

Dear
Artfukts,



Look at
My Curve

A report to an academy



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A friend recently sent me a link in an e-mail and advised me to check it out. It led to a page that had listed the name Natasha [sic] Sadr Haghighian 1966, IR. In the next line, it said: Rank (2012): 1150. As artist's attributes it listed: Female and Photography. Further down, it said: Biography, and then came a stop sign; next line: 1966 Born in London, lives and works in Winbledon (England). The stop sign caught my attention. Clicking on it, I got the information that one could potentially add information to this section. "Winbledon" seemed to be a typo but then again, who knows.

I happen to go by the name Natascha Sadr Haghighian, and by hearsay—as Spinoza would point out—I know that I was not born in Iran and not in 1966. I wasn't born in London and I do not live and work in Winbledon. But I also know—not by hearsay—where these contradictory, deceptive facts stem from. They are artifacts from the washes of the Internet's strata. I myself helped plant them there at different points in time, usually borrowing a CV from the website www.bioswop.net for purposes of representation in public events. The bots operating the ArtFacts.net site my friend had forwarded me must have gotten conflicting information on the same subject and a programming bug helped create the present case.

So this is how I found out I have a page on ArtFacts.net. I did not ask for that page; in fact, I got upset about it as it tracks my activities and—even though buggy—collects information about things connected to my name. Now maybe I need to explain that I have never published curricula vitae that refer to my actual activities, education, or ethnic background. I generally reject the format of the artist CV, not only because listing where and when someone has exhibited is a truly stupid invention but also because I can't come to terms with the idea of labeling myself artist, let alone German artist or Iranian artist or German-Iranian artist. If I have to play the game of identity politics and enter

representational loops that might lead me or others to believe in what is written about me, it should at least be a real game. How about: "I am a bio-German white heterosexual male mid-career artist with an average of 6 solo shows a year and I am in the collection of the MoFuckingMA." Or: "I am a POC bisexual female, which is why my work is about racism, sexism, and colonialism." Or maybe: "I am an Iranian artist who studied at Cooper Union; that's why I rejected the invitation to the Magic of Persia Contemporary Art Prize. I don't need to play the identity card, I can do better."

But whatever happened to the artist CV? Up until now, we've all been told to foster and maintain our résumés like a garden with a pretty lawn and decorative flowers and hedges that need to be trimmed and watered regularly. Now, however, people Google you first, and maybe never check the CV. In this scenario, Google becomes the urban wasteland where the seeds from our garden are avidly spreading, where things have a life of their own, somewhat feral and erratic and therefore a better place to get a "real" impression of someone. Some people are thus obsessed with their first search

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results, diligently trying to control at least the first impression. Depending on what picture they want to draw of themselves, they push their gallery webpage or their juicy Facebook pics, or even a combination of both, because they know a contradictory impression can be the most attractive to some. In the end, our online profiles shouldn't look like a tidy lawn with hedges but rather more "natural," including posts by institutions, randomly interesting information about our private life, and in general what other people say or write about us, and all the feral stuff out there that shows our relevance.

This development has certainly rendered the CV into a dull, overcome format from the past century, the "Century of the Self," as Adam Curtis calls it.¹ Yes, it's still used as a part of grant or scholarship applications and, of course, in catalogues. But at the same time, the conventional data about an artist—as in: born at such and such a place at such and such a time, solo exhibitions, group exhibitions, gallery representation, collections—is reproduced in the so-called cloud, now gathered by bots probably mostly lingering around the outbox of e-flux and the like. Furthermore,

websites such as ArtFacts use these conventions as parameters for mathematically evaluating a "career." This reproduction of convention is as absurd as the way in which 3-D buttons survive in digital software as a hangover from the analog age. After all, today many artistic practices differ profoundly from those of the past century and are in no way captured or represented within these conventional criteria.

So, alarmed about the newly discovered data sponge, I wrote to ArtFacts and asked them to call off their bots and erase my profile. To make my argument, I used concepts that I usually question or ridicule, such as artist, oeuvre, and authorship:

*To whom it may concern,
May I ask you to take down listings and other information on my work from your website immediately.*

*My cv is part of my artistic oeuvre. For conceptual reasons, I never publish my cv anywhere and have never done it in the past.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natascha_Sadr_Haghighian*

By publishing data about my activities, you interfere in and damage my work.

I will have to take legal action if the information is not taken down.

*Thank you for your understanding,
Natascha Sadr Haghighian*

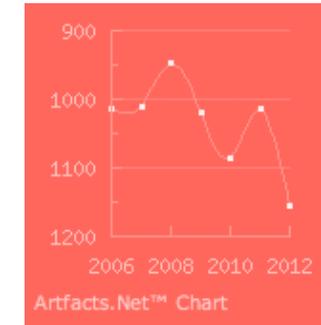
I was convinced that they would be intimidated, but instead they simply responded that they would in no event erase the entry. Another provider of art facts named Kunstaspekte was more understanding, at first glance. They thanked me for my e-mail and explained that they took down the biographical information (which was "born in Tehran in 1975, lives and works in Berlin"), but stated that they would not take down the exhibition listing as this information stemmed from press releases, etc., which must have been published with my consent at some point. Instead, they invited me to fill in the blanks and help with completing and correcting my profile. My "legal action" threat was fake, of course, as I didn't have the financial means to pay a lawyer to go after them. I was really tempted to turn this into an art project, find funding for the lawyer, and declare CV jihad on Google. At first, it definitely had a David-fighting-Goliath appeal, but after some

meditation it looked more like a Don-Quixote-tilting-at-the-cloud undertaking. By the time I'd succeeded with a cease and desist order, ten other pages would have popped up like rambling weed. I would make it my life project to keep the bots in check. Fighting the cloud? I don't think so. It suddenly appeared disproportionate to my previous small intervention of ridiculing the artist CV and playing with the unwritten rules of the art world's representational formats. Turning this into a major legal affair would miss the interesting questions. And the interesting questions are manifold in the cloud. Up here in this murk of data trash, where not only am I supposed to benefit from the info-junk my activities produce but also where selling this junk is a lucrative business, I am confronted with new aspects of the game. Perhaps these are actually not new but rather reiterate formerly tentative things in a more apparent fashion, providing new stages for the enmeshed performances and practices that constitute the real.

But let's return to the ArtFacts page for a moment. Anyone who has ever visited his or her own ArtFacts page probably would agree that the most

fascinating part of it is the curve. Located in the left column, it is called a Ranking Graph.

So, this is what my Ranking Graph looks like:



To see the detailed analysis behind the graph, one needs to buy a personal membership to ArtFacts, which I was reluctant to do, so it will remain unclear what exactly led to this dramatically oscillating curve with a clear downward tendency. I quickly scanned my inner timeline since 2006 and it definitely feels as if, in terms of quantity, I had consistently worked off a comparable workload every year since 2006—except for 2009, where I had in fact taken a one-year holiday from art to do other things. And yes, sure enough, there is a downward movement in 2009. Nevertheless, I have a hard time identifying with this curve. And what on earth went wrong in 2012 that made my curve drop like the Iranian currency? Should I be worried? Trying to iden-

tify with the ArtFacts graph, I detect a strange magic operating between me and the curve. Funny mimetic loops unfold between us. The curve apparently obtained its shape from my activity and now that I retroactively have become aware of it, I try to relieve the curve. Two very different entities ape each other, diligently.

When I sit opposite you like this, Curve, listening to you talk, drinking your shape, I really and truly forget—whether you take it as a compliment or not, it's the truth—that you are a graph. Only gradually, when I have forced myself out of my thoughts back to reality, do my eyes show me again whose guest I am.

Speaking frankly, as much as I like choosing metaphors for these things—speaking frankly: your experience as an object, dear Curve—to the extent that you have something of that sort behind you—cannot be more distant from you than mine is from me.²

It seems the curve has known of me since at least 2006 but I only just became acquainted with it, so I wonder what we should do now? How will we interact in the future?

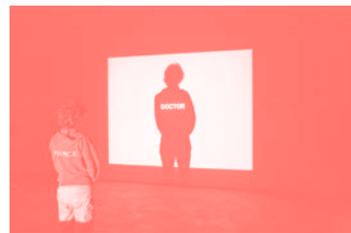
Will it keep tracking me? And now that I have found it, will I keep tracking it? Will I bookmark it since I can't erase it? Will I try to manipulate it? Will I make efforts in my career just to see whether it responds? I wonder how we will actually relate? I have to admit, I do sympathize with its sweeping shape, its indifferent yet dramatic cyan line punctuated by imperial blue dots.

Up to this moment, I had been focusing on fighting representations that support the existing power relations. I initiated bioswop.net to subvert the representational format of the artist CV, a format that turns activity into a factual list of origin, background, and value, facilitating the market and institutions. But in the light of my new friend at ArtFacts, not only does this intervention seem obsolete, but before updating my strategies I seriously need to reconsider what is actually happening.

Rappelling into the arena of renegotiation over concepts such as identity and representation, fact and fiction, more problems loom ahead, including subject-object relations, Self, Other, and eventually the renegotiation of the project of modernity itself. I start to sense that my interaction with the graph, my confusion

over how we actually relate, is part of a bigger tectonic shift, rocking the very ground on which I presume to stand. The borders that modernity had tried to install between subject and object, between fact and fiction—all these other categories that promised clarity, and eventually understanding of the stuff we're made of—are under scrutiny from all sides. The border fortifications turn out to be rather porous, if not fluid, and now things are going all sorts of places.

One aspect of the magic I am detecting in my relation with the graph could be described as the participation of the name in the thing named, or the participation of the image in the thing it depicts. It is the magic of language, as Walter Benjamin describes it. The word participates in the object via the magical attributes of the name, wherein the name tries to become the object. It's a process of participation of the name in the object rather than a relation in which the name represents the object.



Dear Artfukts, Look at My Curve:

I detect this very same magic in my encounter with the graph. I don't identify with what the image represents but I participate in it as much as it participates in me, drawing on its character and power as it draws on my character and power. The curve and I are entangled in a mimetic dance, imitating and becoming one another. Our shapes submerge into one amorphous thing as we interact, and in this process of participation I am not a subject looking at an object that represents me.

Hito Steyerl refers to this concept of participation when she suggests that we side with the object instead of the subject in the struggle over representation.³ She notes that the striving for full subjecthood in most emancipatory movements—with its promise of autonomy, sovereignty, and agency—has lost attraction to some degree after encountering implicit subjectification to power relations. The empowerment that comes with subjecthood is in practice often complex and full of conflict. The subject finds itself enmeshed in a social and political fabric of relations with other subjects, reproducing patterns of exclusion, oppression, or discrimination. While we

figured out this complication, we also discovered that objects also actually have agency and seem to act with some autonomy. But Steyerl does not suggest that we identify with what the object represents and enter another subject-object relation. Instead, she points toward a concept of identifying with the thing itself, of participating in the object. It is an approach to participation as the absence of relation. Subject and object merge in this process, wherein the subject is first of all a subject of knowledge and not necessarily always a person. Looking at me and the graph, I realize that participation does enact a different magic than the one inherent in relation. From this perspective, the struggle over representation seems strangely outdated.

So now we side with things instead of subjects, transgressing the border between us and stuff. First, we discover that things have agency, that objects might be sovereign and act autonomously without us subjects making them do so, or rather without our being able to control them, as there are multiple forces at work. Then we learn that "the thing and the knowing being," as Benjamin phrases it, are not

necessarily different entities but instead are "relative unities of reflection" participating in knowledge.⁴ It does seem contradictory that while the object can act autonomously, the subject cannot know of that object but can only participate in it. It creates a sensation of blindness, a feeling of not knowing where one stands, where one is positioned. It does match the feeling of being sucked up by the cloud.

My graph is a manifestation from, of, and in the cloud. But what is the cloud? It does not seem to be an object of the kind we know, neither is it a subject. It is as much fact as it is fiction. As much as it is an empty envelope of parameters and subroutines, it is also a formation of multiple voices, enacting the formats the envelope provides. This enactment constantly exceeds the envelope; the envelope responds by constantly changing, adapting, and mimicking the movements, the voices, and the bodies that enact it. The cloud is not representing anything. It just exists as a mimetic machine that constantly renders realities. I am part of the cloud. My movements, my voice, my body are linked to this machine, whether I choose to actively participate in it or not, and I am unable to clearly distin-

guish agents and agencies in this process.

But wait, my dear artfukts, all this goes beyond my graph, acting autonomously and confuses me profoundly. Let's go back to that desire to overcome representation and side with the object. In my case, we were looking at an image of me—a curve—acting independently, without me doing anything or at least without me controlling it.

The aniconic argument responding to the autonomy of images is old.⁵ It acknowledges that images have always tended to abandon what they depict and act independently as icons or idols. The aniconic argument warns us to be aware of this strange nature of images to become things in themselves that act as knowing beings. As much as this character of images has been used to draw and maintain power, it has also been questioned and attacked basically since images have existed.



While there is much discussion about the recently rediscovered "premodern"

animistic features of objects, of images that provide them with certain powers, the knowledge of these powers is actually very old. So, why suddenly this desire to change sides? Maybe we desire to side with objects because we want to surrender to their powers. Being tired of awkwardly struggling with the emancipatory mission to claim subjecthood and ways that it relates to its representations, we abandon the position in charge of knowing, controlling, shaping, and conquering things and declare that we want to be moved again.

Maybe these animistic features have been hijacked by the capitalist forces of commodification. Maybe it is these forces that have decided to shift attention away from the “I” toward the “it.” Perhaps they have told us that now the desired is the focus of attention, instead of the one who desires (who is now a consumer or fan of the object). In this case, wanting to be the object announces that we want to be desired as objects and not addressed as consumers. This is how we hope to regain agency and participate actively in a face-value economy. Having one million people like your picture or watch your YouTube video is so much more desirable

than claiming subjecthood. And you have already transgressed the border, you became the picture, you participated in the video going viral. Exactly who or what has agency in the reality that is created here is impossible to divide from a completely participatory process of all involved.

Yes indeed, the capitalist agents are trying to feed on me through the graph, and my initial response is to reject this breach into my autonomy to claim who I am and what I do. But then again, I can’t uphold the indignation. Maybe my indifference is due to the curve’s arbitrariness. Maybe I have already conspired with the curve.

I feel like I’ve lost something and I can’t put my finger on it.

In her lecture “Subject to Object and Vice Versa,” Nairy Baghramian defends the emancipatory possibilities of the subject in the face of the rise of the object.⁶ Artists have long struggled to become subjects, she claims, thereby enabling themselves to participate in discourse and to create politically and socially relevant arguments and situations. But in the past few years, “the status of a work of art has risen beyond that of mere autonomous

existence to the point where works are sometimes treated like quasi-subjects capable of their own autonomous thinking.” Baghramian warns that, in practice, the work might begin to take action by itself as well, and enter into direct dialogue with other agents such as curators. It might pursue its own alliances and relationships. This development might create a situation in which artists are precluded from the discourse and, falling silent, turn themselves into mystified objects. This would leave curators, commentators, and market players as the only active agents exercising control in the discourse.

With the evidence at hand, one could say that Baghramian is claiming a dead duck. Then again, she is advocating for the subject’s agency, an agency that has come like so many other emancipatory enablements through and by struggle. And, similar to such discussions within feminism or labor struggle, the political question is raised of whether letting go of such achievements uncontested might be a huge mistake? But what if the question is wrong and the struggle with the borders of inclusion/exclusion, powerful/disenfranchised, subject/object just does

not hold, does not do it any longer? If the quest is still for agency and sovereignty and rights—and I believe it is—maybe the agents, the territories, the movements have changed and so strategies have to change too. Surely claiming subjecthood did create a feeling of integrity, a wholeness of a specific kind but, as in the very idea of solidarity, this integrity often exceeds the limits of our own body, our own voice, our own movements.



During the campaign for Troy Davis, who was on death row for a murder he claimed he had not committed, many people, including myself, changed their Facebook profile picture into Troy’s to support his peers’ campaign for a fair trial and justice for his case. The campaign of nearly one million supporters could not save Troy; he was executed on September 21, 2011. Yet in other cases, such campaigns proved success-

ful. To express solidarity and support by claiming to be XY and thereby multiplying or cloning the person in question, potentially indefinitely, has become a common campaign tool in social networks—often expressed visually by replacing one’s photo or wearing a mask.

This act also uses the mimetic power of the name participating in the thing named. It doesn’t claim to relate to a struggle, but instead to be the struggle. It claims to be able to melt down identities and become anybody at any given moment in time. This can be a very powerful tool as it can transmute a single person into an enormous multiheaded entity whose growth and thereby power is potentially unlimited.

“The struggle for justice



doesn’t end with me. This struggle is for all the Troy Davises who came before me and all the ones who will come after me. I’m in good spirits and I’m prayerful and at peace.”⁷

Some are hesitant to apply this identity swap as a political strategy. A friend admits a feeling of resistance against changing his profile picture. There are even voices radically opposing such meltdowns. During the campaign for another case, the fatal shooting of young Floridian Trayvon Martin, the video of a young woman appeared on social media who positioned herself as a “privileged white middle-class female socially concerned activist.”



She declares, “I am not Trayvon Martin! I am not Troy Davis!” She concedes that a white middle-class activist claiming to “be Trayvon Martin” is a positive attempt to humanize the victim, indicating that a young black male is deprived of this status by society—i.e., the status of a subject. She remarks

that due to her own skin color and social status, she would never be exposed to the injustice that a young black man faces on a daily basis. On the contrary, she was privileged by default and instead predestined to become a George Zimmermann, the man who shot Trayvon Martin, rather than a Trayvon or Troy. Therefore, it would be preposterous to claim to be Troy Davis. It would blur, if not whitewash, the differences created by systematic racism that led to him being on death row. She demands that all privileged white middle-class activists such as herself stop decorating themselves with the precarious identity of the oppressed and admit what they really are. This would be the only way to truly support the struggle of the oppressed and achieve change. She ends by saying, "Do not, I repeat, do not claim to be them!"

I come across these counterattacks on the mingling with subject-object relations in different places. This activist's approach of positioning—of marking her identity by declaring her ethnic and social background, skin color, gender, nationality as the contextualizing starting point for any argument or activity—has

increasingly become the basis of political debate or left-wing activism, but can even be found in job announcements in academia in what is now called the former West. It is uncanny how the very categories that some decades back were detected as socially constructed, and therefore to be questioned, criticized, and taken apart, vehemently find their way back into the very same discourse—critically addressing identity politics—but now they appear fierce, unshakable, and somewhat hyperreal.

"Are we looking at a logical loop," asks a paper published by gender studies students at Berlin's Humboldt University, "in which emancipatory analysis got enmeshed? 'These categories are socially constructed.' 'Yes, but they are also a real form of existence.' 'Yes but they are historically produced.' 'But they are a real form of existence.' But ..." The writers criticize the way in which the politics of positioning is gaining growing influence in critical whiteness studies, gender studies, and antiracist activism. They apprehend that positioning and verbalizing identity threatens to put people in their social or ethnic place, denying transgression and making the overcoming of

these categories and hierarchies a secondary task, if not impossible. They quote a fellow student saying: "I will never know what it feels like to be a female refugee, therefore I cannot comment on this matter."⁸

Interestingly enough, this comes after a fundamentally nonessentialist wave in identity politics, where transgression was part of the game of playing with the existing borders between categories and claiming to be able to reinvent one's identity indefinitely as an act of subversion, emancipation, and autonomy.

In the 1990s, various movements claimed sovereignty over their identities, whether it was the queer movement transgressing the existing gender categories or migrant activist networks, such as Kanak Attak, which programmatically stated that it was not someone's background or passport that was important, but their attitude.⁹

Michael Taussig aptly describes the current situation: "History wreaks its revenge on representational security as essentialism and constructivism oscillate wildly in a death struggle over the claims of mimesis to be the nature that culture uses to create a now-beleaguered second

nature."¹⁰ The very ground under our feet is socially constructed then, but also very real. As we slowly start to grasp the delirious stability of such bedrock, we try to hold on to anything solid.

But I suspect all residual solid things might turn out to be twisted in the end. Maybe it's time to practice balancing.

Avery Gordon commences her publication *Ghostly Matters* with this quote borrowed from legal scholar Patricia Williams: "That life is complicated is a fact of great analytic importance."¹¹ Gordon uses Williams's proposition to talk about the power relations that characterize societies. According to Gordon, these relations are "never as transparently clear as the names we give to them imply." She elaborates:

"Power can be invisible, it can be fantastic, it can be dull and routine. It can be obvious, it can reach you by the baton of the police, it can speak the language of your thoughts and desires. It can feel like remote control, it can exhilarate like liberation, it can travel through time, and it can drown you in the present. It is dense and superficial, it can cause bodily injury, and it can harm you without seem-

ing ever to touch you. It is systematic and it is particularistic and it is often both at the same time."¹²

Gordon sees these multifaceted power relations best described by Williams when she refers to her own ancestry, proposing life's complexity as a vital aspect of analysis. Williams's great-great grandmother was a slave and her great-great grandmother's owner was also the father of her children. So she is the product of a participation of an owner in his property, a very confusing, yet not very unusual, expression of power relations. To amplify Gordon: power can harm you without seeming ever to touch you; it can speak the language of your thoughts and it can travel through time.

As Gordon relates, Williams decides she can only make sense of the apparitions that keep visiting her if she takes the complexity of involvement into account. She can only trace her great-great grandmother by looking for the "shape described by her absence," a shape that is drawn by her owner's hand. While she was deprived of rights, of choice, of being sovereign, she can be found in his letters and legal documents. His hand and her absence form a flicker-

ing shape, partly traceable, partly apparitional: a power relation that reaches into the present. Williams has to confront these forces, this haunting. She has to look for "her shape and his hand" as the power relation between her great-great grandmother and her great-great grandmother's owner is also part of her own shape and the way she engages that relation. Power can harm you without seeming ever to touch you. Life is complicated.¹³

These forces that arrive in all sorts of forms and names shape parts of us profoundly, and yet not all parts because some seem strangely inaccessible and evade forming or naming. The right to "complex personhood," which according to Gordon is the second dimension of the theoretical statement that life is complicated, means exactly this: we can be object and subject at the same time, same and other, fact and fiction, oppressor and oppressed. We can be contradictory and suffering from these contradictions.

Williams's tracing of her shape and his hand uses sympathetic magic or the mimetic faculty, as Taussig terms it, a necessary magic "to the process of knowing and the construction and subsequent naturalization

of identities.”¹⁴ I wonder if the mimetic faculty is in fact the very connection in the participation of the name in the thing named, of the subject in the object of knowledge.

Taussig says that we mostly use the mimetic faculty to go on living, pretending that we live facts and not fictions, even though postmodernism and the critical project in academia of uncovering the social construction of race, gender, or nation has instructed us that reality is actually made up. We know this and still we use the mimetic faculty to pretend it’s natural. We trace a construct and live that copy vigorously. “The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power.”¹⁵

Taussig questions the critical project analyzing social construction insofar as it should have been just an invitation, an introduction to further investigation and not a conclusion. It was only the beginning of knowledge and should not pass for actual knowing. Life is constructed, yes—but it’s more complicated than that. Because if it is constructed, why does it feel so

immutable, so natural? How come, again and again, we believe in inventions such as culture or nation as if they are completely real?

For Taussig, it is by the magic of the mimetic faculty that we make them real again and again. But these realities are not conclusions or finite states but instead they are in continuous flux, transmutation, permutation, diversification, alteration, disintegration, and collapse. He suggests diving into that turbulence where the forces that render the real coalesce, where the mimesis of history meets the history of mimesis. For him, it is this place where Kafka’s ape aping humanity’s aping dwells. Taussig believes that only there in the inner sanctum of mimesis, in imitating, can we find distance from the imitated, the dead end of constructionism.

In October 2012, Ai Weiwei released a video on YouTube in which he and a group of associates gather in his studio courtyard and mime the moves of the “Gangnam Style” music video by Psy. His original video, with 1.59 billion views, is the most watched YouTube video to date. The dance moves, which include galloping in place with wrists crossed in front of the

chest to mimic horseback riding, have been reenacted in numerous ways and by numerous parties across the globe. Ai’s version copies the horseback-riding moves, adding handcuffs to the crossed wrists in reference to censorship in China and his previous detention by the Chinese authorities



In interviews, Ai has claimed that the international Internet meme phenomenon is an expression of individualism, and that the “right of expression is fundamentally linked to our happiness and even our existence.”¹⁶ His video was immediately banned by the Chinese government. While I watch his video on YouTube, Ai Weiwei becomes an object, a copy of another object. But he is also equipped with agency (as seen by the worried actions of the Chinese authorities), making him a subject. His studio, a location in the real world, becomes part of the cloud in this attempt to use the magic powers of miming what a billion eyes have seen. The Chinese authorities validate Ai’s

meme by taking down the video, themselves miming the expected authoritative gesture, and adding another link to the real. Then, in a recently fashionable gesture of art-world solidarity, Anish Kapoor initiates another “Gangnam” reenactment. Kapoor’s meme adds his large studio along with a famous choreographer and another 250 people to this conglomerate of things perpetually building reality.



As Steyerl describes so accurately, most things we are dealing with are “usually not a shiny new Boeing taking off on its virgin flight. Rather, it might be its wreck, painstakingly pieced together from scrap inside a hangar after its unexpected nosedive into catastrophe.”¹⁷ In other words, it’s a mess.

My curve and I are part of this mess, a bigger mess. I became part of my own forensic team, detecting the hidden forces and desires buried in the rubble, piecing together the signs of power and violence that have gone through my

body, my world, my reality. I can still look for integrity, my dear artfukts. And this cloud, it’s nothing.

Images

Page 5: (clockwise from upper right)

- Performance images of Natascha Sadr Haghghighian’s *present but not yet active* at Frankfurt Zoo, 2002. Courtesy the artist and Johann König, Berlin
- Installation view of Natascha Sadr Haghghighian’s *Empire of the Senseless Part II*, Berlin, 2006
- Erica Crittendon, 19, takes part in the United 1000 Hoodies rally for Trayvon Martin in Seattle, March 28, 2012. Neighborhood-watch volunteer George Zimmerman shot and killed the unarmed 17-year-old on February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida. Photo: REUTERS/Marcus Donner
- Computer accessing bioswop.net, a project by Natascha Sadr Haghghighian
- Screen grab of Natascha Sadr Haghghighian’s profile on ArtFacts.net, 2012

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- Ranking graph from Natascha Sadr Haghghighian’s profile on ArtFacts.net, 2012

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- Natascha Sadr Haghghighian’s *Empire of the Senseless Part II* (page 9) and *Part I*. Courtesy the artist and Johann König, Berlin

Page 12:

- (lefthand column) Image used by Facebook users as a profile picture during the “I Am Troy Davis” campaign.

Source: Google image search

- (middle column, top to bottom) Martina Correia-Davis, Troy Davis’s sister, in front of Daniel O’Connell Monument with Amnesty International Ireland activists in Dublin, 2010. Courtesy Amnesty International USA ©All rights reserved by amnestyinternational_usa
- Demonstrators hold “I Am Troy Davis” posters in front of their faces, courtesy NewsOne.com, <http://ionenewsone.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/troy-davis-1.jpg>
- Members of Anonymous wearing Guy Fawkes masks at the Scientology area in Los Angeles, 2008. Photo: Vincent Diamante. Image source: Wikimedia Commons
- (righthand column) YouTube user 13emcha protesting the “I Am Troy Davis” movement, March 31, 2012, accessed July 25, 2013

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- Screen grab of Ai Weiwei’s YouTube music video in which he performs his riff on Psy’s “Gangnam Style,” 2012

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- Screen grab of Anish Kapoor’s YouTube music video performance of “Gangnam for Freedom,” 2012

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- Image posted by “Michelle” on “We are the 99%” Tumblr site. The text reads in part: I am 3 years out of college, employed, with only \$10,000 in debt. I am lucky! I work full-time for a nonprofit. I make less than \$20,000 a year, I can survive on this. I am lucky! I can not afford the buy in (\$175) for my work’s Health Saving Plan → I don’t have Health Insurance once I turn 26 (9 more months) and can’t be on my mother’s plan. The only rea-

son I have never had to choose between food and gas is because my parents sometimes help me. [...] I AM LUCKY! But I'm also scared. I can survive, but for how long? - I am the 99%
Source: <http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/post/11101669294/i-am-3-years-out-of-college-employed-with-only>. Last accessed August 12, 2013.

Notes

1. This documentary television series from 2002 focused on "how those in power have used Freud's theories to try and control the dangerous crowd in an age of mass democracy," as described in Adam Curtis's introduction to the first episode, "Happiness Machines." *The Century of the Self*, directed by Adam Curtis (BBC Four, UK: March 17, 2002).

2. Amalgam of my own phrasings and an extract from Franz Kafka's *Report to an Academy*. The Kafka quote is sourced from the introduction to Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1992), xiii.

3. See Hito Steyerl, "A Thing Like You and Me," *e-flux journal* 15 (April 2010), accessed April 10, 2013, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/a-thing-like-you-and-me/>.

4. Walter Benjamin, "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism," in *Selected Writings: 1913-1926, Volume I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 106), 146.

5. "You shall not make for yourselves an idol, nor any image of anything that is in the

heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." Exodus 20:4-6.

6. Nairy Baghramian, "Subject to Object and Vice Versa" (lecture delivered as part of the ongoing series Subjective Histories of Sculpture, co-organized by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School and SculptureCenter, New York, March 15, 2012), accessed April 15, 2013, <http://vimeo.com/38803990>.

7. Statement by Troy Anthony Davis on the day before his execution, September 21, 2011, accessed April 15, 2013, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/emails/W1109EADPO5.html>.

8. This article appeared under a pseudonym. Ayşe K. Arslanoğlu, "Stolz und Vorurteil: Markierungspolitiken in den Gender Studies und Anderswo," in *Outside the Box, Zeitschrift für feministische Gesellschaftskritik* #2, vol. 3. Longer quote based on the following text, translated from German by the author: *Betrachten wir eine logische Schlaufe, in der sich die emanzipatorische Analyse verfangen hat? "Diese Kategorien sind doch sozial konstruiert." "Ja, aber sie sind auch eine reale Existenzweise." "Ja, aber sie sind historisch gemacht." "Aber sie sind eine reale Existenzweise." "Aber ..."*

9. An interesting article that explores this shift in Germany using "kannak attack" as a reference is Aida Ibrahim et al., "Decolorize it!" *ak - analyse & kritik - zeitung für linke Debatte und Praxis* 575 (September 21, 2012), accessed April 15, 2013, http://www.akweb.de/ak_s/ak575/23.htm.

German text:
Nicht politische Standpunkte und Strategien werden diskutiert, sondern die Personen, die sie äußern, stehen zur Diskussion. Daraus resultiert auch mit Rekurs auf das falsch verstandene bzw. naiv »übersetzte«Selbst-termächtigungskonzept der »Definitionsmacht« die derzeit gängige Positionierungspraxis: In Uni-Seminaren und auf Veranstaltungen erfolgt - oft unabhängig vom konkreten Thema - eine quälend lange »Selbstpositionierung« der sprechenden Person, in der diese detailliert Auskunft gibt über ihren Pass, ihre Hautfarbe, ihre sexuelle Orientierung, den Zustand ihrer körperlichen Verfassung, ihren familiären Bildungshintergrund sowie ihre Einkommensverhältnisse. [...]Und das Netzwerk kanak attack hat sich Anfang der 1990er Jahre dezidiert als Zusammenschluss von Menschen begriffen, in dem nicht nach Pass und Herkunft gefragt wurde, sondern die Haltung zum Rassismus entscheidend war.

Translation by the author: It's not political viewpoints and strategies that are being discussed; rather, the people who express the views are up for discussion. From this results the currently established practice of positioning with recourse to a falsely interpreted or naïvely "translated" concept of self-authorization of the "Defining Power" at university seminars and events—independent of the topic—a tormenting, long "self-positioning" of the speaker occurs in which he or she provides detailed information about his or her passport, skin color, sexual orientation, physical

condition, family background, and income [...] In the early '90s, in contrast, the network kanak attack had understood itself decidedly as a coalition of people whose attitude towards racism was relevant, not their passport or origin.

10. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xv.

11. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3.

12. *Ibid.*, 5.

13. As a further amplification of this theme, I quote Audre Lorde channeling Paulo Freire: "As Paulo Freire shows so well in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situation which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which know only the oppressor's tactics, the oppressor's relationships." Audre Lorde quoted in *Sister Outsider* (Trumansberg, New York: Crossing Press, 1984), 123.

14. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, xiii.

15. *Ibid.*, xiii.

16. Video, "Ai Weiwei does Gangnam Style," *Guardian* (UK), October 24, 2012, accessed May 5, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/video/2012/oct/24/ai-weiwei-gangnam-style-video>.

17. Hito Steyerl, "A Thing Like You and Me," *e-flux journal* 15 (April 2010).

