimir Umanets, learned this lesson (or taught it) very publicly when he was sentenced to two years in prison for writing "a potential work of yellowism" on a Mark Rothko painting in London's Tate Modern. Yellowism is the idea that if anything can become art regardless of its use value, then we could imagine a third category of stuff past art, in light of which the art/non-art distinction dissolves. Both are equally potential works of yellowism, just like a soup can and a urinal are equally art objects. Umanets's writing "a potential work of yellowism" on a Rothko is the same as Duchamp's Sharpie-ing "a potential work of art" on a toilet while he takes a piss. Except Umanets isn't an artist. We know he's not an artist because he's in jail in England, and England, Ai would remind us, has freedom of expression.

Umanets wasn't looking for freedom of expression, but freedom *from* expression, out from under the artistic injunction to replace what you destroy. He wanted to break without buying, but that's not in liberalism's deal. And no one cries for a vandal.

Because Umanets is a vandal and not an artist, there won't be any complaints from the U.S. State Department. Because this is England and not Russia, there won't be a Human Rights Watch report, as there was for the band Pussy Riot when they were arrested for trespassing. Even anticapitalist arts writers called for his head on a platter.

Art, like the market, promises that you can do anything you want, as long as you keep your hands to yourself. You can put an iPad in a blender, but you can't just take one off a store shelf to do it. You can break a Han Dynasty urn, but not a framed picture of someone else breaking a Han Dynasty urn.

In America, Ai Wei Wei's pieces are paired with their imagined absence in China. It's a single gigantic work of implied distinction, a portrait of freedom of expression drawn in negative space. In the Hirshhorn he is to art as art is to capitalism: a reminder of what's allowed. ■

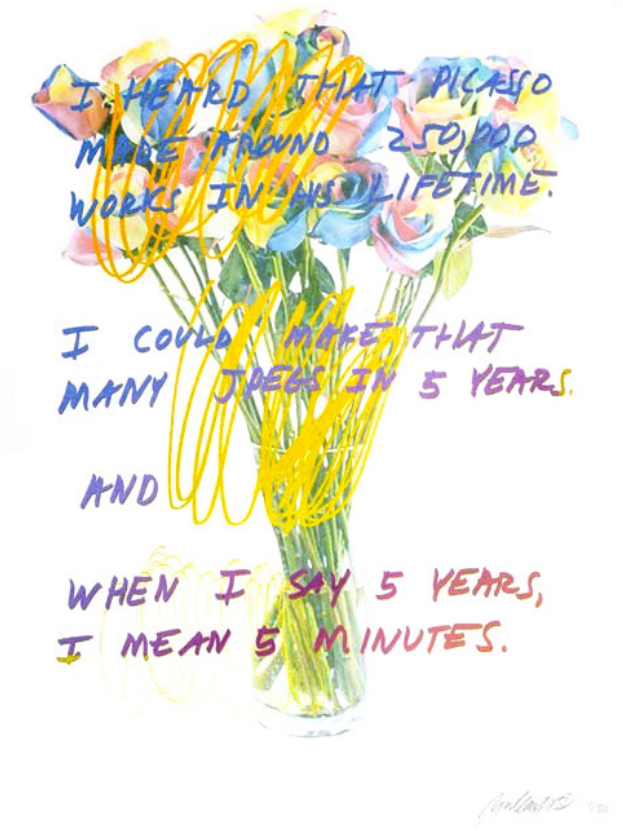
Athletic Aesthetics

by BRAD TROEMEL

A new species of hyperproductive artist flooding the Internet with content invites audiences to complete their work by loving their brand, making the artists themselves the masterpiece

VISUAL ARTISTS, POETS, and musicians are releasing free content online faster than ever before. There is an athleticism to these aesthetic outpourings, with artists taking on the creative act as a way of exercising other muscle groups, bodybuilding a personal brand or self-mythology, a concept or a formal vocabulary. Images, music, and words become drips in a pool of art sweat, puddling online for all to view. The long-derided notion of the "masterpiece" has reached its logical antithesis with the *aesthlete*: a cultural producer who trumps craft and contemplative brooding with immediacy and rapid production.

Athletic aesthetics are a by-product of art's new mediated environment, wherein creators must compete for online attention in the midst of an overwhelming amount of information. Artists using social media have transformed the notion of a "work" from a series of isolated projects to a constant broadcast of one's artistic identity as a recognizable, unique brand. That is, what the artist once accomplished by making commodities that could stand independently from them is now accomplished through their ongoing self-commodification. This has reversed the traditional recipe that you need to create art to have an audience. Today's artist on the Internet needs an audience to create art. An aesthlete's audience, once assembled, becomes part of their medium.



Parker Ito, *America Online Made Me Hardcore*, 2013

Posting work to the Internet without a network of viewers in place raises the same questions as the proverbial tree falling in an empty forest. If a Tumblr post has no notes, is it art? Does it exist? For young artists using social media, the answer is no. If an audience for their work isn't maintained, it loses the context necessary for regarding it as art. Facing dim employment prospects and precarious conditions (not to mention massive debt from higher education), such practitioners aggressively seek to exercise clout in the online attention economy through overproduction.

Just as conditions have changed for artists, they have also changed for audiences. The refresh rate of information in social media alters viewing habits. When looking at a screen, we don't fixate on a single status update, image, website, or work for long. Part of this is because the interfaces militate against it: 140 characters is a light reading load. In the cases of Tumblr and Facebook, the information piling up in a newsfeed flows past viewers almost automatically into a virtually bottomless well.

But attention spans are also constrained because each bid for our attention on social media can prompt an endless hunt for a more complete understanding of its context. An endless cascade of tabs can arise from a simple friend request, far beyond "Who is this person, anyway?" Little can be meaningfully understood about any given person based on an isolated Tweet or profile picture. Mutual friends need to be investigated, personal website links in the About Me section need to be opened, geotagged restaurants need to be Googled and their menus canvassed for the kinds of ingredients favored. And to get satisfactory context for the work of a single person, viewers may have to go through all of that person's online folders, scrolling all the way back to when they first joined whatever service they're using. Caring too much about any one item to the exclusion of the others readily available now seems to jeopardize the viewer's ability to understand the whole.

Even if you don't go on winding quests for context and allow information to passively wash over you through your feed, you ultimately arrive at the same place: recognizing patterns amid flow rather than shutting the floodgates. As Marshall McLuhan claimed

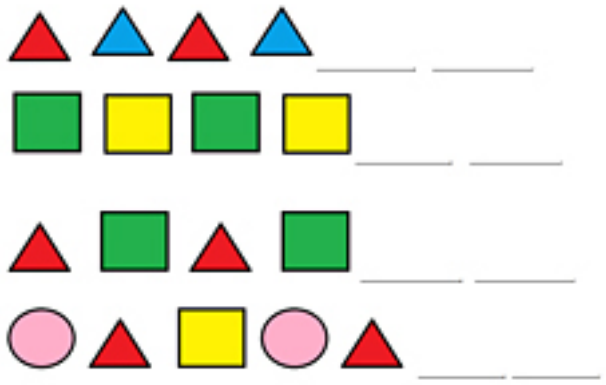
in "The Medium Is the Massage":

> Our electrically-configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. We can no longer build serially, block-by-block, step-by-step, because instant communication insures that all factors of the environment and of experience coexist in a state of active interplay.

The idea of memorizing art-history slides to demonstrate a mastery of the canon now seems like a quaint reminder of a time when individual works somehow meant more than the always fluid relationships between them. Audiences no longer have the luxury of imagining that there is a static regime of aesthetic stability dictating quality and meaning. Passive viewers, who consume at the same pace as those they follow produce, and context hunters, who compress that process in time, end up with the same hermeneutic, finding meaning in the lines drawn from one bit of information to the next.

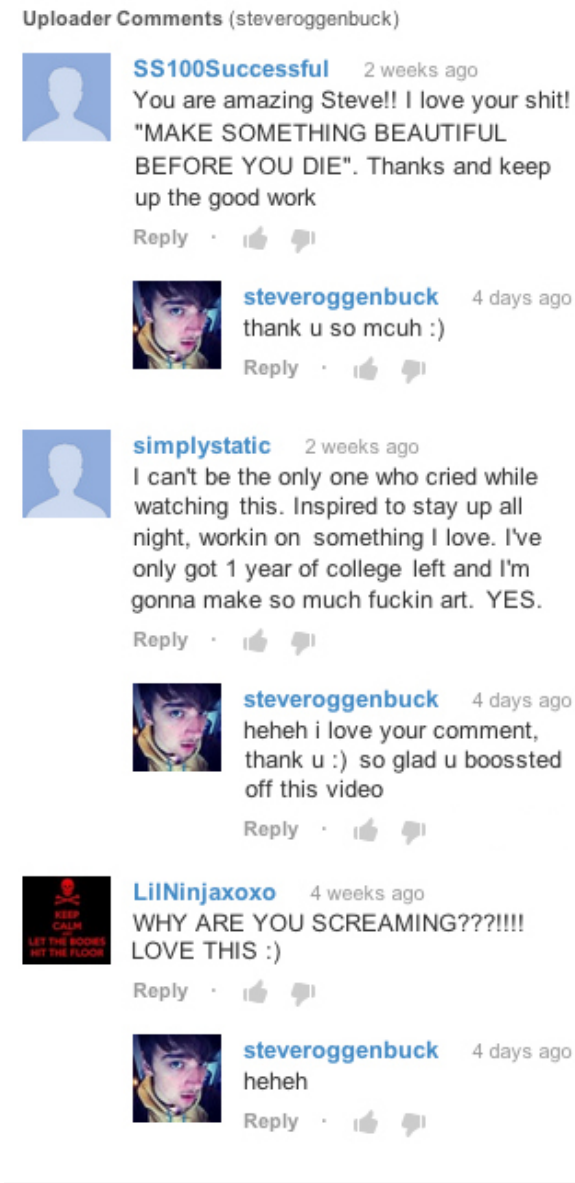
To maintain the aerial view necessary for patterns to emerge, one must cultivate a disposition of indifference. To be indifferent is to believe that any one thing is as important as any other. Social media anticipate and reinforce this attitude, presenting, say, news from Afghanistan and a former high school friend's lunch in the same format, with the same gravity.

Athletic aesthetics inverts this indifferent disposition, using it to produce as well as view content. Instead of creating a few, thoroughly worked pieces, the aesthlete produces



a stream of work in social media to ride atop the wave in viewers' newsfeeds, or else become the wave itself, overwhelming them with material. The tacit agreement between the aesthlete and the viewer is to be mutually indifferent toward quality understood as slick production value or refined craft. For aesthletes, the point of their work is not only what it expresses but the speed at which it's expressed. The ideal presentation of their work is the constant broadcast.

With the constant broadcast as goal, editing oneself becomes a waste of resources. Time spent on anything is time worth being redeemed in attention by sharing it. A private process of refinement is simply lost time. For aesthletes, the studio as a site of self-reflection and craft goes public; no middle ground or time lapse between production and publicity is necessary. For the audience, what's missing in production value is supposedly recouped in honesty and personal connection with creators, whose every image, poem, song, video, or status update becomes a chance for direct interaction. Viewers need not hope for a momentary glimpse of the artist at an opening or await the chance to see musicians onstage. The artist's aura has been leveled and spread



across dozens of daily opportunities to comment, like, and reblog. The privacy of the studio starts to be perceived as a form of censorship, and even oversaturated celebrities like Beyoncé must have a Tumblr now.

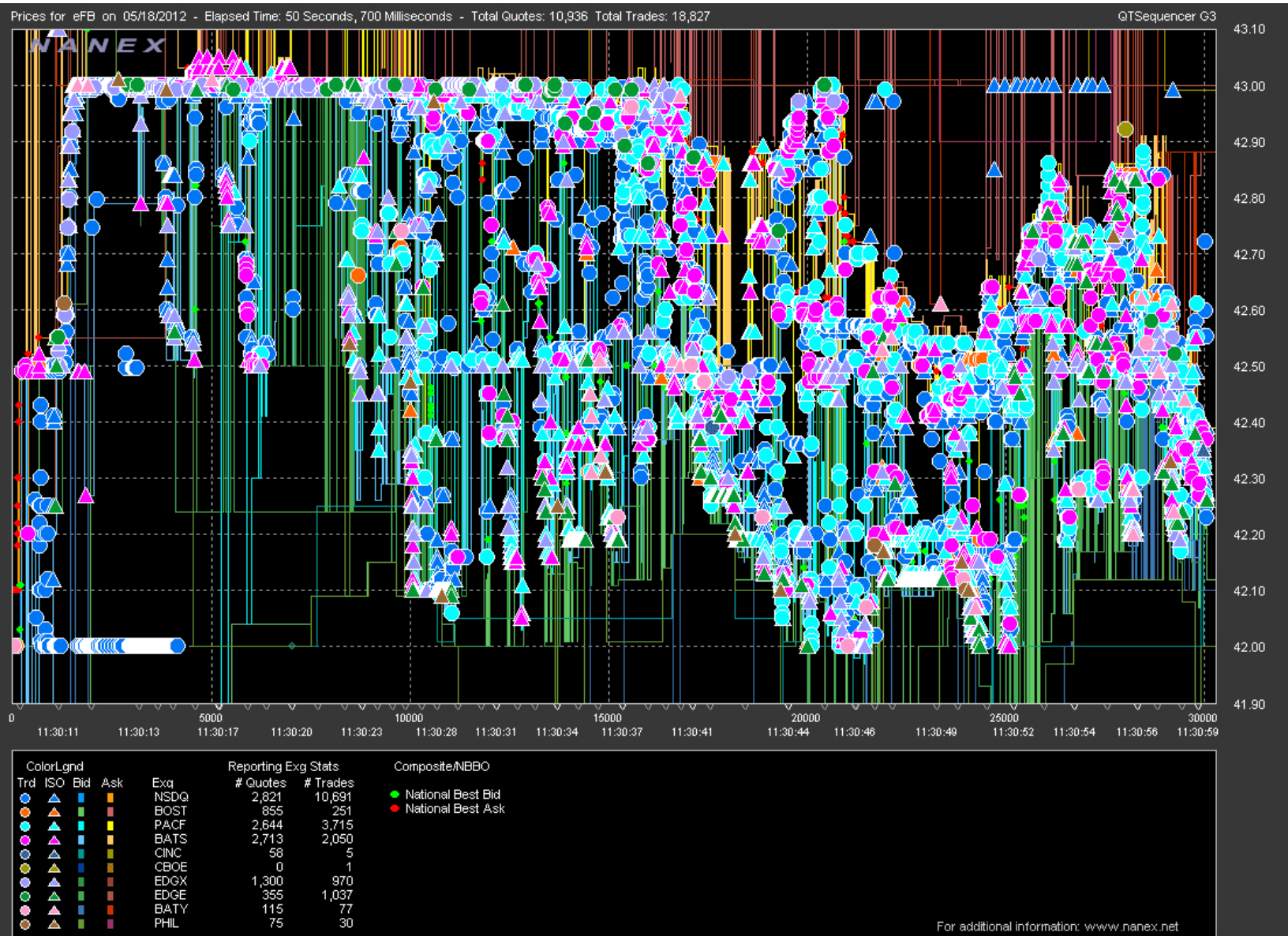
The underlying promise of Rate/Comment/Subscribe! culture is that viewers can engage in a more direct form of fandom, in which their tributary comments and reblogs are directly acknowledged by artists and eventually become an element in their creative process. Audiences can now believe they are co-creators, collaborating with artists by appreciating them. The upvoted commenter who distills and wittily articulates the general sentiment of an audience's reaction to social-media works is hailed a kind of hero, the voice of the people, as with Patton Oswalt's Thor83 character in *Portlandia*'s season three Evite episode.

Of course, this was once the artist's claim to heroism—being sensitive to the times and other people's affect so as to express a general sentiment or zeitgeist in a unique, compelling way. Aesthletes' self-editing is now outsourced to the audience, who carefully pick over the barrage of content with unprecedented zeal. Their eagerness to assess and evaluate artists' work lies somewhere between being volunteer market researchers and a wish to bend artists to their will and "democratize" their art.

While that kind of direct democratization may be wishful thinking, aesthletes certainly rely on decentralized audiences to perpetuate their virality, which is the essential content of their work. It's impossible to

imagine Steve Roggenbuck's practice apart from his commenting, poking, and liking his viewers every step of the way. This interaction, and the compounding attention he receives for it, is not peripheral to his work but integral to the messianic nature of his delivery. Roggenbuck's calls to self-improvement, creative ambition, and ethical living are nothing without the interplay of an audience whose widespread response serves as a marker of affect for the message of his videos and writing, which verge on art-as-self-help. For Roggenbuck, going viral doesn't spread his work so much as complete it.

This dynamic of the audience self-screening for their favorite content makes the risks associated with releasing undesirable content fairly low, while enhancing the potential rewards of releasing beloved content. The opportunity costs for *not* releasing work quickly rise as audiences becomes less discriminatory and more participatory. Thus aesthletes rationally adopt a lottery-like gambit of releasing as much work as possible: The more they release, the more likely one will become a hit. And even less successful posts will serve to strengthen the bond between artist and audience, giving each a chance to



reinforce the existence of the other—"I'm still here!" they say in unison.

Athletic aesthetics amounts to the supply-side gamification of the art attention economy. Notes, likes, and reblogs serve as the quantitative basis for influence in an art world where critics' written word has been stripped of power. Art making becomes a fast-paced, high-volume endeavor analogous to the universe of automated high-frequency stock trading. This mode of trading supplants floor traders with unmanned computers responsible for moving fractional sums according to complicated if-then sequences programmed by quantitative analysts. The speed of trades are central to their strategic functionality, so much so that companies in New York and London have lobbied for new fiberoptic cables across the Atlantic to ensure maximum velocity.

Critics argue such trading methods fail to create "true" economic value: Rather than prompt companies to become more efficient or make better products, algorithmic trading merely capitalizes on rapid capital shuffling and micro-arbitrage. Others worry that vast automation leaves the market vulnerable to a single digital glitch generating systemic market crashes, as in the case of the "flash crash" on May 6, 2010, and again on August 1 that year, when software at Knight Capital Group malfunctioned, setting off unintended trades and leading to a $440 million loss for the company.

Such criticism of algorithmic trading echoes complaints leveled at aesthletes. Proto-aesthlete Soulja Boy—propelled to

Albums

- 2009: *I'm Thraxx*[3]
- 2009: *6 Kiss*[3]
- 2010: *Rain in England*[22]
- 2011: *Angels Exodus*[22]
- 2011: *I'm Gay (I'm Happy)*[23][24]
- 2012: *Choices and Flowers*[22][26]
- 2012: *Tears 4 God*[28]

Mixtapes

- 2007: *S.S. Mixtape Vol. 1* (with Young L)[29]
- 2009: *S.S. Mixtape Vol. 2* (with Young L)[30]
- 2010: *Paint*[31]
- 2010: *Dior Paint*[32]
- 2010: *Base World Pt. 1*[33]
- 2010: *Roses Exodus*[34]
- 2010: *Pretty Boy Millionaires* (with Soulja Boy)[34]
- 2010: *Everything Based*[34]
- 2010: *MF Based*[34]
- 2010: *Blue Flame*[34]
- 2010: *Gold Dust*[34]
- 2010: *Where Did The Sun Go*[34]
- 2010: *Red Flame*[34]
- 2010: *Red Flame: Evil Edition*[34]
- 2010: *MM..Christmas*[34]
- 2011: *Red Flame: Devil Music Edition*[34]
- 2011: *The Myspace Collection*[35]
- 2011: *Illusions Of Grandeur*[33]
- 2011: *Bitch Mob: Respect Da Bitch Vol.1*[34]
- 2011: *I Forgive You*[33]
- 2011: *Black Flame*[33]
- 2011: *The Silent President*[33]
- 2011: *BasedGod Velli*[33]
- 2011: *Blue Eyes*[34]
- 2011: *Goldhouse*[34]
- 2012: *White Flame*[33]
- 2012: *God's Father*[33][34]
- 2012: *#1 Bitch*[34]
- 2012: *The BasedPrint 2*[34]
- 2012: *Trapped In BasedWorld*[34]
- 2012: *Water Is D.M.G. Pt. 1*[34]
- 2012: *Green Flame*[34]
- 2012: *Rich After Taxes*[34]
- 2012: *Based Freestyle Collection*[36]
- 2012: *Task Force*[34]
- 2012: *Obama BasedGod*[34]
- 2012: *Based Jam*[34]
- 2012: *Frozen*[34]
- 2012: *Illusions of Grandeur 2*[34]
- 2012: *Halloween H2O*[11]
- 2012: *Crime Fetish*[34]
- 2012: *Glassface*[34]
- 2013: *Pink Flame*[34]
- 2013: *Pretty Young Thug*[34]

fame by the "glitch" of his online audience's inexplicable obsession with "Crank That (Soulja Boy)"—was vilified as unoriginal, in light of his prodigious, Fruity Loops–driven output of music on Myspace. Aesthletes are often criticized on the basis of individual works, whereas viewers must engage as much of their catalog-in-process as they can to find the patterns necessary for its meaning to emerge.

While firms have given over stock trading to vast warehouses of black boxes with blinking lights, the aesthlete merely emulates machine-like modes of creativity. Among the most famous of these semiautomated modes is the improvisational spoken-word format of "Based" freestyling, created by alpha aesthlete Lil B. His Based delivery, a DIY deskilling of hip-hop's oxymoronically conservative freestyle format, emphasizes absurdity, incoherence, and chance verbal collisions rather than the traditionally valued characteristics of fluid delivery and cohesive narrative wordplay. Based freestyle opens the sluice for any vocal effort—no matter how poor by traditional standards—to be accepted as a completed track. Doing another take would defeat the purpose of the Based style's aesthetic of chance, thus setting up a procedural pattern that buoys any supposed shortcoming in content.

Since honesty is redefined as directness, the customary checks and balances of studio editing become a kind of dishonesty or trickery. The most incoherent, poorly timed, and narratively abstract Based freestyles thus appear as the most successful, perpetuating a perception of Lil B as a bold creator unwilling or unable to censor himself in any way. On a practical level, this stream-of-consciousness mode of production also allows Lil B to release a much larger amount of music at a faster rate.

In the art world, Nick Faust sticks out as a prime example of an aesthletic approach to curating art on Facebook, posting 20 or so new albums of art and art-related images every day. The type of work posted adheres to no specific formal or conceptual interest, ranging from Byzantine works to contemporary textiles to PVC stock photography, just as Lil B's wide-open interests range freely. (As he says, "I can do 'Swag OD' but then my favorite musical artist right now could be Antony and the Johnsons.") Faust's immense outpouring of content upends the traditional understanding of curatorial practice by overwhelming his audience rather than providing a concise selection. Like other aesthletes, Faust becomes a wholesaler of content, allowing his Facebook friends to pick through and engage with the images they find most relevant. Ignored photo sets serve only to reinforce Faust's commitment to sharing as much as humanly possible, whether that material is popular or not.

Wide nets are cast by those who, like Lil B and Nick Faust, are young and/or energetic enough to overshare. Perhaps the most athletic aspect of these individuals is their unmistakable embrace of competition, which their efforts unreservedly respond to and foster. This social-media-induced competition is not without its detractors. Media theorist Geert Lovink has recently argued in *Adbusters* that

> Today psychopathology reveals itself ever more clearly as a social epidemic and, more precisely, to be a socio-communicational one. If you want to survive you have to be competitive, and if you want to be competitive you must be connected, receive and process continuously an immense and growing amount of data. This provokes a constant attentive stress, a reduction of the time available for affectivity … If we bring this analysis to the internet we see two movements—the expansion of storage and the compression of time—making online work so stressful.

Like the athlete who lives to perform for stadiums and television audiences of millions, the aesthlete basks in the stress of overproduction. While competition exists between the aesthlete and the slower-moving, perfectionist artists of the previous generation (as evidenced in the Lil B vs. Game feud), the main competition for aesthletes comes from within themselves. At the risk of romanticizing a potentially self-harming practice born of precarity, there is a certain euphoria, like the endorphin-fueled exhaustion of a runner's high, in depleting your mental and physical faculties to the greatest extent possible, especially when this exertion drives the expression of an expanding creative vision. Just as in weightlifting, in which mass is gained from strenuous reps that destroy and prompt the enlarged rebuilding of muscle fibers, athletic aestheticism promises that artistic progression will come more surely from the stress of strenuous making than from contemplative reverie. What separates the aesthlete from the overworked intern or sweatshop worker is that the aesthletes' labor serves themselves; it's self-exploitation rather than exploitation at the hands of other capitalists.

To demand payment for these self-imposed ventures of overproduction, one must first ask the following questions, posed by Andrea Fraser in her essay "How to Provide an Artistic Service: An Introduction":

> Fees are, by definition, payment for services. If we are, then, accepting payment in exchange for our services, does that mean we are serving those who pay us? If not, who are we serving and on what basis are we demanding payment (and should we be demanding payment)? Or, if so, how are we serving them (and what are we serving)?

By serving themselves, most aesthletes provide their content for free. The ease of access to their work reinforces the low-risk/high-reward dynamic of their overproduction, as Pitchfork contributor Mike Powell notes:

> Ultimately, my take with Lil B is that he keeps the price of entry to his world so low that complaining about him is a waste of energy. He offers himself to his audience for nothing — giving him nothing shouldn't be hard. Furthermore, I don't even know what "ironic" means in the context of Lil B. If he really didn't think that the world was a beautiful and endlessly amusing place, where does he find the energy to keep rapping about it for free?

Most aesthletes secure artistic freedom only by working in the precarious space outside the governing institutions of their field. Lil B remains unsigned, and aesthletes practicing visual art are far more of a presence on the Internet than in physical galleries. Even if the contemporary art world accepts challenges to received notions of quality—deskilling has been widely debated at least since Duchamp's time—it has maintained a less flexible approach toward quantity, upholding relatively conservative restrictions about how many exhibitions an institution should have per year, how large an exhibition space should be, and how many works are appropriate to stuff in a certain square footage per show. The same goes for artists: There still are (rarely spoken) rules as to how many works an artist should produce in a series for it to be financially viable and how often an artist should release new work without making previous work seem obsolete or a career mistake the artist is eager to repudiate. In other words, from the conventional art world's perspective, appropriating mass-produced goods is a legitimate artistic gesture insofar as the goods are not appropriated and serially exhibited en masse.

Release schedules for work were once fully orchestrated by culture-industry institutions, tailored to the market-researched demands of a buying audience. In the case of television, shows would be edited so to anticipate commercial breaks in the narrative. Time and space imposed limits on these institutions: a white room can fit only so many paintings without overflowing, a CD can fit only so many songs without become a bulky boxed set, a magazine column can have only so many words before it crowds out the advertising sold to support it. The internet-induced stress that Lovink refers to is born from the infinite expanse of storage the internet opens up. Without a clearly defined limit on content, where does a creator start or stop? The aesthlete's answer is to continuously sprint up Mario's infinite staircase—it's the journey, not the destination.

In an attention economy, there is more value in being ubiquitous than scarce, especially when there is no added cost to publicizing more works and no depletion of digital content's aura, given that it permanently exists only as a copy for all. The waiting period between releases that once structured the market and assigned a price to each work does not suit online content. There is now simply not enough time for a single assessor to explore an aesthlete's full catalog, or for the market to price it all. The aesthlete is outrunning them.

Instead, the artist's personality becomes the sellable good. Attention acquired in new media can be leveraged to sell more inherently scarce goods and services, like teaching, lectures, concerts, and books. Aesthletes' work becomes inseparable from the theatre of their own excessive labor.

If the value of the masterpiece was found in its timelessness and material specificity, the aesthlete's ambition is to exist most fully in the limited time and infinite space to which they can lay claim. ■

Flatland

by LONEY ABRAMS

The difference between artworks and their documentation images online is collapsing. So is the prestige economy of traditional galleries

FAR MORE PEOPLE see art on screens than in museums. The gallery is no longer the primary exhibition space; the Internet is. As documentation—photographs or videos that capture a finished work of art, usually installed within a gallery—are posted to the Internet and then dispersed and multiplied via likes and shares, online viewers become the overwhelming majority of an exhibition's audience. The digital image is supplanting the art object. All works, regardless of their material constituents, are flattened, scaled down to several hundred pixels. Consequently, the digital photographic image can be understood as the homogenizing, ubiquitous medium of our era.

If the Internet is the main space in which art meets its audience, then documentation media must be considered an artistic medium in its own right, the most consequential representation of an artist or curator's work. Artworks exist not as physical entities, but as JPEGs, and their visibility relies not on their physical presence within a gallery but on their online accessibility. The gallery, then, serves not as the "true" exhibition venue but the site of a photo shoot—the backdrop to the installation photo. It provides the oppor-

tunity to document art within an institutionalized context in preparation for its release into online circulation.

Aware that the physical exhibitions they design will eventually be re-presented immaterially, curators may adapt their practice to accommodate an online audience, leaning toward photogenic artworks and exhibition designs. But as artists and curators anticipate the Internet as the ultimate exhibition space, what function will the physical exhibition space serve? If installing works in galleries is only a means to an end—i.e. the documentation image—will the gallery become unnecessary?

Traditionally, we think of the gallery as having the following functions: providing an exhibition space that allows the public to view art; offering the artist and the curator exposure and access to their consumers; and acting as an intermediary between artists and the market, providing artists with the potential to earn an income as a professional. The first two functions, which connect cultural producers with their audiences, can be executed much more efficiently on the Internet. Artists have the ability to create vast social networks online, promote themselves and their artworks, and use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr to share images themselves. Further, while galleries restrict how, when, and where their represented artists show their work to keep demand high, the attention economy rewards artists who produce and share frequently, encouraging artists to be productive and prolific. The Internet allows the artist more autonomy, more agency over the dispersion and reception of their work. Artists can be more effectual than the gallery in cultivating attention and connecting with their audiences. Yet the gallery continues to have the upper hand in connoting value within the art market, and the white cube continues to be the quintessential marker of art-world status.

Most professional artists consider gallery representation as the primary route to and provider of financial stability. Curators, too, rely on such institutions to fund their careers. While online social networking provides the potential for artists to garner attention from collectors and other sources of income, collectors need to be convinced that their purchases will be secure investments. Gallery representation and their contracts offer the artist the credentials necessary to be viewed as a worthwhile investment. Collectors depend on trusted gallery directors and museum curators as professional arbitrators of market value. But if we no longer require the physical presence of galleries and their exhibition

If installing works in galleries is only a means to the end of a documentation image, will galleries become unnecessary?

spaces, could we imagine a virtual alternative that connotes the same level of market credibility? Do artists and curators need to be included in physical exhibition spaces in order to create income-generating reputations, or could their presence on a particular curated website offer the same art-world imprimatur?

As critic Michael Sanchez has pointed out, Contemporary Art Daily, a blog updated daily with images of exhibitions from around the world, "has effectively redirected traffic away from individual gallery websites and print publications to become a primary point of access for information about exhibitions." Each exhibition is laid out identically: the site's home page offers the title of the show accompanied by four images, the venue, the artists, and the dates. Clicking on the title brings the viewer to an impressive quantity of installation photos (each easily shared with a button-click), sequenced to provide wide installation views before narrowing down to specific objects and details. This standardized format provides a systematic and formulaic experience of every exhibition, and in some ways, usurps the role of the curator by linearly directing the viewing experience.[1]

Though Contemporary Art Daily showcases exhibitions from a huge pool of galleries, photos on the site become almost indistinguishable from one another, save for the art. The white cube retains its place in the documentation image: Each photo has a white-walled backdrop and minimal accompanying text, mimicking the aesthetic of white-cube galleries. Situating works within a simulated white cube maintains the illusion of prestige and credibility traditionally conveyed by the gallery space. Only now, the gallery-cum-backdrop contextualizes the work not within physical space but within the democratized playing field of the Internet, while specifying the images' art-world context. Thus as these images are dispersed online and become severed from their original sources, removed from their proverbial pedestals as they are posted amid a nonhierarchical stream of non-art content on the Tumblr dashboard or Facebook newsfeed, their white-walled backdrop differentiates them from the heterogeneous images around them and acts as signifier of their high-art status.

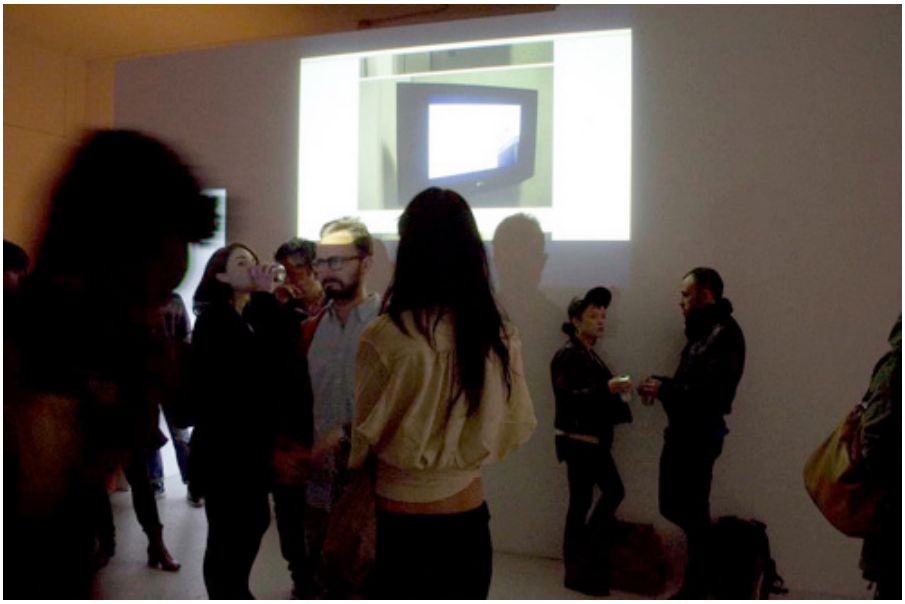
Though digital-documentation images are supplanting exhibition space and we can even imagine the obsolescence of the exhibition space as it moves to the screen, the traditions and formalities of the gallery still hold prominence. Indicative of the clean exclusivity of private, difficult-to-access shows, the white cube has become a metaphor—not a physical necessity but a necessary signifier of institutional acceptance. Artwork does not require installation within the white cube, and the white cube does not require art objects. Instead, art objects require the transitive value that the white cube implies.

Galleries' sole purpose becomes clearer:

1. Accessing work this way is undeniably different from experiencing art objects firsthand. But rather then debating the merits and limitations of experiencing art on the screen, this essay locates the exhibition, rather than the viewer, as subject. The online-viewing phenomenon is taken as a given.

They are reception spaces that redistribute associative status and function as arbitrators of market value. The gallery's primary role is not as a place in which to view work—openings will be attended regardless of whether any art is present—but as an authoritative resource for cultural clout.

With the Internet as the most efficient means of art distribution, and the gallery as the most efficient means of increasing one's cultural value, exhibitions located somewhere between the two can potentially reap the benefits of both worlds. Hotelart.us, an ongoing project organized by me, Jonathan Stanish, and Ian Swanson, initially avoids the white cube by installing and documenting physical exhibitions staged in non-gallery locations, and then later presenting the documentation in a gallery. By using publicly accessible venues like hotels, spas, and department stores, hotelart.us can produce frequent and site-specific exhibitions that last only as long as it takes to document them. Audiences don't view the exhibition as initially installed in real life. Instead, the exhibition is presented on Tumblr in conjunction with a gallery reception, which presents projected documentation of the original installation. In this case, the images themselves break free from the homogenized aesthetic of the white cube, and the white cube holds no conventional art objects during the opening. The gallery is instead used strategically as means of solidifying art-world ties and contextualizing the project.



Hotelart.us reception at Interstate Projects for the exhibition, "Cultural Affair." An installation photo of Chino Amobi's *Illuminazioni*, documented at the Cosmopolitan Hotel, is projected on the wall.

These gallery installations and receptions are also documented, creating multiple versions of the exhibition online, highlighting the mutability of representation. As artworks are understood through their digital representation, and because many different images can represent the same artwork, it becomes hard to locate a single manifestation of the work as "authentic"—or as any more valuable than any other version. The notion that an artwork has an intrinsic meaning is undermined. By offering documentation of the works originally installed offsite,

Josh Citarella's *Eldorado Projects*. One of multiple versions of the exhibition space, this image depicts the space as three times larger than its actual size.

and then again as projected images within a gallery, hotelart.us emphasizes that the objects themselves are not the arbiters of their own meaning, but instead they are defined by a variety of versions that construct their meanings as they circulate the Web.

A recent project by Joshua Citarella further develops the mutable exhibition and creates multiple versions of not only the installed works, but also the gallery space in which they are installed. In Citarella's Eldorado Projects, the white cube becomes a stand-in for itself. Citarella and his peers constructed a three-walled exhibition space in the woods of upstate New York, invited artists to install works in the space, and conducted a photo shoot. Using editing software, Citarella then created many versions of the exhibition by digitally altering the photographs. The result is a series of installation images that contradict one another: In some instances, the walls of the room itself are expanded to create the illusion of a larger space, in other cases the artworks themselves have been edited and rearranged. The viewer is unable to discern which images, if any, are

unaltered representations of the space, making the actual dimensions and layout of the physical exhibition entirely irrelevant.

Disconnected from any specific institution, location (the woods could be any woods), or precedent, the freestanding structure resembles the white cube while inherently unable to perform its traditional functions. But by using the exhibition space as a jumping-off point rather than the end product, Citarella expands the definition of the installation photo and suggests that the physical version of any installation is only one of many.

Though documentation imagery presents exciting opportunities for artists and curators to manipulate and recontextualize the traditional exhibition, this paradigmatic shift is not necessarily beneficial to everyone. As screens replace exhibition spaces, curators and artists who cater towards photogenic aesthetics and online audiences will be rewarded. As digital images become currency, works that are difficult to translate as documentation are less valuable. While artworks that are sensually rich (Ann Hamilton's "the event of a thread" at Park Avenue Armory), performative (Marina Abramovi's "The Artist Is Present" at MoMA), participatory (Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument" at Forest Houses in the Bronx) can create robust experiences IRL, the curator seeking to generate limitless exposure is rewarded best by showcasing works that are more photogenic in nature. (During the month of July, Wade Guyton, Guyton/Walker, Kelley Walker at Kunsthaus Bregenz got the most notes—likes and reblogs—on Contemporary Art Daily, followed by Ben Schumacher and Carlos Reyes at Tomorrow, Toronto.)

As long as the physical exhibition continues, curators will perhaps find it advantageous to compose installations through the camera's viewfinder, designing exhibitions that are photogenic from several static viewpoints, anticipating the JPEG as the ultimate product. While current curatorial discourse continues to position the physical experience as the guiding impetus, exhibitions that are photogenic will have significantly larger audiences than those designed with the sensory experience of the physical viewer as its primary subject.

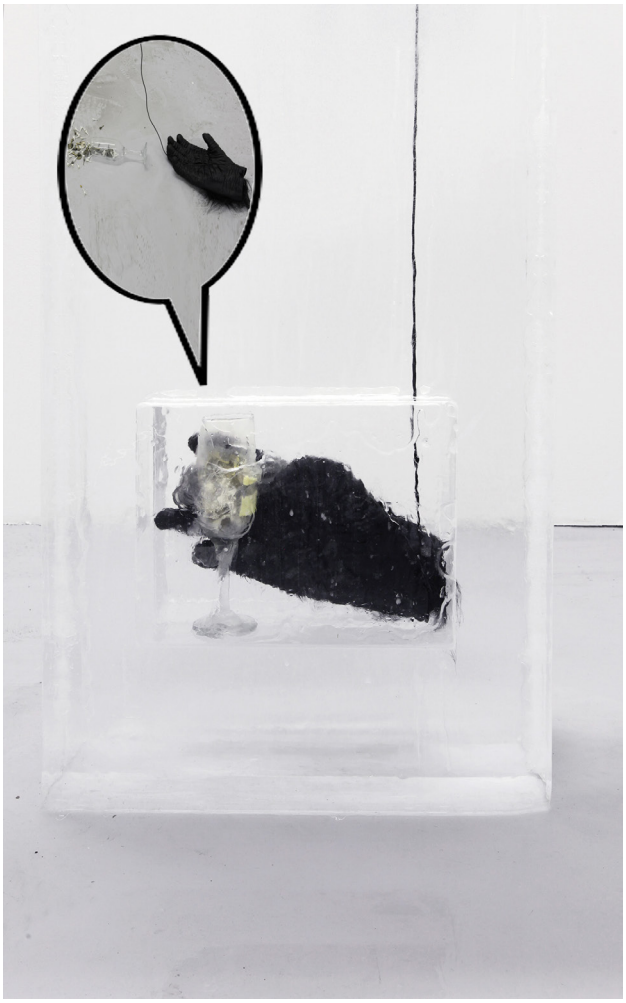
While screens supplanting galleries may not bode well for performance or installation artists, it may make such nonarchival works archival. Works that last a matter of days, minutes, or even seconds, become archival when photographed. Materials that melt, evaporate, expire, and decompose are viable options for works that only need to exist long enough to be captured on camera. Of course the documentation of ephemeral works is not new with the Internet; artists have long relied on the camera in order to materialize ephemeral works. But what makes post-internet documentation different is that works aren't documented to become suitable for gallery exhibitions. Instead galleries are used to document work to make it suitable for online reception.

Galleries are no longer the most effective means of art distribution. But they still are the most effective facilitators to the art

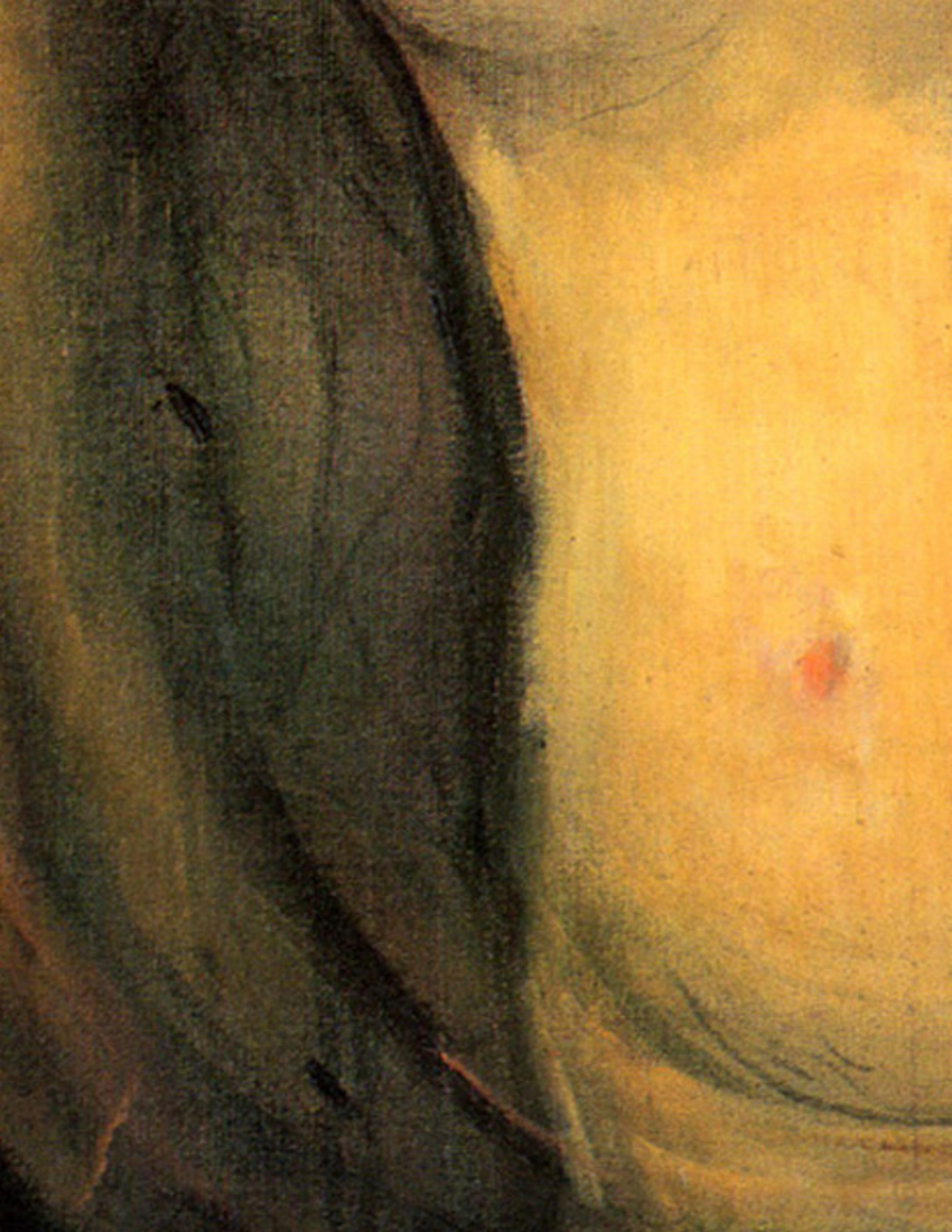
market, as they connote prestige by acting as authorities on market value. But if the physical exhibition is only a means of generating documentation imagery and associative status, can we imagine a more efficient means to this same end? Perhaps a different backdrop to the installation photo can be substituted, and artists and curators can circumvent the institution by forming online platforms and websites that replace the gallery as the decisive, value-granting authority.

The emergence of "galleries" that operated solely online could be next. Without the expenses demanded by the physical gallery (i.e. high rent, utility bills, property insurance, art insurance, building maintenance, etc.), an online gallery would need to generate significantly less income to cover its cost of operations. With virtually no overhead expenses, these "galleries" could afford to offer their artists a significantly larger percentage of money from sales while generating the same profit margin for themselves.

Far from limiting artists and curators, the demand for photographic documentation encourages experimentation and prolific production. Work can be documented and posted immediately, providing the artist with instant feedback from their audience via likes and comments and expanded opportunity to represent and promote themselves, relying less on press generated by market-driven galleries and institutions that restrict artists' freedom to produce prolifically and radically. The documentation image is a fertile medium with ripe terrain, offering immediate and potentially vast distribution, contextual mutability, and institutional commentary. As galleries have been the home of art objects, URLs are the homes of documentation images and could potentially connote the prestige and cultural value traditionally monopolized by the institution. URLs will stand side-by-side with the names of reputable galleries on artists' curriculum vitae, and artists will be rewarded as much for their self-sufficiency as for their ability to game the gallery system. ■



From Ben Schumacher and Carlos Reyes's "A Salted Quarterly: Notes from the Why Axis," at Tomorrow, in Toronto. Image accessed at Contemporary Art Daily.



Get Off

by NICK FAUST

Artists and critics should combat stylistic prudishness, overcome guilt and shame, and embrace discourses promiscuously

The characterization of Warhol's noncommercial work here as the product of some lower-class fey hobby served to position it as a kind of "fag" art, and Warhol himself as swishy queen whose artistic pretensions just couldn't be taken seriously. This is an explicitly "homosexualized" construction of Warhol which dominates in the 1950s, both in relation to his work and his social persona, was instrumental in making Warhol an unsuitable candidate for the artist-subject position well into the early 1960s. Warhol was a window dresser in the mid-fifties and put together displays for Bonwit Teller and Tiffany's ... Even though the Pop artist James Rosenquist, as well as Johns and Rauschenberg themselves, had also worked dressing windows, it was something that most artists tried to distance themselves from upon becoming successful as artists. Warhol, on the other hand, was famous for his commercial work and didn't appear to be doing it just to survive. Thus Warhol appeared to be identified with window decorating in a way that other artists did not, and moreover, with a profession which was readily identifiable as a sissy occupation.

—Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me, Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963*

WHO'S CRUSHING ON whom? I like to think of artists' usage of materials and themes in terms of flings, relationships, crushes and marriages. What do artists make, with love fresh in the air, in a new space when long-term relationships have fallen apart or are nonexistent, with no stakes beyond the present? Young artists are making due with minuscule studios, without past familiar art-education facilities, wandering, trying to find all the necessary supplies, devoid of disposable income. Those first few casual friends with benefits in a new city, in a small cramped apartment that lends itself to only

half your sexual imagination.

Some artists have a type: big-breasted blondes, stocky Italian-Americans, neurotic catty introverts who just want to stay in all the time, older professorial types to help combat daddy issues. Other artists don't want that. They want fun fun fun and take it as it comes, throwing themselves into whatever turns them on in the moment.

Art criticism, like an upset parent, often passes moral judgment on this promiscuity, scolding, judging indiscretions. There are attempts at keeping art pure, delineating what is what, and who is who, and where the boundaries are. Or in the attempt to redefine the boundaries, there is a tendency to violently sabotage what came before if it doesn't smoothly fit into the new regime.

But it's crucial to encourage brief brushes, longed-for encounters, and magical moments that pass into the night to be brokenly remembered in the hungover daze of the next morning. Flings, one night stands, and vacation hook-ups are just as ripe. For artists who tie the knot—explosive divorces, whimpered muttering and weepy withdrawals, quiet bitter unspoken tension.

Likewise, art writing must attempt to draw new connections, weaving in unpublished, hushed talk that always gets spoken but generally not on the record. The documentation of the piece, the Facebook posts, tweets, and vines that surround such work, the gossip about the work in the bathrooms of the gallery and outside during the smoke breaks and back in the patios and bars after the opening, the press releases both in unchecked email and listserv format, and the 10,000 art-opening invites that networked artists receive each day on social media, the write-up of the work, the studio visits, the sketching out of the ideas, the conversations that influence and sustain the practices—all these are rich and evocative and can provide tremendous energy and meaning to a work and extend its life out beyond.

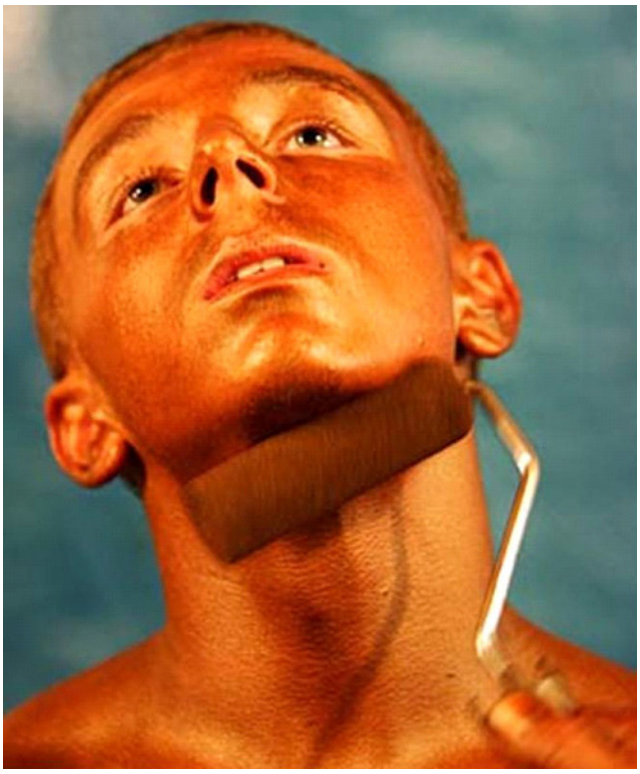
Artists are keen to this, that every stage of the work's life is up for play and that there is no such thing as a fixed neutral, ultimately true iteration of the work. In line with refusing criticism's moralistic impulses, I want to outline the pleasures that manifest themselves through the sites of production—the constant onrush and stimulation of daily life, the influence of the day jobs artists carry on both the making and the documentation and presentation, the opening up of the game, and the heroic attempts to bypass shame.

Art writing must draw new connections, weaving in the hushed talk that always gets spoken but generally not on the record

I think of people getting made up and fabulous, ready for a night on the town, scoffing at such prudes who advise a more "natural" and "authentic" way of

representing themselves—their elaborate play and fluidity as they cycle from situation to situation, conversation to conversation, adjusting on the fly and letting themselves take in the experience while also manipulating it.

Just as readily, in a flush moment at the gym, the activity of bodybuilders springs to mind. They are in a constant state of sexual satisfaction as they tear down their muscles, letting the body tremble and quiver and blood come rushing in, the everlasting pump. Bodybuilding has been transformed from its European roots as an attempt to mirror with the body the Greco-Roman sculptures being excavated in the 19th century and installed in the new museums. Early bodybuilders would sneak through the museum and tape-measure the sculptures head to toe, formulating the correct proportions according to wrist size.



Bronzer. Andrew Gorrie/Dominion Post

Contemporary bodybuilders are beyond such concerns and allegiances to an imagined history. Supplements, drugs, new machines, and other practices have allowed for bodybuilders to obliterate the past standards and achieve a new, more abstract result. They adjust their schedules in opposition to the socially approved distribution of hours and home in and work one specific aspect of themselves to exhaustion. After such elongated erotic performances, they step out under the bright lights, covered in extreme bronzer, to bring out the muscles that look incredibly cartoonish under any other circumstances but the bright lights of onstage competition.

It is with bodybuilders and their ingestion, consumption, refinement, and enhancement of past strategies and the conscious toying with their presentation and documentation in mind that I consider Michael Sanchez's argument about the impact of the iPhone on art exhibition. In "2011," an essay in the Summer 2013 issue of *Artforum,* he discusses the way such devices and image-aggregator sites like Contemporary Art Daily interact with and inform contemporary artworks. Art is rapidly referencing itself, speeding up the previous print- and exhibition-bound seasonal schedule that put forth the studio evidence of trends only every few months. Now, as Sanchez notes, things get posted when finished and shared instantaneously, and as a result, similar artists working with similar materials

or similar ideas can no longer be tied to a eureka moment: *A-ha! This must be the zeitgeist if these unconnected figures are all doing it once!*

Instead, the proliferation of work on the Internet makes it easily digestible and citable. New practices, in Sanchez's view, instantly devour themselves. I think it is necessary to flip the destructive, gluttonous connotations of devouring and focus on the more positive connotations of the word, that emphasis on avid enjoyment. What is so appealing about such fast distribution is how the institutionalized approaches that once suffocated, purified, cleansed, and straightened up the circulation of art are now infused with the chitchat and gossip of social life, and the work is tossed out onto the dance floor, knocked down from the balcony overlooking the frenzy. It isn't, "Oh my, check out that stoic hottie—that removed, super-distant installation at Kunsthalle Wien. Man, I wish I could ask him if he wants to dance, but I'm so nervous, and he's so up there." Instead, in both the quick-feed call and response and riffing and sharing, it is shooting a flirty raise of the eyebrow, adjusting your posture accordingly, and striking up a conversation and making the advance. The stilting and privileging, the attempts to put one group up above another, are falling apart. Everybody is fucking everybody.

The attempts to put one group up above another are falling apart. Everybody is fucking everybody.

In thinking of such juicy tidbits and romantic affairs, I think of Warhol, who was always up to hear the dirt on the previous day and chat at great lengths about the things around him. Through Warhol, the shame and sexual guilt of commercial work is flattened and laid to rest. Also through him, the everyday, the sensational, the banal "low talk," such as gossip and monosyllabic utterances and the carefully crafted considerations of the artist's body and appearance, can be claimed and raised in stature.

A sexual response, arousal, and enrapture in the materials and rituals can form an artist's work and structure what it draws from. Artists are giving themselves over and opening themselves up to those things that stick out, that linger, that give pause, that provide both evident visible pleasure and inwardly-kept satisfaction, that they can't get out of their head, that horrify them but they come back to, that humiliate and punish, that build and nurture, that annoy and tease, that they find themselves needing more and more of. These are precisely what is so invigorating about today's art.

Am I shocked that multiple people are getting excited about and engaging Axe, its body sprays, shampoos and deodorant? No, Axe is insane, its projections so ridiculous, the smells so pungent and easily dispersible, catching a trace of it when you aren't even ready, getting

Dyson Hot + Cool Fan

Ped Egg

smacked by those omnipresent fantastical video clips running in a constant stream online. Axe is so blunt and in your face that an artist was eventually going to have to go up and flirt a little bit with it.

Artists don't have to sign a mortgage with the things they work with, and it is perfectly normal to kind of hate the people you're attracted to. *Gosh, she's so wonderful and smart and well-read and funny, but she's a horrible drunk and she farts in her sleep.* Or: *he's such a belittling and abusive asshole, but I kind of need that deprecation in my life right now, it is hot, I can't help myself, I know it isn't "normal" but it is working so well right now*. Please keep the stories coming, and the encounters memorable.

There should be no guilt in the little tricks and joys that the photographer takes as she shoots yet another wedding or another shampoo commercial. No guilt for the studio assistant as he minutely changes the slightest tone of the shadow in Photoshop on a hurried, last-minute assignment. No shame for the sculptor achieving bliss as she gazes out at the perfection that is the Dyson Hot + Cool fan or for the painter as the hairs on his neck stand on end as he takes in a perfectly luminous, kinky kids' plush toy. No guilt for the performance collective as they assimilate the back-and-forth exchanges between pro wrestlers and their audience.

The little welds on the underneath of the chair, the otherworldly quality of the Ped Egg suspended in some floating advertisement, the catalogs for car shows, all those marvelous oddities that are liberated from art's guilt complex, strutting flamboyantly through such longed for and un-actualized concerns.

THERE'S SOMETHING TO be said for the repetitious, paying-the-bill qualities of getting the thing right, getting it to look exactly how it needs to look, and making sure that

it looks damn good and not dejected. That seems to be an undercurrent of the sculpture that wants to cleanse you, as it builds on the minimalist introduction of plastics, resins, metal, and other industrial materials in their stark punctuality—slickness and play with space along with the straight-out fling with branded body products, as configured by a generation of artists who aren't guilted into previous high-low, worthy-unworthy binaries, using the commercial skills and craft that they acquire in their day jobs.

Artists working today don't own this fact enough. They're still too meek about it. America always had a Warhol problem when he was alive, in that his flamboyance was too much for some folks who preferred their artists, like Johns and Rauschenberg, to deny their commercial activities and keep themselves pure from such daily occurrences, taking up residency in certifying institutions that still believed art was above everything else. There's still this leftover anti-market stigma that sneers at both those who sell and those pay the bills in less pure and wholesome fashion. As if the only way to be a valid artist is go to pro, shuffling through the residency cycle, taking adjunct positions with only one semester of your life planned at any moment, hoping for some fantasy placement so you can be above the daily fray. The shame of selling, and the shame of admitting that you might find certain qualities of your day capable of being relevant to the things that art struggles with is still taboo, amazingly.

Such practices apply not only to the production of work but also to documentation

L'Oreal for Kids bottle

and circulation. Artists are getting more honest about what turns them on across the board, and this includes browsing, looking, staging representations, and resharing—owning the way you like to browse, the way you like images to look when you see them, hiding the muffintop you've got creeping over the side of your pants by wearing high-rise jeans, putting on a little cover-up, turning your good side to the camera, standing next to someone smaller than you in every picture, making the lights a little bluer in every photo, obscuring the information inscribed on the situation, making pointed removals, and any other playful actions.

Sticking up one's nose at practices previously rejected as serious art—fashion

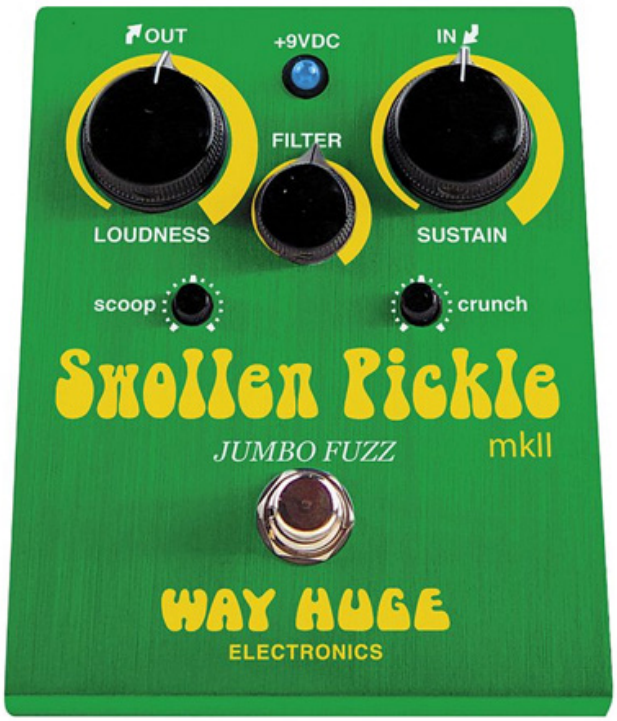
photography, car painting, furniture and website design, among other commercial trades—seems further and further removed with each new MFA class, as young artists let more in and open themselves to wider possibilities.

Although I'm not an artist, there's a personal story that plays in my head when I view a lot of work that touches on these arousals. I'm reminded of an experience I had as a tween at a summer camp where my mom worked as a nurse. It was the first week, everyone still sunfree, completely new to each other, feeling out the situation, the potential for incredibly awkward encounters rampant. One day we all waited in line to get in the showers with our towels and Adidas- or Nike-brand flip-flops, and talk inevitably turned to dicks, in all of their varieties.

What amused me about this not-so-uncommon encounter was the eventual turn in the conversation to shampoo. Everyone at the time had the new fish-like bottles of L'Oréal for Kids, with its emphasis on the no-tears, no-pain qualities of its chemical makeup and constant allusions to the earthy and bodily sexual qualities of fruit. Everyone proceeded to measure their dicks against said bottles, terming the new discovery a *L'Oreal boner,* each one of us with a different bottle.

THE WAY ARTISTS actually talk about spaces, casually at lunches and on the way to things, has always been in my experience closer to the language used to describe music: Things are harsh, ethereal, fuzzy, stark, amplified, severe, ringing. Out of context, if you missed the first few words, you might think they were discussing guitar pedals or a set of sounds on a drum machine.

Music hasn't traditionally been as reliant on proximity to or participation in certifying institutions in the way visual art has. A producer from the middle of nowhere can throw up a track on Soundcloud after being inspired by some other, more-well-connected artist and quickly enter into the dialogue.



Way Huge Electronics WHE401 Swollen Pickle mkII Jumbo Fuzz Guitar Effects Pedal

Visual art should be jealous of this fluid accessibility, these leveling maneuvers. Kids far from the art capitals can give themselves a playful legibility that is constantly

Alex Da Corte, Head, *2013*

up to be teased out and undermined. It isn't realistic for young would-be gallerists to acquire a space like the De Vleeshal, but with a little paint and lighting know-how, they can transform their crappy garage, bombed-out basement, or parent's attic into their own gallery space that is gonna look great all done up and out there.

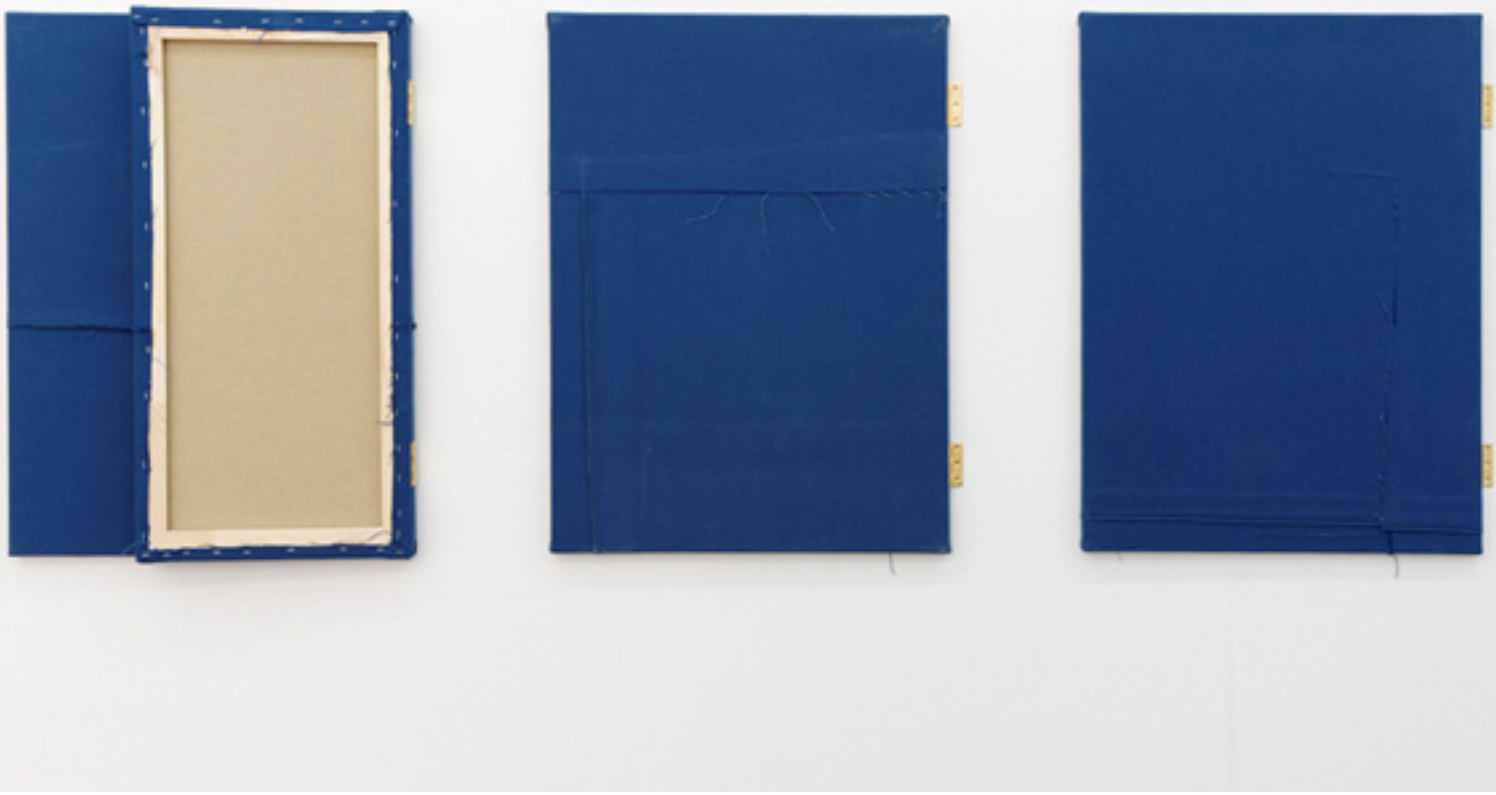
Why privilege one level of the art speech act over another? Sure, some work might be underwhelming in person, in comparison to the space that looked so big onscreen, but the work is just as true in the studio as it is in the gallery, as it is on a website, as it is in a book, as it is on a phone, as it is during pedicure and manicure parties, as it is when barely remembered and floating as an example to be used in a conversation that never quite makes

Carson Fisk-Vittori, Nature Window, *2013*

it out, as it is in a minuscule press clipping that some art historian will dig up a hundred years from now while writing a dissertation. Each new iteration allows for an unlimited amount of possibilities for artists to use, to extend and pause and speed up and burrow in and rewind and cut and paste and reverse and queer and undo and build upon, and as such, none should be shut down.

I think of this new work as coming to grips with its sexual inclinations, its desires, its wants and needs, its fetishes, how it wants it, and when, and from whom, and with whom, and where, and for how long. I'm curious to watch it as it further announces its own notions of identity and desire, comes to terms with the pictorial and critical vocabularies it draws from and turns them inside-out again and again, fighting prudishness every step of the way.

IN "2011" MICHAEL SANCHEZ also discusses abstract paintings that he says gain specific qualities due to specific tones and colors in their relation to the screen. These



Samuel François, Mighty Blue #1, #2, #3, *2012*

medium-specific concerns might seem a nostalgic longing for an imaginary time when art was clearly concerned with the "right" issues before the great beheading and subjugation of opticality, but such work is just as sexually courageous as the meme art and neosurrealism discussed above in its refusal to acknowledge pronouncements on its death as a viable practice, such painting owns its own shamed sexual stature. When critics deride such work, they frequently employ the language long used to attack masturbation. It is overly selfish and inward looking, playing in a cul-de-sac with clearly definable ends and goals and a limited focus (the most boring rise and climax that doesn't let anyone else in). And its emphasis on opticality is especially seen as masturbatory, as this is tied to the accusation that such work refuses to self-critique and police its status as a commodity object, that sensory experience that isn't as rigorous, respectable, and healthy in a relationship as the experiences tied to the other senses. It is too easy and too limited, and doesn't interact with anything but itself, jerking off and acquiring hairy palms.

It is necessary to rescue masturbation and masturbatory art from stigmatization, as these critiques and others like them attempt to shut off the possibilities such work

can have, both in past incarnations and new practices.

Masturbation is often said to stem from psychological weakness and moral decrepitude, or to be caused by a lack of "healthy" relations with others. It's depicted as always a rote, banal and repetitious event. This is bullshit. Masturbation can provide its own intensely empowering and enlightening and inspiring experiences. The joys of masturbating in the shower, masturbating when you have all the time in the world, when you're rushed, when you're all alone in the apartment, when there's someone in the next room, when you're imagining something in your head, when you're looking at an image, when you aid the process with other fluids and devices, imagined assemblages.

Masturbation isn't interesting only to the person who is masturbating. I think of friends masturbating to Skype screens for their partners across the country. The play and teasing, that exciting back and forth, the way your legs tighten, how the sweat glistens on your stomach, how you bite your lip, the slight noises you make, the arching of your back, the way the pace quickens and slows, the way you toss and turn and throw the pillows around. But for the masturbatory artist, the audience need not be literal but can be implied.

A lot of masturbation verges on more conventional sexual exchanges, just as there is sex that verges on masturbation. Events can fluidly circulate back and forth between the two, and open up new potentials. An artist should enjoy both, blend them, and engage however the hell they want, just as artists must have

Jean-Baptiste Bernadet.
Untitled (Shuffleboard), *2013*

flings, one night stands, quiet flirtations, long-distance relationships, marriages, and multiple partners. Far from announcing the death of a medium or signifying only mannerist pranks, as often is claimed about the stylistic shifts of protean artists like Warhol, Picabia, and Richter, the back and forth indicates a ravenous, all encompassing appetite that can't be satisfied, that longs for desires still yet to be fulfilled.

I hope artists stay horny. ■

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Break It Down

by TEJU COLE

Iconoclasm carries within it two paradoxical traits: thoroughness and fury

IN A DRY landscape, men work. With axes, hammers, and other tools, they break stones. It is hard work, from the looks of it, but they do it seriously. They are enthusiastic, and work as a team. Something is being cleared away, perhaps in preparation for something else to be built. A small walled house, made of hardened mud bricks and just a little taller than human height, comes crashing down. When the dust settles, the men, finding the large chunks of rubble unsatisfactory, reduce them further. With a pick, one man hits a flat concrete slab on which inscriptions are visible. At first, the pick glances, unequal to the task. But soon the slab is crossed by hairline cracks and begins to split. Two other men wander near the wall that has just come down. In the sand around their feet are large clay pots, and with effortless little kicks, like bored boys, they break the pots. Stone, mud, clay: Patiently they break everything down. And a little distance away, behind the safety of a metal gate, some people watch the men at work. The watchers let the work continue undisturbed. They do nothing, are able to do nothing, about the demolition in process, the demolition of old Sufi shrines. Between the workers and their watchers, there is a difference in power. An automatic gun, resting on some stones, ignored but unignorable, indicates that difference.

Frans Hogenberg, *The Calvinist Iconoclastic Riot of August 20, 1566*

In August 1566, an angry Calvinist crowd in the Flemish town of Steenvoorde attacked the pilgrimage church of Sint-Laurensklooster, destroying its art and architecture, and killing several of its priests. In the weeks that followed, the violence spread to the major Flemish cities of Antwerp and Ghent. And though there had been periodic outbreaks of iconoclasm all through European history—in Byzantine times, and then with renewed frequency in the age of Reformation—there had never been anything quite like the "Beeldenstorm," the Dutch "storm of statues" of the late 16th century. Sir Richard Clough, a Welsh merchant then living in Antwerp, was an eyewitness to

the destruction, and in a letter to London, he wrote of that he saw:

"All the churches, chapels and houses of religion utterly defaced, and no kind of thing left whole within them, but broken and utterly destroyed, being done after such order and by so few folks that it is to be marvelled at." He described the Church of Our Lady in Antwerp as looking "like hell with above 10,000 churches burning and such a noise as if heaven and earth had got together, with falling of images and beating down of costly works such sort that the spoil was so great that a man could not well pass through the church."

Images are powerful. They can bring people into such a pitch of discomfort that violence ensues, and iconoclasm carries within itself two paradoxical traits: thoroughness and fury. The men (they are in Timbuktu) in their hardworking but boyish ways, and with their automatic weapons, are a good example of this thoroughness, and this cheerful, impish fury.

In early 2001, in the Bamyan valley of central Afghanistan, a pair of monumental statues of the Buddha, intricately carved into the sandstone of a cliff in the 6th century, were dynamited and reduced to rubble. The larger of the statues was 180 feet high. The destruction was not easy: It took weeks. This act of straightforward iconoclasm was done at the direct order of Mullah Omar, leader of the Taliban. He had thought the Buddhas had some tourism value in 1999, but he changed his mind less than two years later, declaring them idols. And so the dynamite was laid, and where the Buddhas were, where they stood in their graceful embodiment of Gandhara art, in their fine blend of Greek and Buddhist artistic ideals, there now stands only silence, emptiness, a pair of monumental alcoves.

Iconoclasm is nominally about theology. Images which represent the wrong ideas must be expunged. But why be so furious about ideas? And, so, how are we to understand the ongoing destruction of Sufi shrines in the north of Mali? Ansar Dine, the rebel group that now controls Timbuktu, believes itself to be doing the will of God. The United Nations doesn't matter, Ansar Dine has said, UNESCO is irrelevant, only God's law matters. The locals are helpless, and horrified. Short of witnessing grievous bodily harm, few things are as astonishing as seeing the casual, physical destruction of what one holds sacred.

Surely, the Muslim piety of "the city of 333 saints" (as Timbuktu is known) should correspond to the Muslim piety of Ansar Dine, should it not? So far, eight mausoleums have been broken, many tombs destroyed, and the rebels are determined to continue the destruction. Their version of Islam—Salafist, fundamentalist—considers the syncretic practices of Malian Sufism, with its veneration of saints and incorporation of vernacular practices, haram. There is no direct Koranic proscription on image-making, but the Traditions of the Prophet, the Hadiths, object to using images to usurp God's creative power. From those Hadiths come such narratives as the one in the 9th century "Book of Idols":

> When on the day he conquered Mecca, the Apostle of God appeared before the Ka'bah, he found idols arrayed around it. Thereupon he started to pierce their eyes with the point of his arrow, saying, 'Truth is come and falsehood vanished. Verily, falsehood is a thing that vanisheth [Koran 17:81].' He then ordered that they be knocked down, after which they were taken out and burned.

On French radio, Sanda Ould Boumana, a spokesman for Ansar Dine, expressed their activity in strikingly similar terms: "When the Prophet entered Mecca, he said that all the mausoleums should be destroyed. And that's what we're repeating." And that is why, more than a thousand years after he died, the tomb of the saint Sidi Mahmoudou has been destroyed and desecrated.

A peculiarity of the Timbuktu iconoclasm is that these shrines are architectural rather than representationally sculptural. They are generally modest in size, and usually made of mud. There is little of the opulence that might have maddened the 16th century Flemish mob, and none of the lifelike mimesis of human form that offended sensibilities in the Bamyan Valley. In Timbuktu, a once wealthy trading city, in a place once fabled for its wealth and learning, now swallowed up by the Sahel, these mausoleums are expressions of local practice: simple and old beliefs in a land of griots and marabouts, the kind of syncretism common to all the big world religions, owing as much to universal edicts as to what works for the people in their land, in their language, and according to their pre-conversion customs of veneration.

There is in iconoclasm an emotional content that is directly linked to the iconoclasts' own psychology. The theological pretext for image destruction is that images are powerless, less than God, ineffective as a source of succor, and therefore disposable. But in reality, iconoclasm is motivated by the iconoclast's profound belief in the power of the image being destroyed. The love iconoclasts have for icons is a love that dare not speak its name.

Iconoclastic hostility is complex. It expresses itself in different ways all through history. But what is generally true of iconoclastic movements is that they are never about theology alone. They include politics, struggles for power, the effort to humiliate an enemy, and a demonstration of iconoclasts' own neuroses. Behind iconoclastic bravado is a terror of magic, a belief in dead saints no less than that of iconophiles and, crucially, a historical anxiety that, in the Timbuktu case, is about presenting the bona fides of Ansar Dine to its Wahhabi models in Saudi Arabia and to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

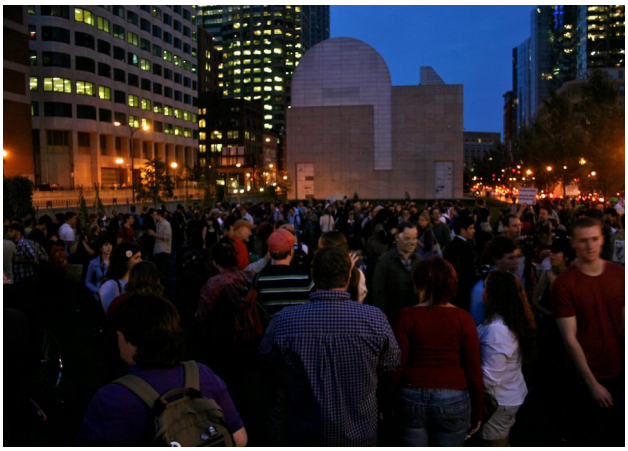
That which doesn't speak dumbfounds. After all, who can tell what such objects are thinking? Best to destroy the inscrutable, the ancient, if one is to truly usher in a pure new world. So, the invaders continue their work in Timbuktu with enthusiasm and good cheer, smashing pots, breaking bricks, rattling at the doors of the mosque. It takes a lot of work to silence silent objects. But already it is clear that not only the people watching from behind the gate are consumed with fear. ■

Giants of Boston

by MARYAM MONALISA GHARAVI

Face-covering vexes geopolitical divisions and reads as one thing: anti-American

The Giant of Boston by Os Gêmeos,
Photo by Geoff Hargadon



Dewey Square, Boston.
Photo by Sarah Dickerson

BOSTON IS A city perennially self-conscious about public art. A 2012 *Boston Phoenix* cover story examined why such an alarming number of young artists leave a city ranked in the top 10 for national arts funding. (The *Boston Phoenix* itself folded not long after that publication.) When it comes to large-scale works in the public domain, the city tends to favor exogenous creations rather than the homegrown. The accusation that the city is risk-averse and WASP-y descends from what Michael Braithwaite called an "age-old attitude central to the very culture of Boston itself: a city where philanthropy as historically been dedicated to institutions and fine art, rather than to visual art and artists that push boundaries." More important, the elimination of rent control by voter referendum in 1994 ensured that tenable housing for artists, the vast majority of whom piece together low wages, would be dispiritingly low.

The most publicly discussed artwork on the heels of that 2012 report was "The Giant of Boston," a large mural by Os Gêmeos (Portuguese for "the twins"). Otávio and Gustavo Pandolfo are Brazilian brothers from São Paulo who co-produce all their work, both sanctioned and illicit, as the eponymous twins, signing their entire jointly bred oeuvre as a single artist. Os Gêmeos' local work comprised three murals around the city and an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, the most prominent artistic institution in Boston.

The story of how the brothers' first major solo showcases in the United States came to be located in the city reveals little of substance about Boston's conservative art fixtures themselves. After all, the commissioned works by the artists were generously funded by multiple senior, prestigious institutions. The twins are internationally hailed (their presence was described by the *Boston Globe* as "kind of like the Rolling Stones coming and giving a free concert on the Greenway"), thus a less "controversial" choice in and of themselves, even though they originate from—heaven forbid—a Latin American nation.

Despite the great care taken to select bonafide art stars and avoid anything "overtly political" (as curator Pedro Alonzo commented), the Dewey Square mural managed to strike a ripple of trouble. The story is said to have unfolded like this. Fox News posed a question to its online audience, encouraging viewers to air their thoughts on the station's Facebook page: "This is a new mural on a Big Dig ventilation building. What does it look like to you?" The Facebook comment thread has since been removed, though some screen grabs remain. In great numbers, spectators explicitly likened the mural's subject to a terrorist.

The bright-yellow, head-wrapped figure in the mural was interpreted by hundreds of Bostonians as an al-Qaeda operative, Bart Simpson disguised as a *mujahideen* fighter, the wife of a terrorist, a "towel head Islamist holding a gun," an "allah [sic] loving united states hating individual," a "gay ninja," a Taliban fighter, a "tribute to Obama's birthday," and in "seriously poor taste." The Pandolfo brothers rejoined that their effigy was a boy wearing pajamas and clothing around his visage. Lest it be claimed that the public

Screen grab by Steve Annear

comments were cherry-picked, *Metro Boston* reported that the post spawned more than 600 racially centered or bigoted comments. The ACLU of Massachusetts intervened to caution against the impulse to "equate all head coverings with terrorism." The deadly shooting of a Sikh temple in southern Wisconsin by a self-avowed skinhead had taken place just one day earlier.

Perhaps the most honest and frank exchange about the mural took place between a child and a reporter:

> CHILD: It's scary like a Batman.
> REPORTER: Why is it scary?
> CHILD: Because it has something covered. And its nose is covered with a blanket.

The "controversy" surrounding the figure in the mural should not be dismissed just because it appears wholesale-manufactured by a baiting local Fox News station. An op-ed by the ICA's current director, Jill Medvedow, claimed that "the critical issue raised by Os Gêmeos' mural is not an aesthetic one; rather I believe it is an issue of the media declaring a controversy rather than reporting on one." By default that claim dismisses the porous political frontiers between aesthetic choices in art and the sphere of public life (and curiously so, for artists whose work has been politically charged since its inception on the streets). Whether or not Medvedow intends it, the statement diminishes the value of the work as little more than a brightening rejuvenation of the drab downtown financial district.

Moreover, while the most obvious parts of the controversy between the art institutions backing the artwork and the artwork's detractors staged themselves in the city, the unseen/unseeable and unspoken/unsayable relationship between the artwork and its spatial site was omitted from the discussion.

Back in 2011 the Occupy Boston (OB) popular assembly chose Dewey Square as the site of their encampment. OB never sought explicit permission to occupy the wide patch of grass in the shadow of the U.S. Federal Reserve from Dewey's private proprietors, the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy. In October 2011, on the heels of police warnings of a first raid, the Rose Kennedy issued a statement: "No one asked for permission. No one gave permission." That initial nonparticipation, which was later rescinded, seemed an implicit go-ahead while encampment was still a part of OB's main strategy.

Leaving aside the smaller mural at the luxury boutique Revere Hotel—formerly the Charles Street jail—or the collaborative mural with RYZE, Todd James, and Caleb Neelon in Union Square, the Os Gêmeos mural in Dewey Square received explicit permission. In addition to the private funding that afforded its creation, cooperation between the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the Boston Art Commission, and the City of Boston sanctioned the use of the front-facing ventilation building in Dewey Square. The permit proved a painless formality.

The city of Boston failed to discuss what public discourses are allowable, seeable, and

sayable. A counterargument might defend the poor patches of grass and shrubbery the Conservancy cited in its protectionist pamphlets during the OB debacle, but it is clear that the city veritably bent backward to approve this privately funded, publicly displayed artwork and did not allow ventilation issues to get in the way. One might say that art is politically innocuous (and the ICA director implied as much in declaring the mural a manufactured noncontroversy). It is permissible to say so. Yet implicit in that assertion is a resignation. One must resign oneself to a certain kind of everyday nihilism: People were beaten and forcefully expelled from a narrow geography of grass that now boasts a mural from one of the most famous art collectives in the world, and in the end, it did not matter.

I TAKE NO pleasure in making a distinction between *The Giant of Boston* mural itself and the significance the artwork engendered (or failed to engender) in its current location. Inadvertently journeying alongside a fellow traveler, I have tracked the cartoonish, bright-yellow Os Gêmeos icon from the cool safety of museums to outside the statuesque walls of the Teatro Municipal in São Paulo to a few subway stops away in Dewey Square. At each site—private or public, indoor or outdoor, small-scale or large—the figure at the center of their work resonated with a complicated emotional mixture of jubilation and mourning.

The Pandolfo brothers themselves have declined (rather wisely) to discuss *The Giant of Boston* mural or its chosen location, save for a memorandum that they believe in "peace" and "imagination." The crouching, face-covered yellow boy epitomizes the seedling of dissent and in that sense the mural seems to speak (though its mouth is obfuscated) for itself, whether or not the artists directly address the fact that the repression brought to bear on Dewey Square has been re-signified by his presence.

The question of the semiotic effect of the masked figure remains, and that is what aroused the ire of hundreds (and at least one young Batman-fearing boy) when they described the little giant as a terrorist. The effect differs not only transregionally (the brothers have painted several murals but this is the first in the U.S.) but also transculturally. What does the covered face of a lone figure mean in Brazil versus Boston? Why this *specific* figure in an American mural as opposed to other very recent Os Gêmeos creations, such as their collaborative work with Aryz in Lodz, Poland?

Locally, Mayor Thomas Menino infamously railed during the OB encampment that he would "not tolerate civil disobedience in the city of Boston." The term *anarchist* was thrown in as a hooliganist slur, as it cyclically is, to encode lawlessness, mayhem, and general disarray. At least since Seattle 1999, political activists of all ethnic and class backgrounds faced suspicion, and occasionally arrest, for masking their faces. Covering one's head or face arouses deep and immediate suspicion in contemporary society. Think

of the use of head covering for religious—particularly Islamic—observance. Think of the use of face covering in strict interpretations of Islamic practice. Think of Trayvon Martin in his "street" clothes, blamed postmortem for his own death because of not only being black but having also worn a hoodie.

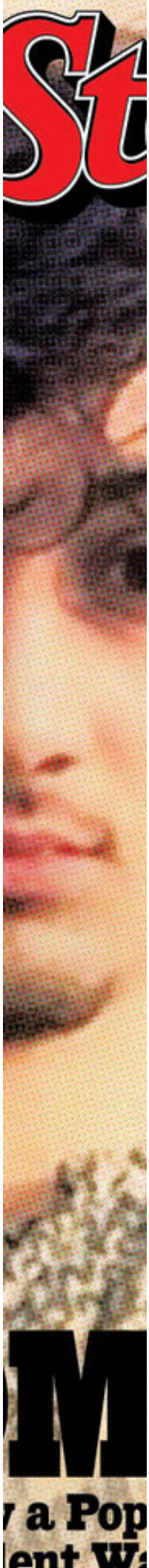
In Brazil face coverage highlights two things: the importance of not being identified (in a police-media alliance where the arrested are widely filmed and photographed, their images distributed as mug shots on national television before so much as a formal accusation) and a way to draw attention to the invisibility of the poor. This is not a matter of inference: Os Gêmeos have explicitly questioned the Brazilian flag's motto (drawn from French positivist Auguste Comte) of "order and progress" in their images. Their yellow and brown animated figures wearing tattered clothes and covering their faces are inconvenient thorns to a long civilizational project.

The overwhelmingly negative disposition toward the mural reveals how Latin American and Middle Eastern visual typologies of face-covering— the disregarded poor of Brazil, the Zapatistas of Mexico, the *fedayeen* of Palestine—collapse into a muddled sameness in the eyes of a suspicious beholder. The racial and sartorial coding that vexes geopolitical divisions reassigns them as one thing, and one thing only: anti-American.

This tendency to see only the repetition of the covered face (repetition because it resists representation) lends not only to the erasure of history, particularly the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and '70s, but to the equation of the masked face with lessened humanness. Viewed this way, one can see how *The Giant of Boston* can simultaneously be aggregated with a negative-marked identity ("towel-headed terrorist") and emptied of political agency (an occupier in the shadow of the Federal Reserve building).

NOW THAT THE mural is going to be prematurely pulled down—many months shy of its original 18-month designated time frame and for reasons unconvincingly given—it seems appropriate to revisit the rancor-inducing icon after the Boston marathon bombing. An unorthodox view of history might cast the mural as inadvertently prefiguring a great local terror. That the terror was masked—though the violent diegesis allegedly staged by the Tsarnaev brothers never involved a masked spectacle—speaks more to the contours of American imaginations about occluded "others" than it does about art. That the artwork was able to shed light on such leanings—that it acted as a surface on which deeply lodged wishes and fears materialized—was its greatest intervention.

The *Rolling Stone* profile of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev made mention of two kinds of inscriptions on walls. The first was inside the boat where Tsarnaev hid from the police: "when investigators finally gained access to the boat, they discovered a jihadist screed scrawled on its walls." The other was in Tsarnaev's high school: "There are at least 50



Detail from *Rolling Stone* cover, August 1, 2013, issue

nationalities represented at the city's one public high school, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, whose motto—written on walls, murals and school-course catalogs, and proclaimed over the PA system—is 'Opportunity, Diversity, Respect.'"

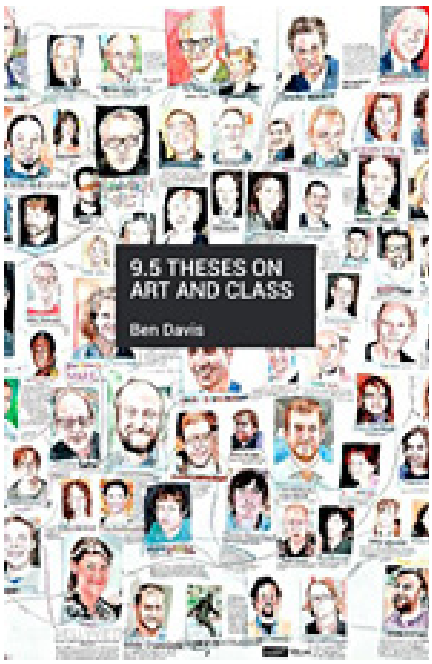
Neither inscription is a work of art, of course, and both were contained in a semiprivate domain. However, the cover of *Rolling Stone*—thought to depict a boy-giant terrorist in a gossamer haze—sparked such hysteria that the mayor of Boston publicly denounced it, several chain stores refused to carry it, and the editors resorted to prefacing the profile with a disclaimer. Soon after, a disgruntled 25-year veteran of the Massachusetts State Police released a tactical police photograph of Tsarnaev in defiance of the *Rolling Stone* cover, to "counter the message that it conveys" and to unveil "the real face of terrorism, not the handsome, confident young man shown on the magazine cover." The police photo showed the young man's face in the bulls-eye of a laser sniper, head lowered and bloodied hands raised. The sniper photo of Tsarnaev was presumably leaked in order to give comfort to his victims, not unlike the ideology that undergirds "Boston Strong," the city's adopted moniker after the blasts.

The original cover portrait of Tsarnaev is indeed telling, but not because it glamorizes or idealizes its subject. If anything, it has the neutrality of a self-portrait, a surface where deeply lodged wishes and fears materialize. ■

Creative Tyranny

By ROB HORNING

Artists' self-important claims for their work makes them worse than useless for political activism



Ben Davis
9.5 Theses on Art and Class
Haymarket Books, 224 pages

CAN YOU CALL yourself an artist and an activist at the same time? Or is the artists' personal brand always in the way? *9.5 Theses on Art and Class*, Ben Davis's new collection of essays, addresses these questions and other similar ones with an admirable clarity that invites debate. In these pieces, Davis, a Marxist art critic and executive editor of *Artinfo.com*, shows little overt interest in policing the boundaries of art—there are virtually no assessments of the aesthetic value of particular artworks. Yet he ends up preserving a nebulous view of "great" art's supposedly objective appeal that undermines his apparent political concerns. Art accrues meaning via its audience, which is inevitably structured by social relations. To imagine that its value can come from anywhere else is to obfuscate the centrality of class that Davis is otherwise eager to bring to light.

Class relations are central to Davis's attempt to rethink the relationship between art and political action. Artists are eager to identify themselves with—and even lay claim to—efforts like the Occupy movement, but their involvement, Davis argues, muddles protest and derails organizational efforts more often

than not. When artistic practice is posited as a politics, it tends to emphasize individual effort and distract movements from pursuing the sort of social change that could benefit that large portion of the population not interested in living their lives as art.

What gets in the way of artists' making substantive political contributions? The collection's title essay proposes that artists' class position opposes their interests to those of typical protesters, even when both are concerned with economic survival. Because artists, unlike wage laborers, have a direct stake in what they produce and face no workplace discipline other than what they impose on themselves, their political attitudes are structurally different from those of the working class, who know they are interchangeable parts in the machine of capitalism and must organize collectively to resist it. "The predominant character" of the contemporary art scene, on the other hand, "is middle class," Davis contends, referring not to a particular income or earning potential but rather to artists' relation to their labor. Artists work for themselves, own what they make, and must concern themselves with how to sell it. Though art has often made a mission of shocking middlebrow taste and artists have often congregated in urban Bohemian enclaves in working-class neighborhoods, they are less vanguard proletarians than petit bourgeois.

This makes artists inescapably individualistic, concerned chiefly about differentiating their product. As Davis notes, "an overemphasis on the creation of individual, signature forms—a professional requirement—can as often make it a distraction from the needs of an actual movement, which are after all collective, welding together tastes of all kinds." Artists must produce their reputation as a singular commodity on the market, which makes their chief obstacle other would-be artists rather than capitalism as a system, regardless of whatever critical content might inhere in their work. When artists patronize the working class with declarations of solidarity, their vows are motivated less by a desire for social change than by the imperative that they enhance the distinctive value of their personal brand.

In the context of artists' fundamentally personal ambitions, "the trope of anonymous teamwork" can "seem wildly radical," Davis observes in "Collective Delusions," though such working conditions are routine for nearly everyone else. Mistaking the achievement of collective purpose as the accomplishment of collective aims, artists arriving at the scene of activism promulgate a politics of "carnivalesque street parties" in which participation is sufficient as a goal. But carnivals are the tolerated states of exception that support the ordinary operation of power. As Davis puts it, artists' eagerness for "temporary autonomous zones" is a "perfect recipe for displacing the goal of struggle from enduring material change that could benefit large numbers of people to a spectacle that is purely for the amusement of those who take part." In other words, artists turn protest into an aestheticized experiential good, something consumed by individuals who can then

disaggregate from the collective with a distinctive, treasurable memory.

According to Davis, the artists' class interest "involves defining creativity as professional self-expression, which therefore restricts it to creative experts"—the artists. Contemporary visual art, then, is a "a specific creative discipline that arrogates to itself the status of representing 'creativity' in general." Rather than being a common property developed by the "general intellect" of workers in collaboration and social interaction, creativity becomes the intellectual property of certified artists alone, who, for their livelihood, administer it for the rest of society. That is, "real" creativity becomes the preserve of a specially trained elite rather than the evolutionary inheritance of the entire human species.

Whether or not it correlates to distinctions in talent, this distinction between the fake creativity of ordinary people working in common and the certified creativity of appointed artists working alone or atop a hierarchy allows those artists to make "artworks" with a value on the market. The point is to give only artists a true property stake in their creative activity—only their creative work has inherent value. Everyone else's creative effort is just plain old "labor," which is worthless until purchased by capital. Limiting authentic creativity to proven professional artists makes creativity both aspirational (it models how nonartists should structure their leisure) and vicariously accessible (nonartists can absorb creativity through awed exposure to properly certified art objects). It is thus that artists "represent creativity tailored to capitalist specifications." Artists become the designated exemplars of the form liberty can take under an economic system that prizes innovation and glorifies ideologically the dignity of the small proprietor. Though Davis recognizes this, he also tries to give it a dialectical spin, arguing that the artists' model of freedom demonstrates what autonomy looks like and why it might be worth struggling for.

But because artists are celebrated by capital for their seeming independence from it, they are liable to become confused about the social role they play. They think being above wage labor gives them automatic solidarity with those who want to abolish it. They think they are fellow travelers when really they are running dogs.

Limiting authentic creativity to proven professional artists makes creativity both aspirational and vicariously accessible

Artists make the satisfying feeling of *being an artist* as much as they make discrete artworks. Typical art-world consumers, however, are not interested in the freedom art might signify. They want some-

thing to invest in and something that sets them apart. The trade in art objects is mainly about updating the prestige scoreboard (and property values) in the rarefied "art world" of multimillionaire collectors, gallery owners, museum trustees, and artists becoming brands. The structure of the entire art milieu is meant to forestall the broader appreciation of art and protect its capability to signify status. It is meant to allow rich people to recognize the fruits of their wealth in their exclusive access to the world's finest things. The glory of the view lies primarily in its being private-access. Ordinary people's appreciation of art attaches to works like so many barnacles, ruining their meaning for collectors. As with any luxury brand, the wrong sort of audience for an artist can sully their market value completely.

This is why so much of the discourse that surrounds contemporary art is so nauseating. It deliberately aims to destroy the confidence of nonelite audiences in their own judgment; it wants to make their potential pleasure in art depend ona recognition of their exclusion from the realm of art-making. We get the joy of knowing there's some consumption experience beyond us that can remain forever aspirational, which gives us cause to cherish whatever brief peeks we get over the wall.

Market ratification affirms an artist's ambition, which in turn feeds the market and the constitutive power of its major players. Art can't break the grip of the market without also breaking artists' determination to exist as a class apart. It is no surprise, then, that artists are largely disinclined to think about class. Helping them in their studied ignorance is the reified notion of the "art world," which Davis contends is a convenient obfuscation that allows participants and aspirants to disavow their collusion with contemporary capitalism's structural inequalities of status and access. "The notion of an 'art world' implies a sphere that is separate or set aside from the issues of the non–art world (and so separates it from class issues outside that sphere)." Artists have pure intentions, yet their collective activities would seem to destroy all possible optimism about whether creative expression can really be everyone's lifework. "Visual art still holds the allure of being basically a middle-class field, where personal agency and professional ambition overlap," Davis insists, but he points out sadly in his introduction that "year after year" the contemporary art world "chews up and spits out idealistic people, leaving them disgusted and heartsick."

The same could be said of the world of literary journals, creative writing, and the "intellectual milieu" in general; each serves as a catch basin for those eager to transcend the ordinary economic relations that largely determine the lives of ordinary people. Often fueled by inherited privilege and a nurtured sense of entitlement, the up-and-coming cadres of the "creative class" seek ways to transform their yearning to be extraordinary into a career, and if that fails, into a politics based mainly on the demand for lucrative self-expression. All the while they imagine themselves exemplars of unsullied, disinterested aesthetic aspiration.

Given that artists' status hinges on mys-

tified creativity, they tend to overrate its transcendental significance. When "committed art practice" acts as a "substitute for the simple act of being politically involved, as an organizer and activist," the focus shifts from economic injustice to liberating personal expression, as though capitalist society has some interest in suppressing it. Even Davis himself falls into this line of thinking: "Insofar as contemporary society thwarts or distorts self-expression," he claims, "the urge to follow one's own creative path can itself be a political impulse."

But consumer capitalism is eager to harness the creative impulses of everyone. It virtually compels self-expression by allowing even the most mundane acts of consumption to become signifying lifestyle choices. (Is your kale organic? etc.) And the elaboration of communications technology has made our expression itself a lucrative product that we make for free and pay to consume the spectacle of its distribution. Telecoms and social-media companies would like nothing more than for us to express ourselves as much as possible. If anything, the problem is that capitalism makes self-expression seem more important than other more cooperative forms of social engagement, a condition that Davis seems to want to condemn. He points out how visual artists often epitomize the aloof pleasures of self-expression, flouting convention and embracing individualistic selfishness over consideration and community-building. Graffiti art is Davis's paradigmatic example, "one of the essential artistic products of the neoliberal period."

No matter how subversive the content of such art becomes, it never ceases to support capitalist hegemony. Artists provide concrete evidence that capitalism nurtures autonomous "creativity" and tolerates even the most intemperate of its countercultural excesses, while it actually siphons the creative energies of nonartists into valorizing consumer goods, putting them to innovative use in expressing identity.

But there is nothing inherently uncreative about consumerism: Shopping on Etsy is arguably just as creative and pleasurable as making crafts for Etsy, tapping the same impulses to recognize and prize distinctiveness.

For those to whom the creative-class habitus is entirely alien, consumer capitalism opens up otherwise inaccessible opportunities for self-expression, making participation in it genuinely expressive and satisfying. As consumers use goods to convey personal identity, they simultaneously enrich the signifying potential of material culture for everyone, strengthening consumerism's appeal as social communication and

Shopping on Etsy is arguably just as creative and pleasurable as making crafts for Etsy

quasi-artistic expression. Social media intensify this, providing a low-barrier platform for people to disseminate their consumer behavior and track the response it gets, while absorbing the influence of their peers. But the artist's interest rests in ideologically subordinating such pleasures to the glories of professional art, thereby protecting the art world's monopoly on prestige.

Davis waffles on this a bit, in part because these essays were written over a span of several years but also because he wants contradictory things. He seeks to protect the possibility of an idealized social function for art in the face of capitalist realities that deny it. He sees artists' class position as causing them ideological problems but thinks the art they make might still be immune. Even as he convincingly argues that there are "different class-based notions of creative labor" and that "one must judge art in terms of the contradictory values given to it by competing class interests," he is ready nonetheless to tout a universal ideal of "creative expression" and assert that art has some objective value that could be deduced in the abstract, independent of the class struggle that everywhere else determines the relative value of human effort.

But it's impossible to say artworks are "great" without also implying that those who can see that objective greatness are in a superior aesthetic position to those preoccupied with consumer junk. In wanting to preserve the traditional transcendental quality of art, Davis is arguing for the very same rarefied aura that critics and collectors and museums and art schools and all the other art-world institutions have always counted on and used as an alibi.

Far from working arm-in-arm with workers to liberate them from the forces the restrict their expression, artists are more likely to work to protect that aura and intensify the qualms ordinary people might have about thinking of their activities as art. Creativity must be held apart from consumerism, protected in the hands of a particular elite with the appropriate training to keep expression "authentically meaningful" rather than commercial. At the same time, authentic art production must be left in the hands of the professionals, who have been endowed with unique talent and have made a series of special sacrifices to develop their artistic gift. Ordinary people are endowed only with the ability to consume, and while they may think that's creative, they're kidding themselves.

Part of the problem with artists as cultural role models is that they authorize a general devaluing of labor by making it seem as though "creativity" is its own reward. In "Art and Class," Davis notes that "the term 'artist' has connotations of freedom and personal satisfaction that can be used to obscure real relationships of exploitation when it is overgeneralized to apply to any type of labor that is deemed remotely creative." This logic is used to justify unpaid internships and measly salaries in the so-called glamour industries. But that justification hinges on the idea that culturally recognized opportunities to be creative are scarce. It's not that too many people are labeled artists then expected to work for less, as Davis suggests, but that not

enough people recognize the artistry in what they are already doing and live with a sense of social inferiority and self-doubt. If they are to protect their own cultural capital, professional artists (and curators and critics) must endorse the standards that pronounce some people as uncreative.

"Creative expression needs to be redefined," Davis declares in the title essay. "It should not be thought of as a privilege but a basic human need … it should be treated as a right to which everyone is entitled." But creative expression is neither a privilege or a need but an inherent characteristic of human endeavor. It is not something decreed by fiat.

Yet Davis seems to think that while "we are all creative people," some people's creativity is more "interesting" than others, and this warrants the elaboration of culture-wide social practices for separating the divinely inspired from the dullards. He implicitly dismisses the view that everyone's activity can be legitimately "artistic" as so much autonomist wishful thinking, scorning "Hardt and his co-thinkers" for claiming that "the entire proletariat has been aestheticized." In disputing artist Joseph Beuys's notion that "everyone is an artist," Davis refers fatalistically to the scarcity of social approval, as though the uneven distribution of social recognition couldn't be made a political target, as though social media hasn't proved that a vast and growing economy of approval can't be technologically called into being. "Universal consumerism has indeed augmented the creative instruments at the disposal of the average person," Davis concedes in "Beneath Street Art, the Beach," "but this potential is not matched by opportunities within the sphere of official culture for people to realize themselves as professional creative individuals."

Who cares about the sanctity of the "official culture," which has a class-based interest in restricting that endorsement to a select few? The opportunities it provides and the self-realization that might stem from them are already poisoned from a political point of view. Davis won't surrender the idea that "official approval matters" and that there is an objective basis for determining "legitimate self-expression." Such official approval may matter to professional artists, because it is the source of their livelihood, and Davis seems eager to defend the right of a select few to make a living through art. To the rest of us, it is the stifling source of delegitimization. It is a reminder of the concrete reality of that solipsistic, insidery "art world" that Davis is otherwise so eager to see dismantled. Shouldn't those excluded from the official art world create their own

Who cares about the sanctity of the "official culture," which is interested in restricting endorsement to a select few?

opportunities, according to their own communal standards, pitting their values against those of the official culture, and the social order that supports it, if necessary? Shouldn't they destroy art to save it?

In "Crisis and Criticism" Davis admits a personal motive for his own faith in art's transcendence: "I have to believe that some theory about art's purpose is important—without a seriously argued perspective on what makes visual art distinctive, all you have left is the art world as a crappy arm of pop culture or a place for high-end gambling." Those descriptions don't seem wrong (nor do they seem mutually exclusive), and Davis's determination to not to accept them simply to preserve critics' and artists' dignity seems a thin veneer.

Art's higher purpose becomes an origin myth that holds out the promise that eventually the art world that destroys so many idealists will ultimately be redeemed. In "The Agony of the Interloper," an essay about "outsider art," Davis argues that the "institutions of art, like all institutions in an unequal society, are warped by their context." But an ongoing unequal context is what brought these institutions into being. Their express purpose is to rule on who belongs and who doesn't based on social position. There never have been any unwarped art institutions; they are warped by design. Does Davis really believe that art institutions once served some pure notion of art and then somehow got corrupted? Whose ideal of purity would have been upheld?

Similarly, in a postscript to his essay "White Walls, Glass Ceilings," Davis urges we fight for "a world where art's value escapes the deformities imposed upon it by an unequal society." Davis wants there to be generalized social practices that can certify art's value without somehow stratifying a society in which art has economic value. Yet if artistic ability is unequally distributed by nature, that fact alone will generate an unequal society as long as art is singled out for special cultural significance. Art is so complicit in structuring cultural hierarchies, it makes more sense to argue that art's value never precedes the existence of those deformities and to agitate for a world where art is granted no alienable "value" at all.

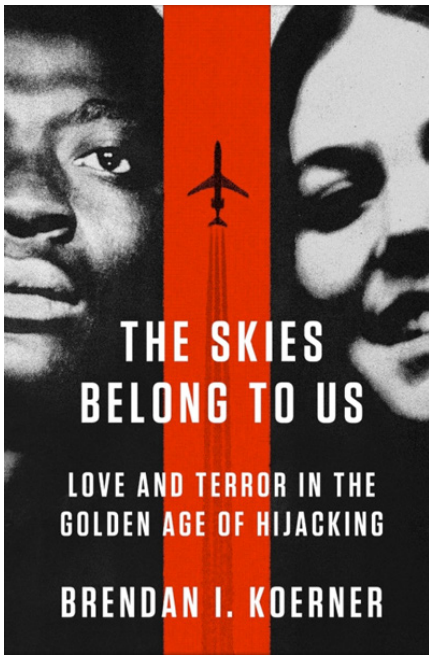
In the collection's last paragraph, Davis comes around to something like this position, that from the perspective of a future communist society, the idea that "great art was something rare and precious, a triumph that had to be scratched out against all odds, a privilege that needed to be defended with boundless righteousness and walled off in its own specific professional sphere will likely seem strange." There is no reason to regard it as less than strange now. We can start by rejecting the need to identify "great" art and the class victors it nominates. When art is finally worthless, it will be free for everyone to make and enjoy. ■

Shouldn't they destroy art to save it?

Leaving on a Jet Plane

By JESSICA LOUDIS

Why was skyjacking so common in the 1960s and '70s?



Brendan Koerner
The Skies Belong to Us
Crown, 336 pages

IN AN ERA when going through airport security demands a level of intimacy that would ordinarily require several dinner dates, it's mildly shocking to realize that security measures were once so lax that for a brief period of time, the American skies served as a playground for an aerial version of Grand Theft Auto. As *Wired* contributing editor Brendan Koerner details in *The Skies Belong to Us*, over an 11-year period from 1961 to 1972, 159 commercial airlines were hijacked across the U.S., sometimes as frequently as twice a week. (On especially exciting days, two separate hijackings might even happen simultaneously.) The identities of the skyjackers, as the *New York Daily Mirror* dubbed them, were diverse: from former mental patients to wealthy white heiresses to radical Marxists. They were seen as something between outlaws and heroes, latter-day pirates propelled by the loss of late-sixties idealism and aided by the airline industry's reticence to impose strict—or any—security measures. (Airlines feared it would cost them customers; the government more or less acquiesced.) *The Skies Belong to Us* takes readers through this heady age via two of its more successful protagonists, but before getting to them, allow me a quick survey of the period's highlights.

Excepting a bizarre incident in 1954 in which a "giant teenager" unsuccessfully attempted to hijack an American Airlines flight, the threat of skyjacking was so far off the government's radar in the late fifties that it forgot to make hijacking a crime when it passed the Federal Aviation Law in 1958. The first wave of hijackings began in the spring of 1961, when a deranged Miami electrician diverted a flight from Key West to Cuba in order to warn Castro about a fictitious assassination attempt. The man was arrested upon arrival, the passengers were treated to lunch in Havana, and the flight was delayed by three hours before landing safely in Key West.

Once Kennedy finally made skyjacking a capital offense, in the fall of 1961, the designation led to a lull in hijackings that would last until 1965, when a 14-year-old boy commandeered a plane in Hawaii. After that, Cuba proved to be by far the most popular destination for hijackers: By 1968, regardless of their destination, all airplanes were outfitted with charts of the Caribbean sea in the event of a rerouting to Havana. For several years, hijacked planes were a source of extra income for the Castro regime, which charged airlines an average of $7,500 to retrieve their aircraft. To dissuade would-be hijackers, the State Department proposed offering free one-way flights to Cuba to anybody who wanted them—a measure the Cuban government rejected.

In 1969, the Federal Aviation Administration convened a special anti-hijacking task force to come up with a solution to the problem. The most popular suggestion (which was never acted upon) was to build a mock version of Havana's Jose Marti Airport in South Florida to trick hijackers into thinking that they had reached Cuba.

By 1971, skyjackings had become so frequent that Lloyd's of London started offering hijacking insurance to travelers in the U.S., guaranteeing "$500 per day of captivity, plus $2,500 in medical coverage, and $5,000 in the event of death or dismemberment" in exchange for a $75 premium per flight.

The era of skyjacking reached its apogee and conclusion in 1972. That year saw 40 separate hijackings and a coup-de-grace in which three men hijacked a plane over central Alabama and threatened to fly it into a nuclear power station. After realizing that airplanes could potentially be used as "weapons of mass destruction" the government finally mandated the use of metal detectors and armed guards at airports nationwide. (All this took place several years before Venezuelan celebre-terrorist Carlos the Jackal kidnapped 42

The era of skyjacking reached its apotheosis in 1972, with 40 separate hijackings and a threat on a nuclear power stations

members of OPEC and negotiated a plane to fly them to Algiers.)

CLEARLY KOERNER HAS plenty of material to work with, but he decides to focus on Roger Holder and Cathy Kerkow, two unlikely criminals who executed one of the most dramatic skyjackings in U.S. history. We meet the pair in San Diego in 1972, just months before the government decision to take air safety seriously. Holder is an unemployed huckster, a black PTSD-suffering Vietnam vet who expresses his resentment of the military by seducing the wives of men in uniform. Kerkow is 20, white, an erotic masseuse and a former Black Panther groupie with an abundance of free time. They hit it off right away, bound by a mutual appreciation for sex and drugs, and, oddly enough, a childhood encounter in Oregon decades earlier. Before long they start dating, and not long after that, inspired by growing anger over the Vietnam War and the Charleton Heston flop *Skyjacked*, Holder decides to hijack a plane. The plan is to end up in Australia, with a stopover in Hanoi to make a show of support for the Vietcong.

And this is how it went down: On June 2, 1972, Holder and Kerkow boarded a Western Airlines flight from San Diego to Seattle. Soon after takeoff, Holder, in full military dress, handed a stewardess a note informing her that there was a bomb on the plane. He then entered the cockpit and told the crew that the Students for a Democratic Society had taken his family hostage and were forcing him to commandeer the flight. (Holder spent the duration of the trip talking to imaginary Weathermen over the intercom.) While Kerkow sat in the back and kept quiet about her connection to Holder, he demanded the delivery of half a million dollars and Angela Davis, the black radical who was then awaiting trial for murder in San Jose.

As was the norm with skyjackings, nothing went according to plan. (An important lesson for prospective hijackers: Don't take over a plane that can't carry enough fuel to get you to your preferred destination.) After retrieving their ransom and discharging passengers at JFK, Holder opted to fly to Algiers instead of Vietnam, and rather than "liberate" Angela Davis (who wanted no part in his scheme) he demanded that Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver meet him on the tarmac in Algeria. Algiers was not yet an internationally known refuge for hijackers, but it was about to become one.[1]

When the Western Airlines Flight landed in Algiers, Holder and Kerkow were greeted not by the Black Panthers but by the head of the Algerian secret police, who confiscated the money (which was later returned to Western Airlines) and handed over the couple to government operatives, including a

1. If you're wondering why the Black Panthers were in Algeria, here's some context: Cleaver, after fleeing the U.S. in the late sixties, set up shop in Algeria at the behest of president Houari Boumediene, who provided the organization with a $500 monthly stipend and a gated villa. Things went well for a while, but by the seventies, the International Section of the Black Panther Party (as the Algiers outpost was known) was cash-strapped and more than willing to take in a skyjacker with incoherent politics and $500,000 in cash.

Imp Kerr

man nicknamed No Nuts. After several weeks of interrogation, Holder and Kerkow were released into the custody of the Panthers. Relations quickly soured: The Panthers suspected the couple of being FBI informants, and the couple suspected the Panthers of being opportunists. (Cleaver's first words to Holder were "So, where's the bread?") But this turn of events wasn't a total disappointment: Holder and Kerkow did spend a lot of time smoking hash on the beach.

The couple's journey over the next several years more or less continued in this surreal vein: When Cleaver fled the country after sending a patronizing letter to Boumediene, he appointed Holder his successor. When, in turn, Holder and Kerkow fled to Paris and were forced to fight extradition proceedings, they were supported by the French intellectual establishment and by Jean-Paul

Sartre, instantly becoming national celebrities. During these years, Holder's mental health splintered into bouts of paranoia and anxiety. He spent time in a Marxist psychiatric institute outside Paris and suffered panic attacks that left him hospitalized. (Even so, in 1984 while destitute and nearly homeless, he met and married "a six-time divorcee a dozen years his senior" who was paralyzed on one side of her body.) Kerkow, in contrast, flitted among the Parisian creative elite, became fluent in French, and subsidized her lifestyle through a series of wealthy boyfriends before vanishing forever one night in 1978.

Save for a final, embarrassing speculation about Kerkow's current status and whereabouts—"I picture her as a dignified French woman in her early sixties, her once-lustrous hair now short and streaked with gray … she and her retired husband occupy a well-appointed house in a sleepy hamlet a few hours' drive from Paris, where they also own a pied-à-terre"—her story ends here. Holder, on the other hand, after years of petitioning the government, finally won the right to return to the U.S. Heavily dosed on psychotropic drugs, he flew into JFK on a July day in 1986 and was promptly jailed, serving three years in detention before being transferred to a halfway house in San Diego. The next several years were spent in and out of psychiatric institutes and courtrooms, in a blur of temporary addresses that made it all the more difficult for Koerner to find him, which the reporter ultimately did, locating Holder in a run-down San Diego apartment only months before the end of his life.

The book, in short, is a trip. But that's about the extent of it. For all its resemblance to a cautionary tale about the curdling of sixties idealism, a semi-comical account of the failure of government oversight, or even a botched script for a late Antonioni movie, *The Skies Belong to Us* ends up being little more than a well-researched case study into a particularly bizarre moment in American history. Koerner has no political axe to grind: The hijackings, rather than being seen as symptomatic of larger political or sociocultural problems, are treated as strange viral phenomena, opportunistic infections attacking a diseased airline system. Koerner might consider hijacking to be an avenue of personal expression for his eccentric and unfailingly earnest subjects, but the deeper causes of their discontent go largely unexamined.

Perhaps because of the extensive interviews that went into researching the book, Koerner has the disconcerting habit of ventriloquizing his characters' thoughts. Upon storming the cockpit, Holder "took a moment to savor the feeling of accomplishment; for the first time in ages, he felt wholly in tune with the universe's intentions for his life." Kerkow is "confident she [can] dupe any FBI agent by flashing her coquettish smile." Much better is when Koerner allows his characters to speak for themselves.

Questioned after his crime, one skyjacker offers a rationale that seems to characterize the fuck-it-all ethos of the era: "It was better than eighteen years of therapy, or whatever. It just seemed like the answer." ■

A brief story of a woman in two frames, across nations and ocean, who falls from a tower and lands at a crossroads, from the sunset's fire to the intestinal unfurling of ghost sparks

by EVAN CALDER WILLIAMS

Magic lantern slides:
Joseph Boggs Beale, Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai

unsolicited advice for the End Times

with

MICHAEL SEIDENBERG

TODAY I READ an interview with the founder of the New Inquiry, and during the conversation, my name came up. In a journalistic, if not anthropological, attempt to describe me, I was said to have "a bit of a belly." I took this description as meaning I had a bit too much of a belly rather than being in possession of only a small part of one. I would venture to guess that in certain societies, my breadbasket might seem somewhat overstuffed, but that's not the world I live in. When most people see any late-in-life pictures of Orson Welles, they are shocked by his girth, wondering how this great genius could waste his life just getting large and larger. When I come across any images of the portly maestro, I ask, How did he squeeze so much happiness into one life and then still squeeze in some more?

Just about now you're probably thinking that I'm choosing to interpret things the way I want to, seeing what I want to see. Well, right you are, but more important, right you will be, if you can learn to personalize your own life story as you live it. I have a vivid dream life that, mixed with my muddied sense of reality, left me no choice but to be in a constant state of do-over. And let me tell you, it works if you work it.

Universal truth is so elusive. Like the unicorn, it might not even exist, so as the end of time approaches, it seems pointless and wasteful to keep pursuing it.

Now when fabricating this new outlook on life, you still need some kind of fair witness to guide you in the construction of your meta-reality. Otherwise you could find yourself blinded by the rose-colored glasses you've only just put on. You need to achieve some kind of balance, and it's not easy. You might worry that you're just rebranding yourself, but it's more like building a better brand of you. It's just getting to know yourself as well your search engine does.

This isn't some kind of virtual second life, rather a chance to re-evaluate the way you perceive your actual life. Once you have the proper perception in place, you've got yourself a new reality. The beauty part is if it breaks down, you can tweak it or acquire an entirely new slant. It's your end of times—you drive it.

Still, there are dangers in being your own creator. If you need to delude yourself a bit, that's fine, but I recommend small doses. You want to avoid becoming one of those heavy-handed self-creators who have no limits to their own grandeur. What do you think allows Jay Z to presume that just his presence is charity and that his very corporeal existence is the highest form of benevolence he can bestow on his fellow humans? That being said, I must say I do appreciate his going green and removing the hyphen from his name.

While we all want to be hearing good news, we don't want to lose our ability to smell a rat. For example, you might hear the new pope saying that being gay is not a sin and it's not for him to judge, but overlook him saying that acting gay is indeed very much a sin. It's a veritable "some of my best friends are…" moment and not to be ignored. You don't want to get caught thinking someone is giving a thumb's-up when they are saying only that they won't point a finger.

There are many responsibilities in being the architect of your own existence, so tread carefully. But make sure you're wearing your favorite shoes. ■

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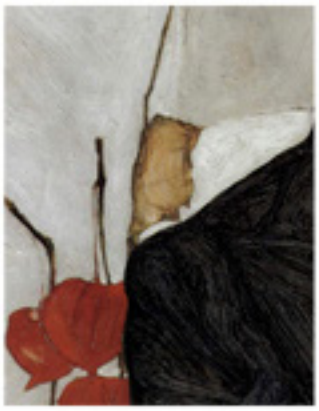

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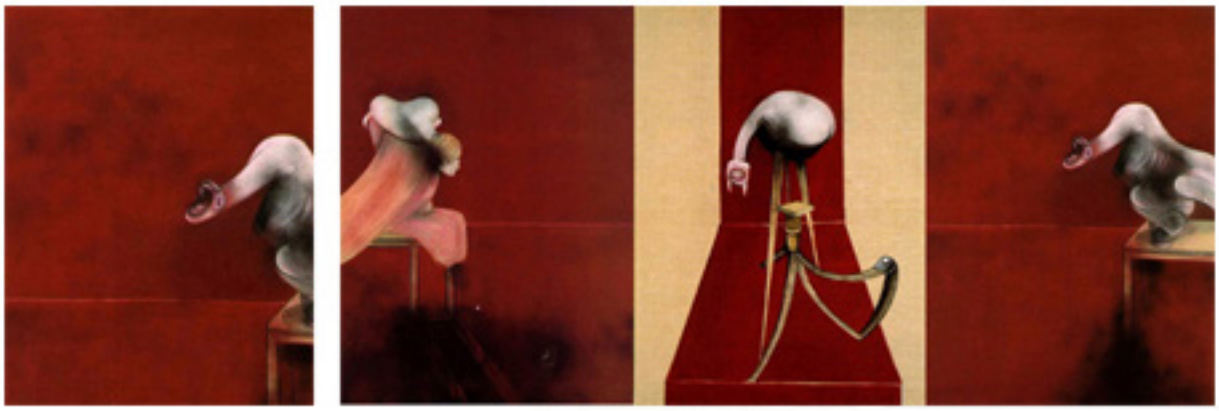

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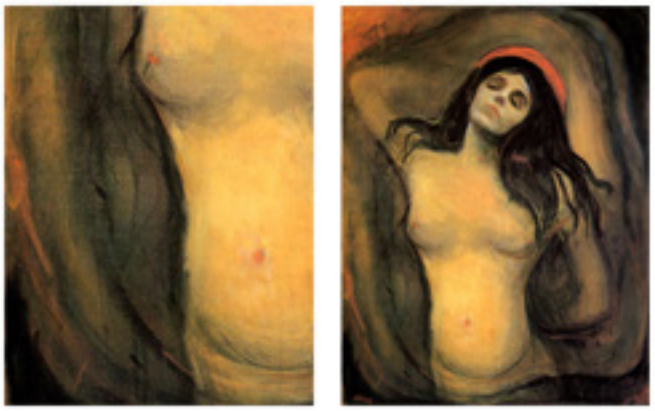

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