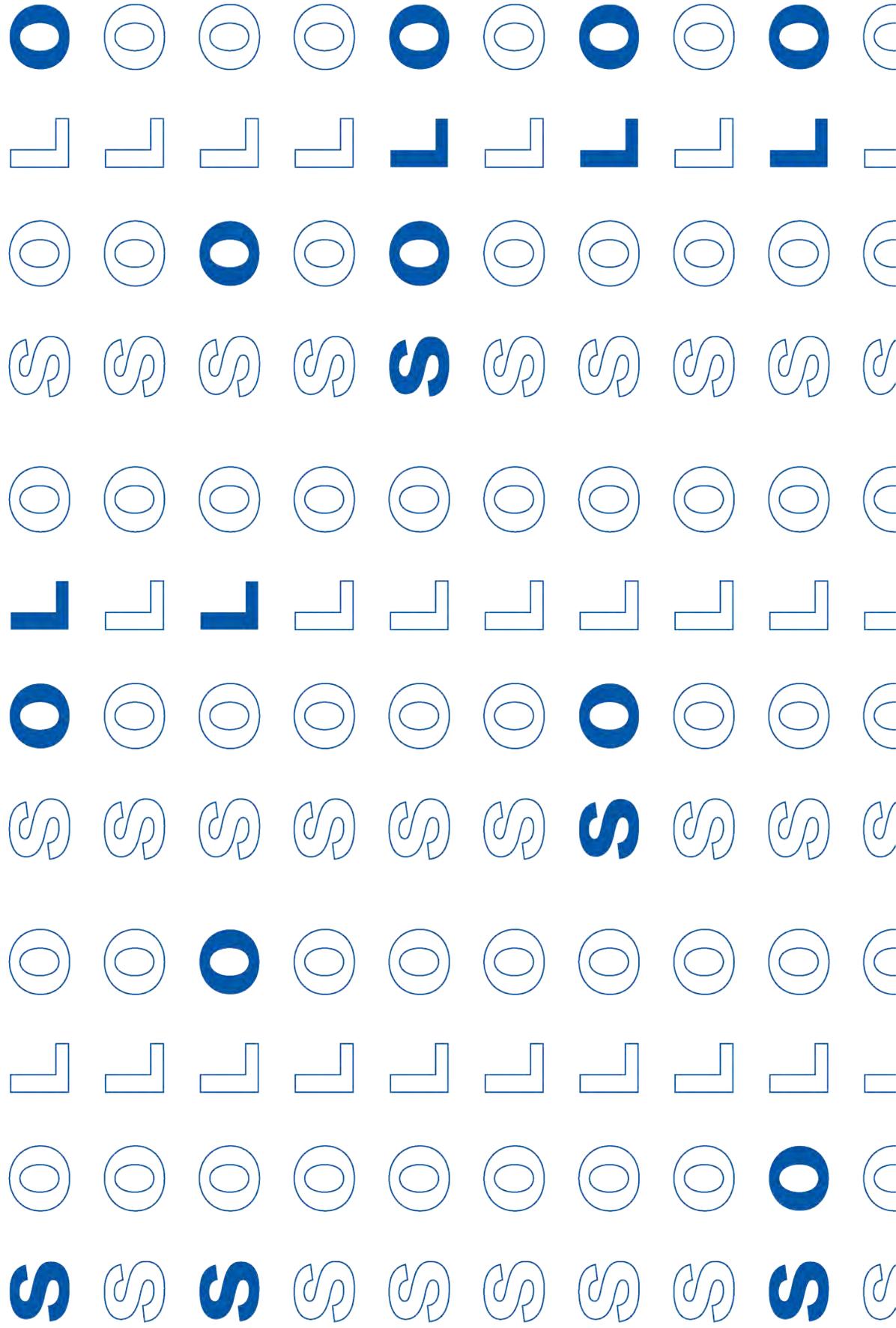


IINN PPEERRPPEETTUUAALL
PPRRROODDUUGCTTIOONN

Pt. 2



Achim Kayser/Alberto Storani/Alexander Niklasch/
 Andrea Fouchy/Andrea Schmidt/Andrea Viliami/
 Anna Rossi/Anne-Pascale Frohn/Anton Vidokle/
 Bertram Sturm/Brian Kuan Wood/
 Cajus Pietschmann/Chus Martinez/Daniel Bouthot/
 David Riley/Detlef Brall/Elisa Maria Cerra/
 Erik Wiegand/Eva Fuchs/Fabio Di Camillo/
 Frank Kiefel/Free Cooper Union/
 Gerard McGettrick/Ghazaal Vojdani/
 Giulia Pezzoli Hengst/Ines Schaber/Irina Contreras/
 Jennifer Chert/Jens Queren/Jeremy Carden/
 Jesus Barraza/Jo Hany/Joe Pflieger/Jörg Wambsgamß/
 Josh Altman/Juliane Bauer/Julieta Aranda/
 Kathleen Knitter/Kaye Cain-Nielsen/Kirsa Geiser/
 La Vina/Laura Barlow/Lex Kosieradzki/

INTRODUCTION:

This is part II of IINN PPEERRPPEETTU-
 UAALL PPRROODDUUCCTTIIOONN, a
 two-part newspaper that accompanies the exhibition
 SOLO SHOW at e-flux. While the first Issue contained
 material more directly related to the exhibition project, this
 second issue opens the discussion up to a multitude of top-
 ics and contributors that nevertheless relate to the principal
 questions behind SOLO SHOW.

Before introducing the content of this issue, allow
 me to give an account of what SOLO SHOW is and is
 not, and how it came about. Some people have complained
 that it's all quite confusing.

So, SOLO SHOW is a research-based project on
 art production, initiated by Natascha Sadr Haghghian
 together with Uwe Schwarzer. Which does not mean that
 Natascha and Uwe are the authors of the work on display.
 It's my work. I, Robbie Williams, am the artistic author
 of the awesome work you see in the show. I fully acknowl-
 edge that the work was produced by Uwe's company,
 mixedmedia Berlin, but it was Natascha's idea to wrap her
 head around how art is being produced these days, what
 a production company does, and how implications like
 value production, labor, and work relations, as well as
 authorship circulating around the figure of the solo artist
 are negotiated. So I, Robbie Williams, am fictional.
 There you have it.

This still does not mean that Natascha and Uwe or
 Natascha and mixedmedia Berlin are the authors of the
 work. Nor does it imply that I am a pseudonym of sorts
 or a collective signature that everybody should use as an act
 of subversion. At best this project creates an operative fog
 around these claims and ascriptions. But now that I'm here
 I might want to have a career for myself, which is mostly
 due to people's desires to see me as a white heterosexual
 male. I never said I was.

This is what the wall text says about me:

The work of Turkish-American artist Robbie Williams
 (b. Berlin) manifests itself in a wide range of materials.
 Williams's hybrid sculptures evoke questions about the
 conditions of the individual in representational spaces
 and reflect on what shapes our daily lives. On the occasion
 of SOLO SHOW the artist shows one piece from a set
 of five objects that resemble obstacles for horses arranged
 in the space as if for a show-jumping contest.

The objects are loosely put together and would collapse
 just as a fence does when hit by a horse jumping over it.
 But instead of using the classical wood structure,
 Williams has chosen materials that refer to his biography
 and playfully quote from the history of modern and
 postmodern art. SOLO SHOW is Williams' first major
 solo exhibition in the USA.

Coming back to the question of authors, the second space
 of the SOLO SHOW exhibition does not include my
 work. It is empty, apart from the sound of a horse
 running around in circles and jumping from time to time.
 Natascha suggested that everybody who helped in produc-
 ing my SOLO SHOW should be listed here and that
 this list should be updated. It is of course a very predictable
 and silly juxtaposition that does not do justice to me or to
 the people on the other side. But I do like that in order to
 get from my space to the second half of SOLO SHOW,
 you have to use the elevator, go to the third floor, enter

ROBBIE WILLIAMS

the e-flux office, engage in a chat with the staff, and grab
 a newspaper if you want before heading down the stairs to
 the empty room with the sound.

This is what the wall text says in that space:

SOLO SHOW is a research-based project on art production
 initiated by Natascha Sadr Haghghian together with Uwe Schwarzer.
 Haghghian in collaboration with Schwarzer who is head of the
 production company mixedmedia Berlin conceived the fictional artist
 "Robbie Williams" and had mixedmedia produce Williams' "SOLO
 SHOW." This company produces works for internationally renowned
 artists but usually stays unnamed and invisible to the public. SOLO
 SHOW, which includes a two-part installation and a publication, raises
 multiple questions about topics such as authorship, deskilling, the
 division of labor in art, and the myth of the "SOLO artist."

So now I filled you in on some of the gaps that might have
 occurred due to personal stuff I was dealing with around
 the time of the opening. I'm much better now, and actually
 I might shift my practice to working with spores for a while
 or go on vacation. I don't really know where to.

But before I go, I'm actually extremely excited to
 introduce part two of IINN PPEERRPPEETTU-
 UAALL PPRROODDUUCCTTIIOONN (did
 you read my interview in the first issue?). There were several
 events during the first three weeks of SOLO SHOW
 including presentations on the lockout of Union workers at
 Sotheby's, the initiative Gulf Labor, Free Cooper Union
 fighting tuition fees and speculation, an analysis of Marcel
 Duchamp's approach to commodity, and a critical juxtaposi-
 tion of authorship propositions by Andy Warhol and Joseph
 Beuys. These presentations led to related contributions in
 this issue. Additionally there is an account of a long-term
 work relationship between an artist and a fabricator, and
 part two of the "Glimmer of the Multitude" essay.

I want to thank everybody who dedicated time to this
 endeavor, everybody at e-flux, and at my gallery, and all of
 the people who supported me.

Cheers,
 Robbie Williams.



4



5

**"YOU GOT IT FROM ME...
THE VOLVO FILM..."**

Thomas Huesman: So I'm back to our projects, please have a look at this rendering. Could it be like that? Any remarks? I think this one separate beam (Träger) on the floor looks a little strange. We should remove it —d'accord? For the side at the back with the windows, could the walls have a small back space of 2mm before the posts or should the beam construction be totally visible back-space 10mm? What do you think? Just to make sure—the sign is internally lit! Milky-white, translucent Plexiglas, with text on the front side only!

Liam Gillick: I recently used some purple Plexiglas in America, which looked a little like the sample you have sent in the email. You can also see here in the photo a dark and light purple. It would be really great to get something like the dark purple. Something interesting. No purple film on top of transparent Plexiglas. It has to be the real thing.

T: Sorry, the dark purple seems out of production everywhere but I just got this lighter one. It's from an Italian company. The model will go to Vienna on Friday and be there late in the afternoon.

Also I have to know if you plan to realize more projects with these 15cm x 4cm x 200cm aluminum tubes, as it is running out of stock—but I can order a new production for a further 180m of this stuff.

L: Here are the plans for the new wall works.

T: Great—nearly exactly the dimensions I supposed.

L: I am slightly ahead of you as I just sent them through. Have a look. As for the tubes: I would like to make more, but I can wait. I have some initial ideas for the Berlin exhibition. But it will not involve these tubes.

T: Hi again, I'm just wondering if everything is OK with the installation? And if you've received your little German pavilion—as envisioned by Arnold Bode?

P.S. I'll be in Bonn next Wednesday and have a meeting.

L: I will get some images from the New York exhibition and show them to you later. In the meantime, we need to start discussing the door blinds for Bonn. Can you remind me of the available colors?

T: Can't wait to see some images. The colors and the order of the colors you can find in the attached photo. I think they should follow the same line.

Anodized aluminum for the top of the stripes should be 4cm. Any news about the bug blinds or anything else concerning your exhibition in Bonn? I'll be there tomorrow for a meeting

L: We need to make 6 sets of blinds that will fit into a 200cm wide x 300cm high door. Each one should

be the same colors as Venice. Here is the current flat plan.

T: I'm in contact with them and at last they asked me for a new offer for supervising the installation and for the production of the bug blinds. They would produce the benches by themselves, which is OK for me if you agree. I would start during the first four days of installation (from the 16th of March) and will be there as long as it will be necessary and also stay for the opening. But they haven't confirmed everything yet. Just one question concerning the doors of the kitchen: In Venice it was possible to open a few doors but I think this isn't necessary in Bonn—it might be easier to keep them closed. What do you think?

L: [Forwarded message to T: Correspondence with Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland]

I am aware that there are concerns about how to hang some of the ceiling works. And that we have to drill into concrete above the false ceiling. I would propose waiting until commencing ANY installation—I thought this was understood anyway. He (TH) has worked with me for ten years and is the person who will be able to advise how to install these works. Nothing should be installed without myself or Thomas present, as some works are very old and it will be necessary to make adjustments and judgments about condition and safety. We have to use new cable and fixings to hang most of the old ceiling works. I understand that Thomas or the KAH will be getting the correct cables to do this. For the work that involves the hanging texts ("Driving Practice") there is a specific order to the work. I am not sure that you have the instructions needed to install this work. Let me know.

T: OK. Do you have the PDF plans for "Driving Practice" like we normally use for production, as this is a new work for me. I think it will be better to take measurements from the object but I'll get some hints as it goes on. How is Dublin? Have you ever seen this spot? Thank you very much for the "Gruppenbild." Any ideas what we should do for your exhibition in Berlin? I have seen your first proposal with works similar to the ones in New York. Please let me know what you think.

L: I will work on it this week. Looking forward to Berlin. Is there a way we could make a cube that had an easier way to take it apart, meaning that the "nut" was maybe capable of being turned by hand?

T: Actually yes. What kind of cube do you mean? Something like the black cube from Paris? Why do you need this? Please let me know.

L: I am working on the plans for Berlin. It will involve a strange installation—which will

**LIAM GILLICK (NYC)
THOMAS HUESMANN (BER)**

not involve a lot of production from you. But it will also involve me producing plans for some new work that we will not necessarily produce for the opening. I have a crucial question. For making wall fins, what are the options in terms of alternative dimensions? If we cannot get the original 15cm x 3cm x 200cm. Can you send me a list? Then I can make some new work. One of the things I want to do is make an aluminum model of the Venice kitchen and a 1:1 scale model of a stacked hi-fi system. I will send you plans.

T: Here is a list of a lot of dimensions for aluminum tubes, square and rectangular. The 150cm x 30mm x 2.8mm tube is also available, I just have to know if you would like to continue with this dimension as it will be better to have it already in my storage instead of waiting to see what kind of quality metal will arrive when I need it for a production with a deadline. I think everything should be clear for "Double Exit Rig." You already explained what they have to do. I can supply them with the right bulbs, connectors, and a plug. Do you have a plan for "Discussion Island" with the dimensions. Actually it is not totally clear to me what I have to do.

L: Did you receive the plans I sent yesterday? Just checking.

T: Yes, thank you. It's going on. Paris ordered this work and I detected that the screen deviates from an earlier plan with inch measurements—120 x 84 inches instead of centimeters. In the past we took always used this measurement: 304.8cm x 213.4cm.

What should we do in this case? Should we scale it down to 300 x 200cm or should we follow our convention as usual?

L: I would suggest the middle of the second Plexiglas field. In my experience that is the best. Looking forward to seeing you in Berlin.

T: It's already done like you suggested.

L: Can we just use the 40-watt bulb? It will be really easy to get some American ones when it is taken back to the US.

T: Would it be OK to have twenty-one lamps or could it be twenty?

L: It was good to see you in Berlin. I need to replace some faded Plexiglas in an early work. I wonder if you could let me know how much it would cost to FedEx me the following:

All 11.5 inches x 11.5 inches (NOT CENTIMETERS..)

- All transparent Plexiglas
- 2 greens
- 2 reds
- 2 oranges
- 2 yellows
- 1 light blue
- 1 dark blue

That is the set. But maybe it would be good for me to order two sets?

- Therefore:
- 4 greens
- 4 reds
- 4 oranges
- 4 yellows
- 2 light blue
- 2 dark blue

T: My guess is it will be something around 400 Euro including FedEx for the two sets! Only one set would be c. 300 Euro. The dimensions are 292 x 292mm each.

T: Dear Liam, now I have the real costs for the Plexiglas pieces but the FedEx is fucking expensive. If there is no hurry I could put them in the crate for New York. I'll ship very soon. Let me know. Talking about football without any alcoholic [sic.] drinks makes no sense at the moment. Cheers.

L: Just want to follow up about that Plexiglas. When do you think it might be possible to send it? Hope Berlin is hot enough. Looking forward to England v Germany.

T: I'm just waiting for the yellow sheets but the replacement parts for the benches are done. I think I'll send everything next week. ETA Friday or Monday the following week. I'll let you know.

England v Germany. That's what football is for. Just one question: Should the orange Plexiglas be blue the blue be orange?

L: The drawing is correct. Not the code. Does that make sense? T: Please compare the Rear View Screen Face (orange Plexiglas on top) with the 3D rendering on the side (blue Plexiglas on top).

L: Here is the corrected drawing.

T: I hope I am not getting colorblind. But should the lower Plexiglas piece (30cm) on the left rear view screen face be a red one or an orange one?

It's hard to decide what you mean, I guess red?

L: How are you? I have a simple question. I have still been giving out plans for 15cm wall works. But do we still have 15cm deep aluminum?

T: I'm OK. Still working. But going home now. "Released Development" is already in progress if that's what you mean. I have already received a second delivery of aluminum for that and it's once again not OK—in bad condition. I will re-order everything. There are some tubes in different storages in Germany and I will get the new stuff next week I hope. Over the last years few years I've had this profile of aluminum specially made for you but I have to take a minimum of 500 kg. If you plan to continue with this dimension please let me know. Also the 100 x 30mm works very well. I saw "Lead Time" last week and it looked very good with the shadowing.

**"YOU GOT IT FROM ME...
THE VOLVO FILM..."**

L: Glad to hear you are OK. It is actually sunny here—although I drank too much last night.

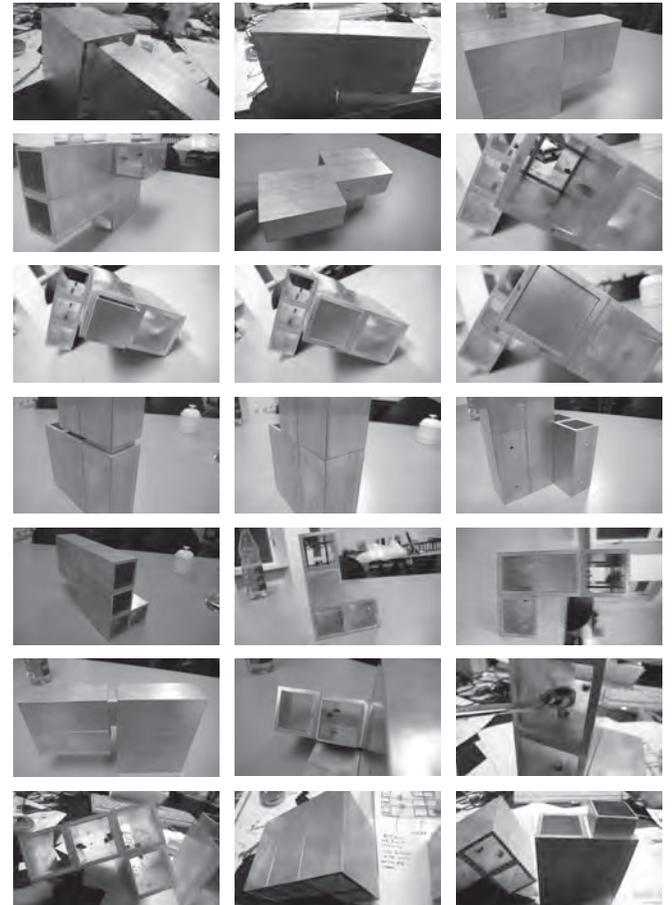
About the dimensions, I am sending one more plan for another one almost the same as "Released Development" but I have remembered that you said it might be a good moment to change a few dimensions.

What would you recommend? I think it might be better to change to the 100cm anyway, as the shadow is therefore not going to be too dark. Is there enough to do one more twenty-element work at 15cm?

T: It is actually a good idea to drink a lot tonight—although it is almost rainy here. It's up to you. If you like the 150 x 30mm I can order some in advance for upcoming projects (fabrication takes six weeks). In the meantime I can find enough for the next work, no problem. I don't know how the 100mm x 30mm works with the monochrome has a nice fading. Let's try one. I have an empty text wall in my living room. You got it from me. The Volvo film.

—
January—October 2010.

**LIAM GILLICK (NYC)
THOMAS HUESMANN (BER)**



**[NOTES TOWARD
A THEORY OF
SURPLUS VALUE
IN CONSUMPTION]
DUCHAMP'S
STRATEGY OF
REFUSAL: ON THE
ARTISTIC MODE
OF PRODUCTION**

By Stephen Squibb

[Theory vs history and how
Marx confuses the theory of
gravity and the history of gravity]

In 1961, Marcel Duchamp spoke of wanting to expose the “basic antimony between art and ‘Readymades.’” This revelation would require a “reciprocal readymade” as imagined in the artist’s famous injunction to “use a Rembrandt for an ironing board!” Reversing this image provides a corresponding injunction for the readymade itself, namely, to use an ironing board for a Rembrandt. I’d like to keep this desire in mind when revisiting three sets of theoretical questions: first, this concept of the “mode of production,” second, the relationship of the work of art to the commodity form, and, finally, the reading of Duchamp’s readymades in terms of this relationship, before returning, at the end, to this question of an artistic mode of production.

I should note that this is a much condensed presentation of some larger reflections, which I have purged of citations for the sake of clarity, but I am happy to provide some of the references after the fact if necessary.

The key to understanding Marx’s idea of a mode of production—an immensely powerful, if also contested formulation—is to recover, first, the lay of the land as he encounters it. This is the topography of classical political economy, which encompasses what I call four genres, or theaters—circulation, consumption, production, and distribution. I will mostly be dealing with production and circulation here. Marx begins with circulation.

Originally, in the *Grundrisse*, Marx enumerated two fundamental forms, or processes, of circulation—money and capital. In *Das Kapital*, he adds a third, original form, the commodity. So commodity, money, and capital are all kinds of circulation. The essence of the problem, for Marx, is the migration of a form of circulation—capital—into the theater of production. It is, in short, when capital begins organizing production, in place of feudal obligations, as in the past, that the “capitalist mode of production” displaces the feudal mode of production. More specifically it is when work—a relation of production—is organized like a commodity—a relation of circulation—by capital, that we have the capitalist mode of production. So we remember the formula for capital (M-C-M) and it is when the C, the commodity, includes not just steel and machinery, say, but human work, that the capitalist mode of production is born. The really important thing is that Marx’s phrase maintains the analytic division between the genres of production and circulation by specifying the relationship between the two; it is the “capitalist mode of production,” and not, for example, the “proletarian mode of circulation,” or the “monetary mode of distribution.”

Our contemporary mysticism only arrives with the term “capitalism,” which covers over this distinction, and thus could be understood to refer equally well to circulation, which furnishes the process of capital, or production, which furnishes the protagonist of work, or neither, or both. What we lose with the concept of “capitalism” is this term, “mode.” A wonderful word. Mode is a term contested equally in political economy and genre theory. For my purposes, it is enough to point out that it is usually considered to be the middle term in the progression “genre, mode, subgenre.” Genre is substantive; mode is adjectival, as in the phrase lyric poem. Lyric is the mode, poem the genre.

In Marx’s case, then, “capitalist” is the mode and “production” is the genre. Indeed, the capitalist mode of production is a hybrid generic identity that results when a subgenre of circulation—capital—begins to organize the entire genre called production, producing a mode,

the capitalist mode of production. Fine, so what is this work that it’s being organized like a commodity is enough to change everything—to shift from a feudal mode of production to a capitalist one? And what does this have to do with art?

By what standard? What is the model by which the violence of the commodity is revealed? It is not, as some would have it, that the work of art is subject to the commodity form, but, on the contrary, that the commodity concept is in some sense subject to the work of art.

That is to say that the commodity cannot be understood except as the substitution of abstract labor for the concrete, individual work whose model is art. To say that the work of art is a commodity, or has become one, is to remove the dialectical tension that allows both objects, art and commodity, to fall into relief. Certainly Marx did not have “the work of art,” as we understand it, in mind when he wrote the opening of *Capital*, but instead sought to contrast the commodity to goods that had been produced for personal use, or as part of feudal obligations. However, it is the case that the art object, understood as an authored expression of human work, maintains as a kind of absolute non-commodity, without which the authorless abstraction of the commodity cannot be understood. Among other things, it is another step in this evolution that Duchamp’s readymade demonstrates, though this is not its whole significance.

There are three things to keep in mind when discussing Marx’s conceptualization of the commodity: use, exchange, and labor, each of which gets mixed up, in one form or another, with value. Marx’s fundamental insight is that use is insufficient to account for exchange, which requires the further category of labor. This initial insufficiency is the famed opposition between use-value and exchange-value. This opposition is most readily apparent about the commodity—its appearance, not its essence—and this is why Marx begins with it. How is it, he asks, that things can have an exchange value? How is exchange value possible, given the subjective, physical characteristics of use-values? How can we understand “objects of utility” to also

be “bearers of value,” given, that is, the asymmetrical use-value assessments in the buyer and the seller? By what standard can they come to an agreement on its exchange-value?

A given commodity, e.g., a quarter of wheat is exchanged for x blacking, y silk, or z gold, &c. —in short, for other commodities in the most different proportions. Instead of one exchange value, the wheat has, therefore, a great many. But since x blacking, y silk, or z gold &c., each represents the exchange value of one quarter of wheat, x blacking, y silk, z gold, &c., must, as exchange values, be replaceable by each other, or equal to each other. Therefore, first the valid exchange values of a given commodity express something equal; secondly, exchange value, generally, is only the mode of expression, the phenomenal form, of something contained in it, yet distinguishable from it (Marx 1887, 124).

The act of exchange, Marx reasons, is only possible due to the presence of some common element in the objects being exchanged—this is labor. Without labor, there is no common element to account for the expression of exchange value. However, this labor cannot ever be labor in the particular, or work, as this is, by definition, not common to all objects of exchange; instead, Marx famously posits, we have a new operative category—“socially necessary labor time,” abstract labor, or labor considered separately from every human instance of its appearance. Exchange value thus stands apart from both the concrete utility of the object, and the specific labor that produced it.

Along with the useful qualities of the products themselves, we put out of sight both the useful character of the various kinds of labor embodied in them, and the concrete forms of that labor: there is nothing left but what is common to them all; all are reduced to one and the same sort of labor, human labor in the abstract (126).

Exchange value is defined by this separation, and this is what distinguishes it from price, which is not. An object may have a price and not be a commodity, insofar as that price refers to specific conditions of production that make it impossible to determine the socially necessary labor time required to produce it. Though Marx starts from exchange value and arrives at abstract labor as its condition of possibility, the two are actually mutually constitutive—it is only to the extent that exchange conceals the labor that produced an object that exchange value can be recognized and labor considered abstract. Exchange value is a function of the misrecognition of labor

as abstract in the process of exchange. Commodities are thus those objects whose value is expressed in reference to abstract, rather than specific, labor:

Every product of labor is, in all states of society, a use value; but it is only at a definite historical epoch in a society’s development that such a product becomes a commodity, viz., at the epoch when the labor spent on the production of a useful article becomes expressed as one of the objective qualities of that article, i.e., as its value... We perceive, at first sight, the deficiencies of the elementary form of value: it is a mere germ, which must undergo a series of metamorphoses before it can ripen into the price form (146).

The mistake is thus to imagine that all prices are pure expressions of exchange value, and, following, that anything with a price is a commodity. Price is an expression that can include reference to exchange value, but is only very rarely reducible to it. More often, price is informed by some reference to the labor that has gone into the making of the object. Rarely is the fetishism of commodities allowed to stand naked, to remain totally abstract. Indeed, commodities increasingly come bearing more and more details of their origins, all of which are designed to counteract the presence of abstract labor lurking behind their production. The object is less and less a commodity the more that its price represents the specific expression of a given worker or workplace. Thus the idea of authentic expression contained in artisanal work, often considered romantic, is in fact the condition of our recognizing the commodity. The two are opposed, constitutively. To call something a commodity requires the existence of something like the work of art—a pure artisanship, where exchange takes place at the minimal distance from labor. Thus, when an artist signs a work, the signature relocates the object in the realm of the concrete and particular. The work of art stands opposed to that authorless product of labor, the commodity, and each would be incompressible without the other.

As Engels writes in a footnote:

The English language has the advantage of possessing different words for the two aspects of labor here considered. The labor which creates use value, and counts qualitatively, is Work, as distinguished from Labor, that which creates Value and counts quantitatively, is Labor as distinguished from Work. (Marx, N14).

The artist does not labor, the artist works. If their work appears as labor,

they can no longer be considered an artist, having been absorbed into the general flow of abstraction. Marx’s much celebrated reflections on the fetishism of commodities take place by virtue of this process of abstraction. It is because the commodity appears as authorless that it can seem to loom over humanity as the gods did before it:

It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There, products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. (147).

The autonomy of commodities, their appearance of having a life of their own, is a function of their being authorless. If they had a maker, a signature, they would not seem independent of human agency. Nothing confirms this fact more clearly than the evolution of branding and marketing over the past two centuries. Branding and marketing efforts are attempts to ameliorate the alienation taking place in the fetishism of commodities, to breed familiarity and comfort in the consumer. Peter Burger writes:

[Marx] locates the cause for the persuasive force of religious view in “real wretchedness.” In this analysis, religion is unveiled as contradictory: Despite its untruth (there is no God) it is truthful as an expression of misery and as a protest against this misery. Its social function is equally contradictory: by permitting the experience of an illusory happiness, it alleviates the existence in misery but in accomplishing this, it simultaneously prevents the establishment of “true happiness” (Burger 1984, 7).

Completing the parallel, we can see that the abstract labor concealed in the commodity connects to “true wretchedness” while branding and advertising efforts connect to religious ideas. These are truthful as expressions of the alienation inherent in commodity fetishism, but untruthful in that the objects themselves remain products of abstract labor. Even the urinal came bearing the marks of an author—J.M. Mott. This brand inhabits the space reserved for the truth of the object’s production. It is made possible by the authorlessness of the commodity.

lessness in the same way that the gods performed the refusal of contingent suffering.

Once we have this understanding in place, we can approach the idea of artistic autonomy in bourgeois culture in a slightly different way. Far from taking place separately from the realm of the commodity, this separation is the canvas on which the portrait of the commodity is drawn. When Marx says that Milton produced *Paradise Lost* as the silkworm produces silk, as an activity of his nature, he is describing a perfect state of dis-alienated work which is the necessary standard without which alienated labor cannot be understood. It is this absolute unity of producer and product whose disruption is conceptualized in the commodity and re-concealed in the brand.

Thus when Burger writes that:

Aestheticism turns out to have been the necessary precondition of the avant-gardiste intent,

and that

only an art the contents of whose individual works is wholly distinct from the (bad) praxis of the existing society can be the center that can be the starting point for the organization of a new life praxis (Burger 49)

he is simply describing the becoming self-conscious of an already existing tendency in political economy. If, that is, the artist produces not the commodity but its opposite, the work of art, the artist also perpetually reinvents the terrain against which the commodity is inevitably expressed. If the commodity works as Marx described it, aestheticism as such takes place alongside it, as the condition of possibility for its being understood as distinct. The avant-garde is a materially existing process from which the commodity takes its bearings. The evolution of branding and marketing is thus the negative reflection of the real movement of the avant-garde.

It is important to thus remember that both the commodity and the work of art predate mass production, and both are transformed by it. If the aura of the work of art in itself is imperiled by mechanical reproduction, a new aura is generated for it as the other of the commodity. (Benjamin's celebrated essay, as its title indicates, concerns only the work of art—the word "commodity" does not appear.)

The persistence of the author, the maintenance of scarcity—these are secular functions of the artwork against the new mysteries of the commodity. Mass production is not essential to the commodity but it is what enthrones it. Mass production elevates the commodity. Advertising and branding are its weaponized simulacra of art and artist. The very goal of advertising is to defeat the perception of alienation while preserving it in practice.

If my reading of Marx is well taken, the objects on the art market are very pointedly not commodities—indeed, that is how we can understand them as art objects—and, as I will be arguing for the remainder of my time, it is precisely this transformation that Duchamp helps us to see. In order for this to fall into relief, we will need to revisit the institutional conditions of the readymade's production.

—/Hedge Here/

These are the details of the Society of Independent Artists, which concern the production of *Fountain*.

This institution was not typical. Instead of the usual arrangement whereby a gallery owner agrees to display, promote, and sell works of art in exchange for a large portion of the proceeds, anyone who was willing to pay the fees for membership and for exhibition was to be allowed to show whatever work they chose. Duchamp participated heavily in the organization of the fair, and even suggested displaying the works received alphabetically, to further underscore the radically democratic nature of the exhibition.

In addition, of course, he also purchased a urinal from JL Mott, signed it R. Mutt, paid the necessary fees, and submitted the work for exhibition under the title of *Fountain*. When the work was refused, voted down by a small margin in a last-minute caucus of ten of the Society's directors, Duchamp resigned in protest. Beatrice Wood recollected witnessing the confrontation between Walter Arensberg and George Bellows regarding whether or not to display Mutt's work:

—"We can't exhibit it."
—"We can't refuse it, the entrance fee has been paid."
—"It is indecent!"
—"That depends on the point of view!"
—"Someone must have sent it as a joke."

It is signed R. Mutt; sounds fishy to me"
—"A lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose, therefore the man clearly has made an aesthetic contribution."
—"We can't show it, that is all there is to it."
—"This is what the whole exhibit is about: an opportunity to allow an artist to send in anything he chooses, for the artist to decide what is art, not someone else."
—"You mean to say, if a man sent in horse manure glued to a canvas that we would have to accept it!"
—"I'm afraid we would. If this is an artist's expression of beauty, we can do nothing but accept his choice. If you look at this entry objectively, you will see that it has striking, sweeping lines. This Mr. Mutt has taken an ordinary object, placed it so that its useful significance disappears, and thus has created a new approach to the subject."
—"It is gross, offensive! There is such a thing as decency!"
—"Only in the eye of the beholder, you forget our bylaws."
(Quoted in Camfield 1990)

There are several things to note here. First, far from being a critique of the institution, *Fountain*, at least, was enabled by it. It had, so to speak, the law on its side. Only by resorting to extraordinary measures was the institution able to prevent it from going on display. Second, Arensberg's defense of *Fountain*, as Duchamp would later echo, turns on the refusal of utility.

The object is said to be "freed from its functional purpose" and "placed so that its useful significance disappears." It is this occlusion that reveals its "aesthetic contribution."

In the first case, it is difficult to square this sort of institution, wherein anyone can pay to have a work exhibited, with the "production of a new commodity," as some would have it. The voluntary nomination of one's own work might be ambitious, distasteful, or otherwise pejorative, but it is quite impossible to imagine it as an example of the production of abstract labor, or the calculation of socially necessary labor time.

Moreover, given that the story of the *Fountain* includes the institution behaving exceptionally by violating its own rules, it is similarly difficult to take it as an attempt to critique the autonomy of art in bourgeois society. If anything, *Fountain* would seem to want to solidify or confirm this autonomy.

In the second case, that of the refusal of utility, we must remember what Marx said about the commodity:

To become a commodity a product must be transferred to another, whom it will serve as a use value, by means of an exchange (Marx, ibid).

Thus even if *Fountain* had been exhibited and sold, there would remain the question of its use value, or precisely that functional purpose from which it has been "freed."

The path of *Fountain* now appears somewhat differently from what has often been thought. In the first case, there is a struggle for the absolute autonomy of the artist. The Independents can be seen as an institution designed to safeguard this autonomy, and the *Fountain* as the object designed to test this commitment.

In the second case, there is the refusal of utility, not as incidental to the aesthetic contribution but as essential to it. If we were correct to assert that the conceptual outlines of the authorless commodity can only be clearly seen when set against the expressive work of art, Duchamp is now demonstrating the same process in reverse, as he throws the work of art into relief against a background of abstract utility. *Fountain* does not confirm the commodity status of art, but denies it absolutely, demonstrating, indeed, that the two are defined by their antagonism.

We can see this contrast at work again in the distinction between the kinds of public services towards which urinals and fountains are respectively put. Urinals are hidden objects of use, while fountains are public objects of reflection. The fountain is proudly useless while the urinal is embarrassingly useful. In narrating the transformation between the two, Duchamp recovers what is dignified in the work of art as against the humiliation of abstract labor, wherein the great panoply of human potentiality is reduced to one, specific use-value. But in order for this use-value to be refused, it first has to be offered. And here we return to the ironing board utilized as a Rembrandt, for what Duchamp understood is that a painting can never be useless in the way that the readymade is useless. The autonomous gesture, that is, the expressive work of the individual, only appears clearly against the background of utility, now refused.

/Mario Tronti/

So, in closing, I would offer a distinction, on the one hand the mode of artistic production—which is the status of forces

and relations governing the difference between art and commodity, and what is, quite superlatively, the subject of SOLO SHOW. And, on the other, the artistic mode of production, which is, I am convinced, simply another name for communism. It is that glorious future where anyone and everyone is free to make theater in the morning, tend crops in the afternoon, and criticize sculpture after dinner. And that progress towards this future is measured, at least in part, by refusals.

It is not simply that one is not born, but becomes woman, one also writes the second sex. It is not simply that one is torn violently from one's home in Africa and forced into slavery, one also makes the Haitian Revolution, and it is not simply that one stops painting and becomes a sculptor, but one founds the Society of Independent Artists, an institution designed to give everyone access to that real freedom that consists of turning a urinal on its side, and calling it a fountain.

It became clear upon presenting these ideas that I had not done enough to clarify their context and significance. For this purpose, a brief postscript will have to suffice. The claim that art is not a commodity because it is impossible to calculate the socially necessary labor time required to produce it is an echo of another, perhaps more obvious assertion. This is the observation that human work is not an object, and that it cannot be bought and sold like other objects.

This, it is absolutely essential to point out, does not stop certain organized interests from trying to do so. Indeed, the attempt to treat human work as though it were an object like any other is the defining feature of what Marx called the capitalist mode of production. This misrecognition is contradictory because if it were the case that human work was a commodity, like steel or machinery, the extraction of surplus value in production would be impossible.

This is a tricky but absolutely fundamental point. Under competitive conditions, the price of commodities—like steel and machinery—tends to equalize for all producers. This means that though I may, for a time, enjoy a cheaper source of steel than my competitors, eventually this cost will be the same for all of us. Thus, the only source of surplus value in production is my ability, as a manager, to pay my workers less than they are worth, in a way that I cannot pay less for steel or machinery. (If I do not pay my workers less, I will be fired by my stockholders and replaced by someone who will.) Thus, though I factor the cost of labor in the same way that I factor the cost of steel, in truth, I rely for my profits on the fact that these are two different kinds of things; that because labor is human and steel is not, the price of labor is negotiable in a way that the price of steel is not. This is the contradiction at the heart of the capitalist mode of production: that, as a manager, I am required to treat human work as though it were a commodity while simultaneously needing this to not be the case. A similar contradiction accounts for the accumulation of surplus value in consumption, namely that I, as a marketer,

am required to treat my product as though it were a work of art—and so I cover it in signatures, brand names, etc. while, simultaneously, needing this to not be the case. This is because if an iPhone were actually a work of art, it could not be assembled by abstract labor in China. Thus, as a marketer, I must act as though my product is a work of art when it isn't, in a way analogous to how, as a manager, I must act as though my workers are machines when they are not. Thus, to claim that the work of art is a commodity is the equivalent of claiming that factory workers are, in fact, the machines that ownership misrecognizes them to be, even as it relies on their being otherwise, relies, that is, on their being human.

To parrot, out of cynicism or pessimism or God knows what, the rhetoric of management that there is no difference between a work of art and a commodity, between humans and machines—it not merely to surrender utterly, it is also to render history illegible. For history consists of nothing less than the organized refusal of this misrecognition—as, indeed, western factory workers refused it, thus forcing management, under threat from stockholders, to move their jobs to China in the first place, and as Chinese workers refuse it every day, in strikes, in sabotage, and often, tragically, in suicide. Machines do not commit suicide and steel does not go on strike.

The history of art and the history of work are thus inextricably linked, not only because both are histories of refusal—the refusal of labor, in the case of work, and the refusal of the commodity, in the case of art—but also because without the possibility of art—of work—we cannot account for the accumulation of surplus value. If, that is, there really were no differences between art and commodity, profit in consumption would be impossible, as surely as if there really were no difference between humans and machines, profit in production would likewise be out of reach. My effort here, however unsatisfactory, has been simply to claim that Duchamp's *Fountain* relies on the distinction between art and commodity in the same way that the critique of political economy relies on the distinction between work and labor, and that, without this distinction, the project of autonomy is doomed.

—SCS, 11/25/13

GULF LABOUR REPORT

WHAT IS GULF LABOUR?

Briefly, Gulf Labor is a group of artists, writers, architects, curators, and other cultural workers who are trying to ensure that workers' rights are respected during the construction of new cultural institutions on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi. After letter-writing and meetings with the Guggenheim in 2010 produced no change, we initiated a public boycott of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi in 2011, to which more than a thousand artists have signed on, agreeing not to sell work to, accept commissions from, or participate in events on behalf of the GAD. This fall we launched the 52 Weeks campaign, where every week for a year we will release one or more artist's projects that call attention to some aspect of the conditions of workers on Saadiyat Island, the political context that enables their situation, and the problematic compact between the western institutions building on Saadiyat and their partners in Abu Dhabi.

52 Weeks represents a distinct shift in strategy for Gulf Labor, from the strategic use of artworks (withholding them, or imposing conditions on their sale, production and exhibition) as an activist tactic, to an attempt to apply the same kind of pressure through the production and distribution of artworks that address or enact that activism directly. The working group of Gulf Labor, which organizes initiatives like 52 Weeks, has a rotating membership open to anyone participating in the boycott.

WHAT ARE WE ASKING FOR?

Once, while we were slurping udon soup at our favorite Gulf Labor calls on all academic and cultural institutions building on Saadiyat Island to seek uniform and enforceable human rights protections for the workers working on their sites. These protections should specifically address:

1. Recruitment fees and relocation costs paid by workers.
2. Confiscation of worker passports by employers. (Though we recognize that this has appreciably improved in recent years.)
3. Poor and unsafe housing and living conditions, even in the Saadiyat Construction Village that is meant to embody the highest standards for worker welfare upheld by TDIC.
4. Lack of freedom to change jobs or to form trade unions for collective bargaining.
5. Lack of open platforms for workers to express grievances or abuses without fear of recrimination or dismissal.

At a minimum, Gulf Labor requires enforcement of the existing contractor code of conduct, known as the EPP—including the appointment of an independent monitor empowered and enabled to make impromptu inspections of work sites and worker accommodations. Over the past two years, we've won some concessions from TDIC, the Abu Dhabi authority that oversees Saadiyat Island—one of which is the aforementioned EPP, and the other being the appointment of a monitor who produced a report last year. We have serious questions about the enforcement of the

MARIAM GHANI

EPP and the independence of the monitor, however, and about the methodology of the report. Ideally we would like to see a workers rights framework like the Dhaka Principles and an employer code of conduct like the EPP enacted into statute and consistently enforced in the UAE.

WHY ARE WE, SPECIFICALLY, THE ONES ASKING?

Many people in the coalition, including me, became involved with Gulf Labor after first being involved with producing art in the Gulf region—making commissioned projects for the Sharjah Biennial, showing at Art Dubai, or even being approached to do work in Abu Dhabi.

We became invested in the project of Gulf Labor not only because we were familiar with the conditions on the ground, but also because we felt implicated. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to do any kind of work in the Gulf without becoming part of this system that underpins everything, which is the migrant labor economy. And certainly the art world of the Gulf is not exempt or separate from this system, because it is embedded in all economic exchanges in the Gulf. At the same time (and Walid Raad's *Walkthrough* performance at DOCUMENTA(13), the text of which was just published in *e-flux journal*, pointed precisely to this paradox or dilemma), the massive investment in cultural projects on the part of autocratic rulers in the Gulf does hold out a sort of promise, both to artists across the Middle East who need more support and exposure for their work, and to inhabitants of Gulf countries who might imagine that freedom of expression granted to artists within museum walls could eventually lead to greater freedom of expression in other arenas as well. If this promise is to be more than a mirage, however, the institutions through which these cultural projects will be enacted should be constructed in an equitable way. Essentially, Gulf Labor is saying that it's not enough for a satellite museum or campus to function as a zone of exception, where the rules are bent for certain actors within a carefully delineated space. We think these institutions can be and do more. They can be levers to enact wider change. And that change shouldn't be postponed till the moment when art enters the walls. It should begin from the moment that the institution is conceived, and be performed through every stage of its construction and existence. Quite frankly, we don't think we should be asked to overlook how our museums are being built just because we're so grateful to have them at all. We think it's fair to ask more of these museums, not because we think so little of them, but because, in a funny way, we might actually think more of them than they do themselves.

WHY FOCUS ON SAADIYAT?

Saadiyat Island is a particular flashpoint because on the ironically named "Island of Happiness," a whole series of western institutions (the Guggenheim, the Louvre, the British Museum and NYU) are loaning their names and institutional cachet to Abu Dhabi to create a brand-new "culture zone." Because the image projected by these western institutions is essential to this project of creating a culture zone from scratch, and that image is fundamentally

GULF LABOUR REPORT

incompatible with the image of the labor camp, these institutions absolutely have leverage that could be used to enact positive change, but are not applying it. As the artworkers most likely to be asked to produce and consume the actual culture of this culture zone, we didn't want to accept this. So we used the leverage we had, which was primarily with the Guggenheim, because it collects contemporary art, and used that to open up a dialogue with them and through them with the Abu Dhabi authorities.

As Walid pointed out, Abu Dhabi's sovereign wealth fund is the third largest in the world. Just the annual interest income from the fund nets them an average of 43.47 billion dollars per year. Obviously, they do not lack the funds to resolve the problems we have identified; they lack the will. Even more clearly: Abu Dhabi absolutely can improve the living and working standards of these workers, but they don't want to. This distinction is crucial, because it points precisely to the importance of this struggle. They don't want to because doing so would set a precedent, and once that precedent is set, it can spread to other sites and other countries.

Gulf Labor absolutely recognizes that this problem and this struggle is not limited to the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, or to Saadiyat Island, or to the Emirates, or even to the Gulf region. We see it as a worldwide struggle. But we have focused our energies on this particular battle because we think it is one that we, specifically, can help to win, because we are able in this moment to ask the Guggenheim and the Louvre and the British Museum and NYU to halt on the brink, and think about just what it means to globalize a museum or a university. When corporations made the same move into globalized production and distribution, the anti-sweatshop movement emerged to hold them accountable for their actions overseas. If museums and universities are going to make the same shift, we must hold them accountable, and we must begin now.

MARIAM GHANI

I AM THE MIRROR

JESUS BARRAZA



I AM THE MIRROR

I am the one who is reflecting the image of all the Future Ancestors. Will I ever be an Ancestor? The people standing in front of me ponder their future and what they will leave behind for the generations to come. Do they ever reflect on my experiences and the journey that led me to end up on this white wall? People are here reflecting on what they will become and the impression they will leave.

They are thinking about where they come from, and like them I come from the earth. I was brought to life through an industrial process where my makings were mixed and heated to blazing temperatures; I was then given shape and made into what I am today. I do not know my makers, but I was born halfway around the world and traveled a long way to get to the store where I came to be sold. I am a commodity, something made to be sold and bought. The people who made me were the

first ones to see their reflection in me, standing in line looking at themselves in others like me, never knowing what these people were thinking. My journey began that day; to migrate from the place I was made to land as a commodity in a market place.

All the items around me are made in far off places too; they were created to be sent around the world to fill market-places before they end up in someone's home. They all come from materials extracted from the earth just like me. They also do not know their creation story—from which land the elements that were mixed to make them came. We are all products of an economy that needs commodities to be consumed in order to continue existing. Like other objects here, I have been bought and placed within a gallery setting and transformed to have an artistic context. We have all been elevated from a mere commodity object to an art object. People look into me and reflect on the way they are living

AN INCOMPLETE TIMELINE OF ME AND THE SONY CYBERSHOT

DECEMBER 2011

A Sony Cybershot (about \$600) and a Kindle (\$300) are bought on credit at the Best Buy in Emeryville, CA. My partner wants a Kindle and I buy the camera simply because I can on credit, and to finally join the HD world.

I take it out once during the holiday season to shoot a few photos of my puppy and family.



APRIL 2012

I have hardly used the Cybershot. I consider returning it but I did not purchase insurance, which is the only way I would be able to upgrade or trade it in. I also consider selling the camera but it doesn't seem like I would get much money back.



JULY 2012

I take the camera to Mexico and begrudgingly use it to test out its video capabilities.



NOVEMBER 2012

Amidst Best Buy's calls for money, of which I have little to none, the camera and a laptop are stolen from my house in North Oakland.

DECEMBER 2012

While I am finishing moving, the neighborhood kids are fighting on the street as they often do. I go outside to check to see if everyone is alright. The gate has opened. Their dog is running down the street. I tell the neighbor, "I'll take him inside!" He nods and I go grab him and run inside their house doing a quick scan of their bedroom. I see my camera, which they probably could not sell, and a few iPhones. I contemplate (re)stealing an iPhone but just (re)steal my un-paid for Sony Camera. I move the next day and leave town for a month more so they are never able to ask me about it.

MARCH 2013

I am sick, don't have any money and wait for bill collectors to call.



MAY 2013

I am a bit better and have signed up for a trip to do a program in Marfa, Texas. I take the camera because I will be traveling a bit before and it is quite small and easy to pack. Despite its terrible sound, it ends up working quite well for my video work (a few shorts) there.

AUGUST 2013

I begin to get calls from 720-509-2106.

SEPTEMBER 2013

It is my understanding that it is someone named Matt Rossiano with Alpha Recovery Corporation who leaves very rude messages.

IRINA CONTRERAS

NOVEMBER 2013

I decide that in January of 2014, I will take the time to call him to ask him more about how much debt collection he handles from cases similar to mine and other burning questions I have for Matt.



DISTRIBUTION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

In early September I ran into Brian Kuan Wood at the New York Art Book Fair at PS1. During our chit-chat I told him that in August I was fired without reason from my job as a property handler at Sotheby's, but it was most likely because I made this piece for the Sotheby's employee art show, called *Insemination Carnival*. He was struck by the parallels between my piece and my story with the upcoming exhibition SOLO SHOW* at e-flux, and invited me to publicize this story here.

I started working at Sotheby's as a property handler in April 2013. I was signed on, without a union contract, as a temporary property handler who could end up with a union contract and fulltime employment after 9 months, or earlier if Sotheby's so pleased. "Temporary" does not mean less hours or less work than a full time employee—it just means less pay, no security, and no health insurance. The union of the property handlers at Sotheby's is the International Brotherhood of Teamsters—the organization of people who carry and move stuff.



In this monstrous international enterprise that pushes the prices of art works to their limit, "labor relations" were a sore subject, harking back to the hostile lockout of unionized workers for ten months during 2011-2012. However, while I worked Sotheby's they were in the midst of an attempt to make us forget our differences, and weaken the union by luring us into the company through superficial perks. It was through the platform created by one of these perks, the employee art show, that I attempted to cut away at the illusion of harmony. The exhibition of the piece "*Insemination Carnival*" pointed toward the truth: I had no security without the union, and my desire was to be a part of the union. The day after the exhibition came down I was let go.

Insemination Carnival had three components: balloons, photographs, and sound. The symbol of the

NORMAN CHERNICK-ZEITLIN

Teamsters Union is a horse, so I inflated thirty-nine metallic horse balloons—one for each property handler—and tied them to a plinth. I also displayed two photographs. One was of a deflated horse balloon and the other of a 16-inch horse inseminator. I shot both in the style of a fashion accessories catalogue, to exacerbate the tension between commodity and art object when a kind of promotion is presented as a work of art. The inseminator represents proliferation of the union, and the deflated horse balloon an awaiting receiver of its penetration, inflation, and unionization. In order to truly turn the exhibition into a carnival, I needed sound to envelop the space. This past spring, my grandfather passed away, and at his funeral we all sang an old union song by Woody Guthrie called "Union Maid." This upbeat song fit perfectly with the installation. I recorded the song, without words, being played on a pipe organ. It was only fitting that the tune of a song whose chorus goes: "You can't scare me, I'm sticking with the union..." would jingle through the halls of Sotheby's.



Bringing the property handlers union into the space antagonized Sotheby's because it deflated the entire purpose of the exhibition, which was to show how generously Sotheby's supports their employees' artistic aspirations. *Insemination Carnival* reminded everyone that Sotheby's didn't have its employees' best interests at heart and that they had threatened our very security when they tried to bust the union. And since the majority of the artists in the exhibition were property handlers, it was these very artists whose livelihoods they stood against.

The organization of the lowest class of workers for better treatment in order fulfill their basic needs and lead comfortable lives was threatening to Sotheby's classist corporate structure. The class-based structure fixes everyone in his or her position and the union reveals that structure.

Just how threatened they were was made most evident

DISTRIBUTION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

during the lockout of the unionized property handlers for ten months in 2011 and 2012. Sotheby's took an aggressive stance by hiring the most anti-union law firm in the country: Jackson Lewis. Sotheby's filled all the locked out workers' positions with temporary property handlers who did not hold union contracts. The board members' sentiment was plainly expressed when Diana Taylor, Mayor Bloomberg's longtime girlfriend, and Sotheby's board member, made a statement to the locked out workers:

I have one thing to say to you. I have had one conversation with [Sotheby's President] Bill Ruprecht about this, and I told him that if he accedes to any of your demands, I will resign from the board, that's all I have to say.

This statement, so openly pronounced, exemplifies the atmosphere of condoned hostility toward workers' rights at Sotheby's. Sotheby's took the personal belongings of the locked out handlers from their lockers and desks and threw them in a dumpster, and told them that if anyone tried to retrieve their belongings they would be arrested for trespassing.

The workers demonstrated for all ten months with the help of Occupy Wall Street. They protested in front of the homes and business places of the board members and clients of Sotheby's. After a while, Sotheby's was getting nowhere with their aggressive tactics and their reputation was being tarnished while they lost money on the legal battle. In the end they switched law firms and signed a new contract with the union, ending the lockout.

However, while employed at Sotheby's, I could still feel the residue of this battle, and the new contract once heralded as a success for labor was actually not much of an improvement. Salaries were fixed with miniscule yearly increases. Workers were not allowed to ask for raises. Sotheby's exacerbated this situation by hiring new unionized employees with different starting wages, sometimes higher than those who had been there before the lockout, in order to create turmoil in the ranks of the union.

Overtime was mandatory, and during the high season we would work for up to three weeks in a row, with many late nights, without a day off. The position of crew chief, which used to be a union position, was now a management one. Sotheby's filled these positions with temps who were hired during the lockout. This put newly hired workers in the position of overseeing people who had been working there for a long time—up to twenty years in some cases. The new crew chiefs saw their position as a specifically anti-union position.

These dynamics made the crew chiefs feel insecure, and it showed in their demeaning behavior toward us, especially toward newer employees or ones hired concurrently with them.

One day, my coworker left work and found a representative from the union in front of Sotheby's, whom he approached with a question about the insurance plan. They then shook hands and parted ways. The next day, that property handler came in to work to find that he had been

NORMAN CHERNICK-ZEITLIN

written up. Apparently, one of the crew chiefs had been watching him from the windows of Sotheby's as he shook hands with the union representative, which, because it was directly in front of the entrance to Sotheby's, was considered a violation of his contract.

When I started working at Sotheby's I was unaware of the labor struggle there. However, once I learned of it I became fascinated by all of its dimensions, and wanted to hear all of the stories and read the articles.



I watched how the battle between the management and the workers was continuing to play out, and Sotheby's new strategy to prepare for when this union contract was to go up for renewal in 2014.

Sotheby's bought out most of the old union guys who were there during the lockout in order to get rid of them. There were a few that remained who were incredibly skilled and knowledgeable workers, often taking new workers and showing them the ropes. The shop steward, who was there

DISTRIBUTION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

when I started, and who was active in the demonstrations during the lockout, was bought out soon after I started. He said he was scrutinized and harassed so much by the management that he couldn't continue to work there. The new union workers were mostly from art backgrounds and did not seem to be prepared for long term employment there since they often aspired to art careers. These circumstances left the union in a weakened state.



The main fight with the management while I was employed at Sotheby's was over mandatory overtime. At one point meetings between a manager and groups of property handlers were arranged, in order for us to voice our concerns. During one of these meetings a colleague of mine banged his head repeatedly against the table to express his frustration with their lack of flexibility in our scheduling. For the workers with families and medical conditions, mandatory overtime was especially burdensome. Instead of meeting any of the requests of the property handlers, the company instead put iPads in our break room, offered to throw us an ice cream party, and started announcing the best worker of the week. Sotheby's could afford to address our demands but would rather not spend on us. Instead, Sotheby's was in the midst of a campaign to make the company a warmer place to work. They had us all take customer service classes in order to learn that we all have a product to give each other and that we are all each others' customers. The security guards, who were mostly ex-cops, now had to smile at everyone. And once a month, Sotheby's threw company-wide, open-bar parties with extravagant raffle prizes such as plane tickets to Amsterdam. The older handlers wouldn't go to these parties but the rest of us did. However, as we enjoyed ourselves on the luxuries served to us, I began to feel that all of our demands and the respect we had earned during the lockout were being washed away in a sea of Kir

NORMAN CHERNICK-ZEITLIN

Royales. These events promoting company-wide harmony were a veil thrown down to appease us while they tried to undermine our union—our sense of solidarity. It was all as if to say that Sotheby's could take care of us: look at what we give you ... how can you be against us? But in reality they were spending money that could have been used to meet our reasonable and simple demands on superficialities. Then they invited us to display our art in their halls.



The exhibition was a joke. Sotheby's had graciously allowed the use of one of its empty exhibition spaces during the dead season, but we had to sign a contract that we couldn't use Sotheby's name to promote the show. It was run by the vaguely named Department of International Development and Learning—by people who had no experience curating. We were also only allowed to bring one guest each to the opening. All the handlers knew what my piece was about and many of them had warned me that doing this would make me a target of the management. But I felt I could not pass up this opportunity to respond to such a context inside of its very attempt to hide itself.

It took a couple weeks before the management seemed to catch on to what my piece was about. I began receiving passive aggressive comments from them. One of the managers stared me straight in the eyes while sternly saying that he enjoyed my horses a lot. Another "jokingly" threatened to pop my horse balloons. The day after the show was taken down, I was called into the human resources office. I was let go. I cannot say for sure whether or not my piece was the cause of my dismissal; I wasn't given an official reason. But I had received no warning, no message of a problem with my job performance. I worked hard for them for five months through one busy season, and they let me go right before the next one was about to start. It also happened to be fired one month before I could receive unemployment

DISTRIBUTION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

benefits. The next day I was without a job, and it was the week I was getting married, to a man, which the management also had some problems dealing with.

The crew chiefs would demean us any way they could, and this often took the form of discrimination based on our gender and sexual identities. They would clap for my female co-workers when they could lift or push a heavy object. A gay co-worker of mine was picked on intensely by his crew chief, but after he complained they only moved him into another crew without any recourse for the harasser. When I had to go and ask for a day off to get my marriage license, I knew that it would be an uncomfortable experience. The crew chief questioned the legitimacy of my marriage, asking if I was just doing this because I could now, or if it was for immigration purposes, then went on to tell me about an uncle who used to be gay and now is a Jew for Jesus. He belittled me because of my sexuality and the experience made me feel incredibly disrespected.

The crew chiefs didn't just discriminate against our individual identities. This attitude was also directed at us as a group, when they treated us like children or worse criminals. Cameras watched us at all times, and they would remind us of this constantly. When something would break or go wrong and the crew chiefs would sometimes tell us of our exact location during the time of the event. When one of us took their cell phone out at work, we were punished as a collective and no longer allowed to have them on us. Then the shop steward from the union fought to have that reversed. But, the union was only allowed to stand up for the unionized. The rest of us were on our own. This situation depressed my co-workers, leaving them feeling angry and hopeless. Almost everyone who came from an art background stopped making work completely.

I see this kind of discrimination as a result of Sotheby's encouragement of competition and individualism in order to mask its classist structure, which keeps everyone in their position. This makes the competition all the more vicious because of its futility. The only way to move up was if you fit as a cog in the machine. Such was the case for our upper management, both of whom used to be union workers but, rumor had it, had betrayed the union in order to move up.

The atmosphere at Sotheby's is a microcosm of the attack on workers across the US. According to a recent report by the Economic Policy Institute, Republican-controlled State Legislatures around the country have been weakening unions and systematically stripping away wage, workplace safety and labor standards. The politicians and business lobby legitimize these actions against workers' rights with myths of undeserving union workers getting too much and the union's needs crushing those of the individual.

Sotheby's has high stakes in preventing economic equality. Not just because they depend on people to have different levels of income, but also because they need people to have huge sums of money and assets in order to buy the cultural objects at the highest price allowed by the market. Unions threaten this, as well as leftwing artists whose work they sell such as Jenny Holzer and Bruce High Quality

NORMAN CHERNICK-ZEITLIN

Foundation. When their work is sold under these conditions, it sucks all the value out of their statements and in the end is probably not the best investment. But then again isn't "tension" an asset to a work of art?

Sotheby's tries to hide the state of conflict between workers and management from the outside, as well as internally. They pretend that the way to company harmony is through individualism and healthy competition, while in reality the classist structure supersedes that and creates a work environment where there are valuable employees and undervalued employees.

The union was created in response to these structural limitations and inequalities, as a way to empower those employees who are undervalued. Despite apparent inequalities in wages and treatment across the echelon of Sotheby's staff, only the property handlers had the agency to unionize—to demand better than the accepted norm. Despite having signed a new union contract, Sotheby's continues to slyly weaken the union so that one day it will no longer have to take heed to the needs of the people that take care of the fine cultural objects sold there.

Despite all of this, I can still look back and smile when I think of the days when *Insemination Carnival* was exhibited in Sotheby's and the CEO's and management had to walk the halls listening to the tune of a song with the words: "No you can't scare me I'm sticking with the union, I'm sticking with the union, till the day I die..."

NOTES

1 Graham Rayman, "Diana Taylor Bloomberg's Girlfriend and Sotheby's Board Member, Blasts Locked Out Art Handlers," *The Village Voice*, (Dec 2 2011) http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscare/2011/12/diana_taylor_bl.php



20



21

GLIMMER OF THE MULTITUDE PART 2

By Brian Kuan Wood

Continued from IINN
PPEERRPPEETTU-
UAALL PPRROODDU-
UCCTTIIOONN Pt. 1.

Even if we are to completely resign ourselves to thinking of artworks as produced by structural conditions we end up bumping into another problem of having a hard time locating the way structural conditions actually work today. Maybe we are still inside the long historical tail of institutional critique trying to identify coercive structures when actually most of the institutions have themselves already been defunded. Or maybe it's a new formal regime mirroring Lippard's dematerialization of art in conceptualism with its informationalization.¹ Only now we are dealing with financialization as a kind of tweaked out dematerialization so radical that conceptual art's immaterial idea retroactively comes off as a purely formal paradigm rather than an ontological break.² We might as well forget dematerialization, since we now function so purely in the realm of the idea that any substance becomes ephemeral regardless of whether it is art or not.³ Now heavy and light material are married by a logistical calculus concerned more with the amount of energy they contain.⁴ Or it becomes a matter of mood. Do you like it? Do you feel it to be heavy or light? It is emotional capture on the one hand but also structural capture because this paradigm by definition evades representation.

But evading representation is no reason to sound so mysterious. In order to schematically trace how spectacle and vision, optics and light, have taken hold as the main movers of matter and value we first need to figure out how abstract and abstracting forces became the paradoxical foundation of economy. There is already an accepted geopolitical and economic lineage in place to explain how we got to where we are and it is not necessary to go too deeply into the continuum that

stretches from Ayn Rand to Milton Friedman and the Chicago School to fiat currency and Bretton Woods to the 1973 oil crisis to Thatcher and Reagan and Deng Xiaoping to perestroika and 1989. But we need to tread carefully when treating this historical line as a purely right-wing conspiracy as a means of sidestepping the paradoxes of liberalism itself, which is precisely what the right-wing took up and turbo-charged through economics. And socialists and classical conservatives who regret the loss of social security and stability in general often criticize the waves of deregulation that liquidated institutional structures on a massive scale. It is naturally extremely difficult for a melancholic and impotent left dreaming of a messianic return to the fortresses of the twentieth century to recognize how profoundly formless the market economy is by definition. They crave the kind of recognition politics performed in broad daylight that looks user-friendly and regulated, presentable and accounted-for like a healthy society. And in the meantime many of the people who never related very much to the terms by which those structures cohered in the first place are slightly quieter in their expressions of disdain. Immigrants and artists and deviants whose needs and desires were never reflected by the great society projected by even the healthiest welfare states knew instability before just as they know it now. They were never really cared for that much or they might have benefited from the state not as a citizen but as a criminal extracting a benefit.⁵ And in some strange way their knowledge of its ebbs and flows has made many of them the exemplary survivors of its decay as much as its most expert navigators. And it seems likely their shape-shifting adaptive abilities can now only move from one parasitical register to another, only this time constitutive and definitive. Artists are not only tasked with giving visual representation to geopolitical or economic paradigms that accrue on a scale that surpasses them, but are actually producing those very paradigms since projection and representation have become the primary medium of polity itself. We now have to speculate just to survive. Maybe we always did.

After all what was the structure

that went missing? Do we know? Was it the welfare state, which Jan Myrdal, son of pioneering Swedish Social Democrats Gunnar and Alva Myrdal put it when he glowingly described the lighting fixtures of his childhood social democratic paradise in ominously divinatory terms as casting "light without shadows"?⁶ Was it to be found in the third way economics of John Maynard Keynes, who was anyhow the first chairman of what was to become Arts Council England following World War 2, and who used his influence to ensure that the funding body report to the Treasury directly rather than any ministry in order to keep art at "arm's length" from government. Supposedly this was done to preclude attempts at turning artists into state propagandists and preserve the artist's innocence as a somewhat moronic flâneur-liberal floating through the atmosphere who "walks where the breath of spirit blows him" and "cannot be told his direction; he does not know it himself."⁷

Whatever the socialist background of such a Keynesian approach to arts funding, Keynes's very position as head of the Arts Council of Great Britain, as it was called at the time, was to anchor the objectivity of the funding body by distancing it from the state, but only by paradoxically placing it closer to capital, however public. It reflects a line of thinking that would take hold much later, namely that capital freed from jurisdiction flows free of ideology. And his artist is nothing if not liberated, following the whims of wind and weather to whatever abstract expressionist canvas or megalomaniac space junk he deigns to dream up and submit for the Council to dutifully approve or disprove based on its inherent merits and qualities. My intention here is not to expose the fallacy behind the idea that markets are extra-ideological as it is by now taken for granted that speculative finance can only feed on waves of destruction and renewal in order to stay healthy and continue expanding. The thing is just that we seem to have already passed completely through a neoliberal era in which economic calculus gets applied and invoked to account for why things happen.

Because now causal chains seem to be formed less by flows of desire

winding around each other and more by the very disasters that so many thinkers over the past few years have identified as being constitutive of neoliberal economy. And the fact that these so-called disasters take hold on registers traditionally outside the field of political economy, and furthermore don't even seem to be explainable by any rationale economic or otherwise, has decoupled economic applications from their own effects in the world and catapulted abstract value up to a much higher register.⁸ There is no longer any use in trying to identify any material foundation for capital in human labor when humans have themselves become custodial nodes through which much broader and more abstract energies and life forces circulate.⁹ But before getting to that it is important to recognize certain crucial convergences between neoliberalism and a much longer tradition of liberalism itself, particularly in the years following 1968.

This shouldn't be so surprising to us actually. It was in the years immediately following May 1968 in France that Deleuze and Guattari wrote *Anti-Oedipus* to theorize desire as a crucial productive force. But even more interesting is Foucault's fascination only a few years later with US neoliberalism, most notably in his reading of reading of the Chicago School neoliberal economist Gary Becker in Foucault's seminars at the College de France in 1978-79.¹⁰ Noting the tendency among US neoliberals to apply the logic of economic calculus to pretty much everything, Foucault was particularly fascinated by the possibility that neoliberals had found a solution for developing a theory of human behavior outside of legal or moral prescriptions and capable of envisioning a new kind of liberty.¹¹ Key for Foucault was the distinction between Marxian abstract labor and the neoliberal redefinition of abstract labor in relation to classical economics. According to Foucault the neoliberal view has it that it is not actually capital that abstracts labor but classical economic theory itself that cannot grasp a certain value that escapes quantification and rationalization due to the unstable factor of time. Capital rather exacerbates this instability, and we have only seen more recently the degree to which capital can become an

empty container, simply a channel that passes other things through, and when pushed to its limit, a mirror that refracts onto all of the factors outside of government or regulation those things that can't really be stabilized by anyone anyhow. In fact when we look at the current condition of instability, capital might not even have that much to do with it.

The application of the grid of economic rationality to all forms of life has been taken to be total in the process of globalization and this has prompted many thinkers to lament the disappearance of any outside or exterior dimension to the market economy.¹² The art world is generally considered to be one of the most advanced forms of complicity in this regard paralleling and even embodying both the production of completely spectral high value commodities with a voracious appetite for lateral expansion often masked by curiosity and receptiveness to new and differentiated forms of cultural input. Furthermore, the idea that there is no outside to an economic grid as such seems overwhelmingly supported by artistic and curatorial focus in recent years on the structural and logistical factors circumscribing the art field, taking those as the primary content of the container, essentially absorbing and casting the self-reflexive mechanisms developed in institutional critique into interchangeable and often recursive iterations. These projects are often shy to assert any kind of paradigmatic shift in terms of content as doing so would neglect the tyranny of structural and logistical factors that claim to recognize contextual rootedness when really we are simply seized by the logic of economy and can only perpetuate it in an artistic mode while meanwhile complaining about the disappearance of any outside in relation to it. All fine and well, but then it should come as some relief that this very economical frame has itself become untenable. In fact we are only now coming to realize that there was nothing inside of it the whole time, nothing much circulating inside the container, very few symposia providing the thrill of a possible paradigmatic restart or the whiff of a dangerous flirt with the brutal truth. But when this combines with the ideological collapse of the abstraction machine of finance

(still running on blood and cash transfusions) it starts to become apparent that there was an outside to this thing the whole time. We were sitting right on top of it as artists and thinkers and adjunct professors and debt-ridden students. Financial speculators were too. We all are. It is the externality that everyone in every precarious position faces and it is called risk. I really don't understand why so many people are upset that there are no longer any radical artistic positions anymore when basically anyone that commits themselves in some capacity to art, or doesn't for that matter, is subject to a condition so precarious that they have to direct every single fiber of their being into generating the performative gestures that guarantee their survival. Is this not radical? Sure, it doesn't register in any kind of public sphere or collective administrative or governmental grand project but that is very simply because its medium is the borderline between life and death. And the empty container is itself made out of all of these practitioners hanging on to each other for dear life.

In the insurance business they have something called a negative externality to describe how the consequences or cost of a decision could compromise its foundation and render it inefficient and thus without utility. It is often used in environmental and climate change discourse to describe the mitigation costs of pollution, for example. It is the deathlike waste product that comes out the other end. It is what scares off investors. It is the anger of the people or the blizzard that no one saw coming. The negative externality is the perpetually unstable and unknowable thing that insurance and social welfare alike exist to anticipate and buffer against. It is the exteriority that can never be absorbed no matter what because it is always by definition beyond calculus and control. Instability by definition defers to these externalities and uses technologies of insurance to account for them. Yet as the unfixed and unquantifiable aspect of labor expands to compromise even the very notion of value, and capital by extension, the environment outside value and the interior mash together into another sort of capital that is subject to whims and flights of fancy—to emotional projection, sentiment, and

hallucination. Economic flows still exist but they start to assume the shape of the energies that propel them rather than any particular waste product or externality. Which is to say that the material base of economy becomes further abstracted to life forces and the energy harnessed from petroleum or raw minerals. Just as abstraction converts matter into spectacle it converts power in a political sense into energy in the sense of electricity. Instability preys upon and simultaneously intensifies life forces.

The sun provides the energy for almost all life on earth.¹³ And it is interesting to note a question that

perplexed physicists for many years concerning how it was possible for the sun to produce and distribute energy with no apparent need to pull energy from any other place.¹⁴ Lord Kelvin and Hermann von Helmholtz proposed a gravitational contraction mechanism to explain the sun's energy output as the result of expansions and highly pressurized contractions, but it was later shown in the 1930s to be nuclear fusion—essentially the conversion of mass into photons, the quantum particle of light and electromagnetism. Photons have zero rest mass, which allows for long distance interactions. And if we are to begin

trying to retool a materialist view of art, it might make sense to look to photons as the material base for artworks that are lightweight, stay intact across vast distances, and whose content is increasingly determined by movement and energetic attraction. Stephen Squibb has pointed out that art may have already displaced capital as the primary producer of value.¹⁵ Art supersedes capital at its own abstraction game by producing pure energy. And where is this energy spent, what is it used to power? This is what we need to figure out.

NOTES

1 See Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), whose six years began one year before Debord wrote *Society of the Spectacle*.

2 Never mind what they say about pieces of paper and postcards being material in spite of their ephemerality, this is a technical quibble for lazy museum bureaucrats and conservators trying to be taxidermists by stuffing the idea back into its material support and write a history that keeps them employed in the business of exhibiting objects as such.

3 Debord was already onto this. Consider how advertising uses semiotics and finance markets ebb and flow according to collective emotional projection. See Maria Lind's Abstract Possible exhibition. Also see Dieter Roelstraete's excellent essay on lightness and heft in artworks, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-business-on-the-unbearable-lightness-of-art/>.

4 Consider Timothy Mitchell's comparison between the logistical

demands of oil and coal. As oil can be transported by water, it is more difficult to interrupt its flows between nodes than in the case of coal, which due to its weight must be transported by fixed rail line. See Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy* (London: Verso, 2011), 36–39.

5 As Fred Moten and Stefano Harney describe the relation of today's student to the university

6 Thanks to Annika Eriksson for pointing this out to me. As quoted by Gertrud Sandqvist here: <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.0/art-and-social-democracy>. Original source: Uno Ahren, Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Gregor Paulson and Eskil Sundahl, acceptera (accept) *Manifesto on Modern Architecture*, Stockholm, 1931; reprinted 1980.

7 John Maynard Keynes, *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, Vol. 28, ed. D. Moggridge (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), 368. In the same volume Keynes also wrote, "If with state aid the material frame can be constructed, the public and the artists will do the rest between them.

The muses will emerge from their dusty haunts, and supply and demand shall be their servants." Quoted in https://www.academia.edu/305231/John_Maynard_Keynes_the_Bloomsbury_Group_and_the_Origins_of_the_Arts_Council_Movement and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arts_Council_of_Great_Britain

8 See my text on weather, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/we-are-the-weather/>

9 Which is to say that economy has itself been subsumed by forces of love and solidarity that no longer have any other extra idealistic or sentimental component, but become based in a mutual benefit so desperate that the bonds formed can only be faster than light and stronger than steel.

10 See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 215–233, 239–261.

11 This was elegantly summarized in a conversation between Foucault's assistant at the time and editor

François Ewald in conversation with Gary Becker at the University of Chicago. <http://www.law.uic.edu/files/file/401-bb-Becker.pdf>.

12 Sometimes this is conflated with Derrida's *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*, which does not make any sense because Derrida was arguing against attentiveness to some mythical contextual rootedness and authorial intentionality and in favor of rip-roaring interpretive transgressions and a commitment to the material judgment of the page even if it's a duplicate. Text me if I'm completely off here.

13 Thanks to Maria Lind for reminding me of solar energy.

14 Following of course the first law of thermodynamics, which states that the total amount of energy in a given system is fixed and cannot be produced from nothing.

15 See Stephen Squibb's introduction to Martha Rosler's *Culture Class*.

THE POLITICS OF DESTRUCTION

This meeting's fare includes pigs in a blanket and the façade of Chips Ahoy and Oreos that stand in for Dean and Deluca finger food. A fog machine periodically exhales across the meeting table as the actresses and actors recite specific financial terms repeated throughout the transcript. The Free Cooper Union players and their audience sit under the glow of red light bulbs. Jamshed Bharucha drones on, played by the speak function in a word processing program. One actor struggles to fit in their tweed blazer. But it soon becomes evident that this ain't just any ordinary school play—it's a recitation and unveiling of the troubling inner workings of governance and hierarchy within the college.

What happens in the end is a folding over of power through reclamation: the students (at e-flux) play the trustees (at actual board meeting) who play the students (at the actual board meeting) who play the students (at e-flux). The Politics of Destruction, a recitation of a leaked transcript of a Cooper Union Board of Trustees' meeting, exists in the realm of tragicomedy. It would be funny if it weren't so real. The Trustees in this leaked transcript effectively create parodies of themselves; their caricatures are bloated, flawed, and grossly over-important. The meeting portrayed, albeit comedically macabre, was dominated by the subject of closure.

On page one of the transcript Mark Epstein, with an air of drama, announces that indeed, "Closure is on the table." Doesn't seem like the meeting can go any more down from here. The rest follows as a hell of a logistics meeting. What are we going to do with the faculty? The unions? The students? After Derek Wittner's soliloquy the fixation is clear: "I think only about cash these days." For the audience, the question is whether you can stay awake during this dry numbers assessment, made somewhat more comedic by the tossing of dollar bills and the outcries of CASH.

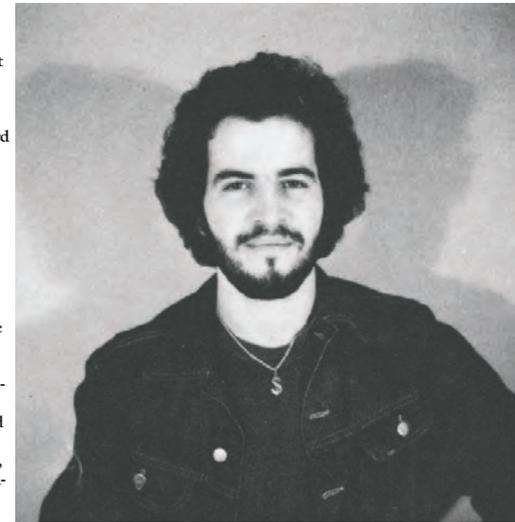
FREE COOPER UNION

Wittner then spoke eloquently on fundraising and board building, as if a school the size of Cooper needs any more board members.

Always keeping the board on its toes, students made a cameo appearance at the meeting that day in September, to the annoyance and amusement of the board. At the first mention of students in the transcript, the question is posed, "Are they armed?," to which the fears of the trustees of possibly violent, angry students are quelled when the students are only carrying fishing poles with dollar bills attached as bait. It's at this point that the belittlement of the students by the board becomes abundantly clear.

TC Westcott has to remind the board members that they are meeting in an academic institution which, seemingly to their surprise, contains students. Students? Activists. Students.

It seems Jamshed Bharucha hit the nail on the head when he so adeptly identifies the disruption of the meeting: "It's performance art!" Cooper students are known fans of *Martina Ambromavitch*. Protesting might be performance. As the meeting progresses, the performers just outside the door become a more prescient matter. Lawrence Cacciatore reminds everyone that there are two possible exits from this room. Stanley Lapidus asks the question of the



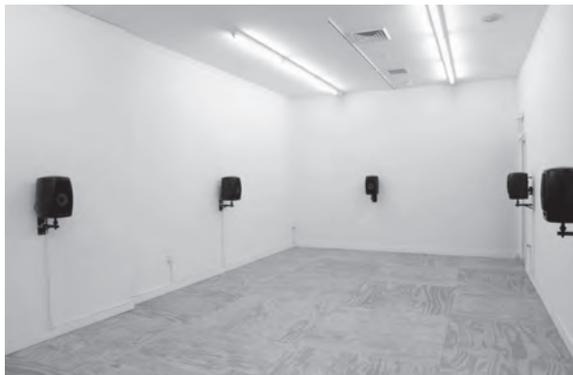
Mark Epstein's Yearbook Picture with Dollar Sign Chain, School of Art '76—Current Chairman of the Board of Trustees

century: "What's on their minds?"

The students are allowed into the meeting, discussion is opened and that's where the transcript ends. A play wrote itself; the students are at once the reason for the meeting, the reason for its interruption, the reason for its recitation. Powerless? Perhaps not.

—
Curtain fall and applause. One audience member sounds their congratulations:

"You couldn't have done it any better yourself!"



EXCERPT FROM THE TRANSCRIPT OF A LEAKED COOPER UNION BOARD OF TRUSTEE'S MEETING

DB Don Blauweiss
DO Dan Okrent
DW Derek Wittner
FD Francois DeMenil
JB Janshed Blazucha
JD Joseph Dobronyi
LC Lawrence Cacciatore
LS Lee H. Skolnick
MB Michael Borkowski
ME Mark Epstein
PC Peter Caffero
RF Raymond Falci
RL Richard Lincer
S Student
SL Stanley Lapidus
SW Sheri Wills
TD Thomas Driscoll
TW T.C. Westcott
VK Vikas Kapoor

3:57:13
SL: So what do the numbers say, TC?

3:57:16
TW: Based on what you close, when?

3:57:18
SL: Yeah

3:57:22
PC: I'm just confused here because there's two different discussions. One is charging tuition for next year's class and the other is closing the school down and the problems with that.

3:57:30
VK: I thought the question was, oh I see, yes, that's right, both questions are important.

3:57:34
PC: Right, I think both questions are important. Closing the schools down in the end, I agree with Vikas, is really disruptive for the students and therefore I think would probably hurt the school in the long term. To say, even after one year you gotta go and transfer and do things you didn't want to do and try to find aid, whatever. On the other hand you gotta wonder what the place is going to be like for a discontinued program in the last year and the next to last year. What professors are going to hang around to do that? It won't be easy and it should be fleshed out sooner rather than later so we know what it would be.

3:58:20
JB: To be honest here, TC and I about 3 to 6 months ago were thinking you have to do it cold turkey and close. Firing faculty is the kind of thing corporations do. You know you have until 5 o'clock to clear out, and here's your severance, and that's it, and we somehow transfer the students out. We couldn't envision how you can carry out a strong academic program with faculty and staff leaving and getting fired. Staying on for another

year simply to do this. The thing that turned us around on that is students, the welfare of students. We simply have to manage the faculty side of it. It's not going to pretty.

3:59:16
TD: I don't know if this question has any relevance, but when I was here, I think it was freshman year or my sophomore year there was a decision made to close the mathematics physics and the mathematics major. I think the solution at the end of the day was that you protected upperclassmen but not lower levels. I can't remember ... certainly freshman were not protected ... I Don't know what happened to sophomores. I think that's an in between solution instead of 4 years.

3:59:48
PC: In that case they transferred out of their majors and they were still offering math and physics so it was certainly close to civil engineering option. Which as a civil engineer, I'm not sure I'd advocate. Considering the freshman aren't that invested in their major. It's easier closing the art school, completely or something like that or you know the engineering school completely.

4:00:26
JB: We can go back ... I mean we do have plenty of institutional memory about that. Alan Wolf himself had to leave but that was a lot easier given that was 1 or 2 departments. We're talking about an entire school if not the entire institution. Even that was traumatic enough and that's what produced the creation of the full time faculty meeting.

4:00:54
TD: The idea of the discussion isn't to stay open the whole four years, so for the freshman to be pleased, it would be hard to stay open for four years in itself while simultaneously balancing the costs.

4:01:10
JB: Yeah. You know, the one thing we all have to recognize in this situation is that there is no easy path. From a rational standpoint it is really not clear that there are any paths at all. I think we have come a long way this past year in trying to find pathways. I do believe there are pathways that enable us coming out of this stronger than before. We may have to ... uh ... give on some highly valued constraints but one of the options we consider are going to have execution risks. They're going to be very difficult to actually execute.

You're going to see a lot more of what you see outside the door. Will you charge or will you close?

Will you create a new program if people are exposed ... opposed to expansion? That's just one of the things on the list. Every path is going to be controversial and fraught with uncertainties. I think there's a distinction between setting a policy, making policy level decisions, and execution on the ground which requires a lot of document tactic, sort of like football. You say, this is going to be the play, then once the play begins you have to improvise because somebody punches you and blocks you and trips you and then you fall. So we're aware of just how difficult any of these things is going to be. I wanted, before we close, to have a conversation about how we adjourn as gracefully as possible and exit, given ... this, I think that the group outside represents a ... it's not representative of the student body but it's a group that's very passionate. Many of them are ill-informed or misinformed and many of those are not ever likely to be ... because ... they don't understand. Are there any art graduates in the room? [laughter]

Mark is an art graduate with an engineer's brain, [laughter] so he doesn't really count. [laughter] The ones who are quantitatively receptive are coming along. The kinds of spreadsheets that you see here are extremely complicated and Cooper Union's finances are an order of magnitude more complicated than any other institution because of this weird step function every ten years of rents. How do you calculate the deficit when expenses go up exponentially with inflation and revenues go like that, crisis-crossing. It's very very real, but that strikes this group as ... obfuscation is the term they use. They're obviously confusing us ... so there must be something they're hiding, there must be something trying to get away with, it must be a cover up to turn the Institution into NYU, to gouge the students, to expand.

For many of the students, you can't get mad at them because they believe that, and it's very much influenced by the occupy movement and there were unconscionable things done by leaders in the financial world, no offense to anybody in this room, but you know, there are reasons to be mad, but there's a difference between being mad in a blanket sort of way and having specific goals. That's probably why the occupy movement hasn't been able to follow through.

I think these students are very frustrated because they don't really have a handle and they're being influenced by some people who do have a handle,

26

FREE COOPER UNION

EXCERPT FROM THE TRANSCRIPT OF A LEAKED COOPER UNION BOARD OF TRUSTEE'S MEETING

4:10:05
DB: Let's just say we all have to go to the bathroom. [laughter]

4:10:08
SW: Janshed, just to note, you offered them a meeting with you at another point? Maybe we should be aware of that, and what is that?

4:10:49
JB: They acknowledge that we have been open to individual meetings that they can sign up for and so on ... they're saying how about a meeting of the full student body? That's fine. We can do it during club hours. Right off the bat they seem very receptive to that. Some of them are very civil and don't think there is anything nefarious going on, they just want more information or reassurance, and others believe we're lying. There's nothing we can say. When someone believes you're lying it doesn't matter what you say, they'll go 'you're lying about lying' and all that stuff. You'll never get out of that. There's another thing, boards tend to be disproportionately analytical people because analytical people are the ones who tend to be more successful in traditional ways and finally pay hands in. This is not a particularly analytical issue out there. It's more symbolic, it's emotional and about understanding how they feel, right?

So going out in a humane way is the way to do it. So, I don't know, is going out the back door the way to do it?

4:12:01
LC: I'm just suggesting, you know, for those people who have a time constraint.

4:12:03
FD: I think we need to go out the front ... [laughter in room]. . . Vikas's comment...

4:12:12
DB: [chatter] If Vikas doesn't come back we'll go out the back way, [laughter]

4:12:28
PC: Would another option be to actually invite them in here for 10 minutes?

4:12:35
SW: I'd be in favor of that, personally.

4:12:37
JB: Any discussion of that?

4:12:38
RF: Ask them to set a prerequisite.

4:12:42
JB: To make a presentation? Not to ask questions.

4:12:45
RF: Want to ask questions, to tell us what they're thinking but

not ask questions. I'd be in favor of that.

4:13:05
LC: Then I think it's important to set some rules up from the beginning. Let's put a time limit on it. Any other thoughts about what the rules should be? I certainly think it's a great way to make peace.

4:13:14
TD: Maybe we say we will listen respectfully but we won't respond, unless you want to respond. I think that will be okay.

4:13:22
FD: I think any talking needs to be done by the president and not by us.

4:13:30
TD: You want them to come in one at a time, or?

4:13:33
FD: They can come in as a group ... [laughter in room]. ... yeah, sure.

4:13:36
PC: The advantage of them coming in also is that it clears out. [laughter and chatter].

4:13:55
LC: I'd also suggest ... please just make sure your papers are put away.

4:16:00
JB: [to entering students] If there are any empty seats feel free to take them.

4:16:07
S: No names? Would it be helpful to leave the nametags, everyone?

4:16:13
LC: Oh, we can have each person introduce themselves.

4:16:24
TD: So, thirty years ago I was on the floor, now I get a chair.

4:16:30
JB: Do we want to do introductions? [students respond "yes"] Your year and class, why don't we start at the end.

4:16:40
DB: Don Blauweiss, Art '61.

4:16:42
RF: Ray Falci, Engineering '86.

4:16:46
JB: And you're an alumni trustee, elected by alumni, and just came on.

4:16:50
LS: I'm Leo Skolnick, Architecture '79 and alumni trustee.

4:16:55
PC: Peter Caffero, Civil Engineering '83 and president of the Alumni Association.

FREE COOPER UNION

4:17:01
ME: I'm Mark Epstein, I'm chairman of the board, graduated '76 from Art.

4:17:07
FD: Francois DeMenil, Architecture, '87.

4:17:11
RL: Richard Lincer, I'm not an alumnus but my father was an Engineering alumnus, class of '42.

4:17:16
TD: Tom Driscoll, Engineering '77.

4:17:20
JD: Joe Dobronyi, Peter Cooper descendant.

4:17:22
MB: Mike Borkowski, Engineering '61.

4:17:26
TW: TC Westcott, not a board member, I'm the Vice President of Finance and Administration.

4:17:31
LC: Lawrence Cacciatore, Secretary to the Board of Trustees.

4:17:34
SW: And I'm Sheri Wills, I'm a professor of art and art history at the University of Rhode Island. I'm here for one year as an American Council of Education fellow. I'm not a board member.

4:18:48
JB: If you want, anybody, feel free to speak, or if you want to elect some spokesperson ... the important thing is to express, uh ...

—
September 19, 2012.

Audio and video for the remainder of the meeting is available online

27

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DANIEL BOUTHOT



On October 1, 2013, a group of plainclothes FBI agents entered the Glen Park branch of the San Francisco Public Library and arrested 29-year-old Ross Ulbricht. He was chatting online in the library's science fiction section. Ulbricht stands accused of running the anonymous internet marketplace, Silk Road. Notorious as an online bazaar of illegal drugs, weapons, and services, Silk Road operated for over two years thanks in large part to an economy of cryptocurrency. All transactions made through the website took place using bitcoin. Following Ulbricht's arrest, the FBI shut down the Silk Road website and seized its assets which consisted of 144,000 bitcoins.

As the seizure occurred, other users of the bitcoin network (who are all able to see any exchange that takes place) easily singled out the accounts involved based on the sheer scale of the transfer. They exposed the FBI's account to the public on the website blockchain.info, where anyone can view a complete record of what amounts to the largest transfer of bitcoins to date.

At the time of Ulbricht's arrest, a single bitcoin was worth approximately \$150. Since then, the value has only increased to an all-time high of \$687 as of November 19, 2013.

Ulbricht was extradited to New York where he remains in custody awaiting trial on three felony charges.

ADDRESS
1FfmbHfnpaZjKFyyi1okTJJusN455paPH

HASH160
a0c6ca5444e4d8b7c80f70237f332320387f18c7

SHORT LINK
<http://blockchain.info/fb/1ffmbh>
DKR Seized Coins At blockchain.info

IMAGE
QR Code link to the FBI's bitcoin wallet containing the seized assets of accused Silk Road administrator, Ross William Ulbricht

RESIDENCY IN MY BED

OMAR MISMAR



Residency in my bed is a program aimed at queer artists, composers, directors, choreographers, designers, and performers of different cultural and geographic backgrounds. Particular consideration is given to artists living at a considerable distance from artist Omar Mismar's residence at 93 Mullen Avenue in San Francisco, California.

A recent ad from the gay geolocation mobile app Grindr announced:

Help Gay Refugees. Gay men in some Middle Eastern countries live in daily fear of harassment, jail, even murder because they are gay. You can make a difference. Tap 'More' to donate to ORAM and help protect gay refugees as they flee persecution on their way to amuch better tomorrow.

The residency program aims to foster dialogue on pressing issues our world is facing today, matters such as romance, international politics, relationships, identity construction, the city and the everyday. The site for the artistic exchange and creation is the bed, technically the empty half of the bed.

The residency will take place on the left side of a black I K E A Hamnes Queen-size bed, on top of a firm I K E A Sultan Hallen mattress of 506 springs. Four pillows, soft and hard, warm linens, a poufy duvet cover, and a green

blanket are available for the selected artist(s). The residency does not provide a stipend nor a ticket fee when needed. The residency is conceived to include one artist at a time, as the bed fits two, unless a certain dynamic or preference of having three or more artists emerges as essential for artistic production.

As Omar Mismar will be on the right side of the bed, the artist in residence will be in constant dialogue and interaction with him. As such, the program will be challenging—requiring a high level of commitment, communication, and a willingness to step outside personal and professional comfort zones, as much as inside, on top, around, below, and behind them.

There is no expectation that the artist should have a finished project at the end of the residency. The residency program is designed to be flexible to reflect the unique processes and preferences of individual artists. Opportunities for artists interested in additional public engagement, open studios/bedrooms, and lectures could be available, but these interactions are not expected. However, the artist in residence is asked to sign a release form giving Residency in my bed the right to use and/or tape parts or all

of the interactions carried out during the residency. In addition, the artist is expected to spend at least 10 hours a day in bed. The time frame for the residency varies according to the applicant's preference and Omar's availability, but it is expected to be no less than one week. There are no defined cycles of open calls; you can contact us at any time at: residencyinmybed@gmail.com.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

- Hygiene
- A letter of intent, including contact information.
- A proposal describing a project or a trajectory for the period of the residency, supported with materials that might help describe the proposal fully (visuals, sketches, diagrams, videos, models, scores, algorithms, etc.)
- Documentation of past works on CD/DVD or website. Please include a printed list, which describes the works and how they relate to your proposed project.

NOTE

if accepted artists are allergic to feather, they are expected to provide their own duvet cover during the residency. The selection process is made by Omar, and it is quite random depending on the work load, particular interests at the time, mood swings, etc....

RESIDENCY
in my bed

CREDITS & NOTES: SOLO SHOW

SOLO SHOW*

November 17, 2013—January 18, 2014
Opening: Sunday, November 17, 4–8 pm
Exhibition hours: Tuesday—Saturday, 12–6 pm

e-flux
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*SOLO SHOW
Robbie Williams

*SOLO SHOW
Achim Kayser/Alberto Storari/Alexander Niklasch/Andrea Fouchy/Andrea Schmidt/ Andrea Villani/Anna Rossi/Anne-Pascale Frohn/Anton Vidokle/Bertram Sturm/ Brian Kuan Wood/Cajus Pietschmann/Chus Martinez/Daniel Bouthou/Daniel Riley/Detlef Brall/Elisa Maria Cerra/Erk Wiegand/ Eva Fuchs/Fabio Di Camillo/Frank Kiefel/ Free Cooper Union/Gerard McGettrick/ Ghazaal Vojdani/Giulla Pezzoli Hengst/Ines Schaber/Ina Contreras/Jennifer Cher/ Jens Queren/Jeremy Carden/Jesus Barraza/ Jo Hany/Joel Pfeiffer/Jörg Wambsgans/Josh Altman/Juliane Bauer/Julieta Aranda/Kathleen Knitter/Kaye Cain-Nielsen/Kirsa Geiser/ La Vina/Laura Barlow/Lex Kosioradzki/Liam Gillick/Lindsay Caplan/Magdalena Magiera/ Mariana Silva/Mariam Ghani/Mark Schubert/ Markus Schmachl/Michael Müller/Mike Andrews/Mynou Dietrichmeier/Neville Reichman/Reichman/Natascha Sadr Haghighian/Norman Chernick-Zeitlin/Omar Mismar/Otto/Pascale Willi/Pierre Maite/Pollux/Rachel Ichniowski/ Rainer Jordan/Ray Anastas/Robert Schlicht/ Roger/Sandy Kaltenborn/Sebastian Summa/ Seda Naimad/Stefan Kessels/Stefan Pente/ Steffen Puschke/Stephan Hempel/Stephen Conover/Stephen Squibb/Tammy Lin/ Thomas Huesmann/Thomas Laprade/Thomas Wendler/Tirdad Zolghadr/Uliana Zanetti/Ute Waldhausen/Uwe Schwarzer/Viola Eickmeier/ William Wheeler/Zach Bruder

SOLO SHOW is a research-based project on art production initiated by Natascha Sadr Haghighian together with Uwe Schwarzer.

OPENING: SUNDAY NOVEMBER 17, 4–8 pm

This is the second part of a two-part newspaper entitled IINN PPEERRPPEETTUAALL PPRRODDUUCCTTIIOONN accompanying the exhibition SOLO SHOW.

More details at www.e-flux.com/program

2013

SOLO SHOW, 2013 Image Captions

P. 4–5
Opening, unpacking, and installing of Robbie Williams' work during the opening of the SOLO SHOW exhibition at e-flux with registrar Zach Bruder and Andrea Fouchy
Photography: Ray Anastas

P. 7
Artist Creativ Kit, Images 001-021
Photography: Liam Gillick

P. 20–21
Opening, unpacking, and installing of Robbie Williams' work during the opening of the SOLO SHOW exhibition at e-flux with registrar Zach Bruder and Andrea Fouchy
Photography: Ray Anastas

P. 24
SOLO SHOW Exhibition view of the second room containing the sound installation
Photography: Ray Anastas

SOLO SHOW, 2013 PT. 2

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Mynou Dietrichmeier/Neville Reichman/
Natascha Sadr Haghighian/
Norman Chernick-Zeitlin/Omar Mismar/Otto/
Pascale Willi/Pierre Maite/Pollux/Rachel Ichniowski/
Rainer Jordan/Ray Anastas/Robert Schlicht/Roger/
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Thomas Wendler/Tirdad Zolghadr/Uliana Zanetti/
Ute Waldhausen/Uwe Schwarzer/Viola Eickmeier/
William Wheeler/Zach Bruder

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