

QUARTER

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Published by MUSEION
Museum of Modern and
Contemporary Art
Bozen/Bolzano

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PATRIOTIC OUTING

*"I went to see a psychiatrist. He said, 'Tell me everything.'
I did, and now he's doing my act."*

Late October on a train, somewhere between Milan and Bolzano. On a seat, a newspaper with an article about a poster designed for an anti gender-discrimination campaign being conducted by Tuscany's regional government.

The controversial poster shows a baby with the word "homosexual" written on his or her wristband. The media are always interested in such controversies.

Richard Prince's description of what initially drew him to the photograph of the ten-year-old Brooke Shields comes to mind. In 1983, Prince appropriated this ambiguous image taken by the commercial photographer Gary Gross. Published in 1976 by Playboy Press in a book entitled *Sugar & Spice: Surprising and Sensuous Images of Women*, the photograph shows a naked, prepubescent girl standing in a bathtub. As Prince describes it, "When the picture was taken, Brooke was ten years old but Gary Gross made her head up to look like an older woman. Then he went to the trouble of oiling her body to heighten and refract the presence of her 'he-she' adolescence. Now we've got a body with two different sexes, maybe more, and a head that looks like it's got a different birthday."

At the time, Brook Shields was already known as a child model. Her mother had signed a release giving Gross unlimited rights to publish the picture. But in 1982, Shields, who had become a celebrity, convinced the New York Supreme Court to issue an injunction against Gross to refrain from publishing the image, asserting it violated her right to privacy. The following year, the Appellate Court overturned the decision on the ground that children cannot break a contract signed by a parent or guardian. At that point, Richard Prince found the picture in a booklet published by Playboy Press, framed it in gold, and exhibited it in a storefront gallery he had opened for the purpose. "I matched the picture," he said, "to refer to the outer facts rather than making my own picture which would have involved only inner facts." He called the piece *Spiritual America*, borrowing the title from a 1923 photograph by Alfred Stieglitz. "I saw Stieglitz's photograph, *Spiritual America*, at the Met just before opening the gallery," explained Prince. "It's really the whole reason for the show, for the gallery. I mean a picture of a gelded horse with a title like that-it just seemed to mean so much."

Indeed, *Spiritual America* can be seen as a critique of the power of images in our society and stresses the freedom we have to decide what their agendas might be. The evocation of the Stieglitz photograph can also be seen as a critique of America's Puritanism. "Terrie, Brooke Shields' mother, recognizes what this picture could possibly suggest (not about Brooke, but about her). In a word: 'pimp'..." he explained. "We've got a couple of million dollars in court costs and another possibility of millions in projected sales from a poster that Gross is trying to sell of this image of Brooke. You've got the management of an image, the questions of ownership of an image; finally you've been the princess of the United States. And it's all happening because of the truth or consequences of a photograph. The ecstasy of communication. It sounds like a bizarre game show. I don't know if any of the principals involved recognize exactly where the heart of the darkness is located. But I began to see the 'picture' as a patriotic one, that is to say, if I was to have heard that this type of activity over a photograph was happening in another country I would have considered moving there."

See: Nancy Spector's essay in *Richard Prince* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim museum, 2007); www.richardprinceart.com/write_spiritual.html/; David Deitcher in "Spiritual America, *ArtForum* (October 2004).

Corinne Diserens



Incomplete houses, part of a stalled municipal development of 1000 houses. The allocation was made in 1998, building started in 2003. Officials and a politician gave various reasons for the stalling of the scheme: shortage of water, theft of materials, problems with sewerage disposal, problems caused by the high clay content of the soil and a shortage of funds. By August 2006 420 houses had been completed.

David Goldblatt
Lady Grey, Eastern Cape, 5 August 2006

HIKING NAKED IN SAXONY

“

And you know about the magpie?”

“Yes, I know about the magpie.”

“So I can go on vacation with my mind at ease?”

“You’re going hiking?”

“No, no. I do Nordic Walking, high end plus one, training course two.”

“Isn’t that hiking?” I wonder out loud.

“No, no, young lady. That’s got nothing to do with hiking. I got Nordic Walking, high end plus one, training course two, as a gift certificate, along with the rubber plant, for my birthday.”

The magpie, here, is not the bird, but an electronic program for reporting your tax returns directly to the department of internal revenue. But dubbing this program “the magpie” has nonetheless to do with the bird, since we humans think of this bird as a thief. The people at the tax office were amused by the thought, “Well, we’re thieves too,” and called their program “the magpie.” And since no one had imagined that people who work for the fiscal authorities could manage so blithely to laugh at themselves, the popularity of the revenue service surged immediately from zero to a hundred. It’s even forecast that revenues from this year’s taxes will shoot stupendously past their mark.

Nordic Walking no longer requires explanation, since by now we’re all acquainted with the military stride of these people as they march through the woods; and, no, it’s not to be confused with hiking (see above) which is such an uncoordinated, structureless, and aimless way of all-day wandering and strolling about, and therefore surely senseless. By now, we’re entirely used to it. No one finds it odd at all to see people marching in unison through an innocuous stand of birches. It’s just as normal as all these people talking alone out loud, sitting unaccompanied in automobiles or walking through the park, gesticulating with both their arms while talking, and also performing all the other actions one associates with conversation. At first one thought, “How odd? Has everybody started to talk with themselves?” And suddenly there it was: one stared at the thought that all of us will end up crazy, or find ourselves autistic in this pulsing, periodic society with a galactic bent for auto-atomization.

But no, that man is only on the telephone, with no receiver and only with a little cord that runs not to the phone itself, but underneath his jacket. And he’s quite normal: quite entirely and even especially normal. One might maintain that precisely this performance—talking out loud with no one else in sight—which before we’d have viewed as pathological, or autistic, or as a sign of a syndrome of deprivation, or exhibitionistic, or in any case as something marginal... precisely this, today, is the seal that makes us especially respectable. Who knows, maybe one day we’ll look at two people who stand together in the same place while trading words with one another and think: “Such poor, lonely

people, who have to make do with whoever happens to be standing beside them.”

Yes, don’t we seem already at times to think of people who talk with one another in the here and now as lonelier than those with a fat agenda full of telephone numbers?

And is the day now all that distant when we’ll look at the bird called “the magpie” and remark: “Now, how about that?! A bird with the name of a tax form!”

And we’ll have to offer a complicated explanation of precisely what we’re up to when we’re simply out for a walk, whereas “Nordic walking high end plus one” will be taken for granted as crystal clear to all.

The programming of our world—the programming, in fact, of what’s in our heads—brings all sorts of wonders to light. At times this doesn’t even require a technological innovation, or any sort of novel equipment. It’s quite enough to remove something from its ordinary context and then—in all its decontextualization—to put it right back where we found it, and suddenly we’re looking at something entirely different.

A perfectly normal farmer, for example, can thus be transformed into an entirely extraordinary apparition, in no way inferior to the Yeti. Those who doubt these words have only to pay a visit to an alpine fitness spa. You’ll find yourself presented not only with homemade “wellness pasta” but you will also be given the chance to stretch out in the bakery’s oven (since farmers traditionally have been known to do just that). And on asking why that marigold balm is so expensive, you’ll be told that it costs so much because the blossoms—and here the wellness lady vastly widens her eyes—“were gathered by a real farmer.” And what, I wanted to ask her, might an “unreal farmer” be, but was held in check by a spasm of respect for her wide, wide open stare.

“Is that usual, and generally here the case?” is the question we always ask when we come as strangers into someplace new and find ourselves facing something odd. But generally it’s not the case. What seems strange, even when one’s a foreigner, is generally quite unlikely to be usual. There’s the example, for instance, of those three naked men who stepped into the light of day from the bowels of Saxony’s Ida Cave. We were sitting at the edge of a monstrous abyss in the midst of the ebb and flow of an ocean-like German forest; strange cusps rose high into air above and beyond it, the Elbe Sandstone Mountains, which are some of the oddest rock outcrops anywhere in the world. One sits at the edge of the great abyss and reflects on the meaning of the human fear of great abysses. Is it the fear of falling over the edge, or perhaps more truly the fear of jumping? The fear, then, that a sudden jump might be possible, without having wanted or planned it. And at a certain point I turned around, just in time to catch the sight of three naked men as they issued from the cave. Yes, they were fully equipped with hiking boots and backpacks, and were even wearing hip belts, but down below there was little question of the sight of their dangling penises, and further dangling scrotums. Three men in their fifties, suntanned brown, and there they truly stood, evenly tanned all over. The others, who sat like us at the edge of the abyss, were eating.

And they simply continued eating. So, we too dealt another bite to our tomatoes, not wanting to be taken for prudes. Now is this, here, the usual sort of thing, here in the East, where the beaches too are famously full of naked people?

But naked bodies on Eastern Germany’s Baltic beaches have long been growing fewer. And that—according to the ranks of the naked who remain—has much to do with the ways in which society, and especially the young, are ever more repressed. But those in bathing suits insist—quite contrariwise—that a triangular scrap of cloth between the legs is in fact much more erotic than fully

naked flesh. That argument, moreover, is easy to follow. That naked woman in a Swedish supermarket surely lacked a certain somehow as she stood with her cart of groceries next to the cash register: was it a cloth triangle to cover her pudenda, or perhaps a veil?

It’s also interesting that both of these opposing groups, the naked and the almost naked, claim that eroticism is on their own and not the other side.

But for us and our company of three naked men, there wasn’t any question of forming a judgment that certain amounts of clothing are any too much or any too little, or of assessing whether or not that cloth triangle should or should not have been missing. One has to draw distinctions. We were struck instead by the relationship between nakedness and heavy shoes and backpacks, and with all conceivable ropes and cords encircling that naked nakedness. In short, it seemed incongruous. And the hip girdle of a backpack pressed against naked skin isn’t much to be compared to the exciting surplus coverage of a g-string. As far as all of that’s concerned, it had simply nothing to say. Nor should it have. The three elderly naked men surely had no idea of the pursuit of female company. They were simply interested in hiking. And that was that.

But, still, we found them a bit unnatural. No, it simply is not usual to go hiking naked in Saxony. They must be on some kind of class. A class, perhaps, in holistic hiking. What else? It’s only natural! Some sort of program.

Mostly it’s precisely those classes with titles that flag the “holistic” or that insist on being “in harmony with” that are most especially unnatural. So it must have been something like that. And later it was suddenly clear to us that we were quite surrounded by classes and class participants, and for quite some time had again and again been asked the title of the class in which we ourselves were participating.

In none at all, and much to everyone’s amazement. And what’s the class that brings you here?

The young man had just appeared with a tree trunk balanced on his shoulder. He lay his tree trunk down, wiped the back of his hand across his sweating forehead, and it was only then that we realized that he wasn’t alone and on his own, but in fact was a part of a group, all of whose members carried a tree trunk on their shoulders. “What’s the class?” and he broke into laughter. “This ain’t no class! This is an adventure weekend!” At which again he shouldered his tree trunk and continued along his way.

A digression: In Marthaler’s Murx den Europäer, murx ihn, murx ihn, murx ihn, murx ihn ab! a young man enters a room in which fifty strong young fellows are doing pushups and asks, “Is this the cooking class in ‘baking without flour?’” At which the leader of the course is quick to reply, “No, this is not the cooking class in ‘baking without flour.’ This here is the class in fucking without a woman.”

And now what about this sign that hangs on the sliding door of the saloon in which we’ve just now ordered a beer: “The authentic interpretation of nature and culture” What could that be about?

Or what’s culture, and what’s the interpretation of nature? And authentic to boot. And what would be the difference between an authentic interpretation of culture and a non-authentic one? Or between an authentic interpretation of nature and a non-authentic one? When a political party takes the name of “mountain” or “sea,” as in fact is known to happen in Bulgaria, that would be a non-authentic interpretation of nature. Since a party is not in fact a mountain. But when I call a mountain a mountain? Is that authentic? And if yes, an authentic what? An interpretation of nature, or an interpretation of culture? Every act of naming is a cultural operation; that mountain would stand there nonetheless

**Maxi Obexer
Berlin**

**And with so many
courses, no woods left**

Translated from the German

even if we called it “cloud.” And perhaps it’s all for the best that the mountain doesn’t know what it’s named. (Maybe no one yet has told it.) But that doesn’t take us much further.

Lawn mowing! Yes, lawn mowing. A typical interpretation of culture, or cultural interpretation. Since lawns are a typical product of culture, and therefore the mowing of lawns, the tonsuring of lawns, is the purest of cultural interpretations, and ergo fully authentic! Poor old lawn. Surely there must be something natural about a lawn. After all, it’s not a plastic lawn, and regrows of its own accord, and therefore naturally. Pure culture, then, is something it really cannot be. Again this doesn’t take us very much further.

What about a tattoo on a woman’s back that says “human body”? Is that an interpretation of nature, or an interpretation of culture? Or a shock of pubic hair shaved into the shape of a perpendicular Hitler moustache. An interpretation of culture, or an interpretation of nature? Again we’re getting nowhere. No one could seriously maintain that the human body is a purely natural phenomenon.

So, where precisely can we draw the line of demarcation between nature and culture? And how can interpretations be cleanly differentiated into natural and cultural?

Perhaps we do best to attribute no meaning to any of this. The inventors of all this talk about interpretations of nature and culture are just a bunch of guys who’ve get the whole thing wrong, but who need nonetheless to make a living.

Let’s pose the question to a lady who’s taking the class, and who just now advances through the sliding door emblazoned with its title: “The authentic interpretation of nature and culture.” Well, it’s a class from the Anglo-American... the Anglo-what??? Anglo-Saxon? Yes, from the Anglo-Saxon cultural context where you learn what to do when you’re out in nature in order to take in everything as a unified holistic experience, or both as nature and culture all at the very same time, without restricting perception to either the one or the other. Many thanks.

And there you have it. Again that word, “holistic.” No matter how you take it, it always means bad news. First of all, it always implies that we’ve lost the notion of the “whole,” and that whatever this class may be, it intends to restore it to us. There are two things wrong with that. First of all, an understanding of the whole is nothing we have ever lost, since we never ever had it in the first place (and couldn’t so much as risk a statement on what or where it might possible be). Secondly, what’s to be made of the thought that a vision of the whole might be restored to us by simply taking a class? That’s a shockingly tiny notion for something called “the whole.” “The more exposed, the more invisible.” That’s a sentence I absorbed at this year’s documenta, and it perfectly reveals the implied dynamic of all such programs: naturalness, in harmony with, the holistic... all of these notions are predicated on a former loss of something, and we’re guaranteed to get it back if only we’ll take this class. The class in fact consists of nothing more than the isolation of a single element—the tree, the plant, the bird, the knee—which we’re to learn to experience holistically.

Programming is itself, par excellence, an act of isolation: the extraction of an element from a complex context, with a view to the re-establishment of a perception of the whole precisely in that moment when the mind has been deprived of the sight of its complex contextuality.

Enough. We simply want to be here, sitting in the woods. To be. Not to interpret. Which is why we’re stopping now. For something more that the trees can give us; that the trees and birds can give us; that indeed we can give ourselves.



Schloss Wiepersdorf, photo: Susanne Britz

THE BOOKSTORE AT DOCUMENTA 12

Fabrizio Gallanti
Milan

Translated from the Italian

The Italian word for “bookshop” is *libreria* (and vice versa). And when the term “bookshop,” instead of *libreria*, appears in an Italian text, one’s immediately to understand that it’s a question of a kind of subsidiary sales point, generally in the near vicinity of a museum or exhibition space. It could also be in the near vicinity of other sorts of “cultural” places, no matter if permanent or temporary: theaters, movie houses, spaces for a fashion show, fairs, concert halls, festivals. Somehow or another—in spite of finding its origins in a thoroughly commercial logic—a bookshop lends nobility to the functions it flanks, and holds the umbrella of a notion of “culture” (in the sense of the “culture industry”) over all the most disparate activities.

At *documenta 12*—the exhibition of contemporary art that takes place in Kassel, Germany every five years—the sale of books and official catalogues was divided up and scattered throughout the city at various focal points that lay along the paths of visitors as they moved from one show venue to the next. Publications shared these sales points with other objects as well: T-shirts, notepads, cups, calendars, frames for photographs, stationery. All of these various products were more or less visibly stamped with the exhibition’s logo. But the prices of the objects (though all within a range of reasonability) were inversely proportional to the size of the logo the objects displayed: the bigger the price, the smaller the emblem.

A bookstore true and proper was on the esplanade in front of the Fridericianum Museum, which is historically the heart of *documenta*. This bookstore didn’t sell the exhibition’s official objects, which is to say that it didn’t concern itself with what the culture industry calls “merchandizing.” The bookshops as well as the true and proper bookstore were located in

temporary structures: prefabricated modules like the sheds at construction sites, at times for the guards, at times for the foremen or surveyors, at times as housing or as other facilities for workers. These are the very same constructions with aluminum frames and honeycombed plastic sheeting that we see in disaster areas (as housing for evacuees) or in other situations of temporary residence (such as nomad camps, or immigration centers). All the exhibition’s ancillary activities were housed within such modules, larger or smaller according to the function they served: information booths, ticket counters, public toilets, and of course the bookshops. Every venue was also flanked by a shed that served as a coat room, where bags and knapsacks were obligatorily checked. On rainy days, visitors were clearly embarrassed by whether or not and where to leave their umbrellas: there was the risk of getting drenched while scurrying back to the entrance of each of the various venues. These check rooms were staffed by youngsters who were highly courteous and suitably armed with patience. Any number of visitors returned at some point to a check room in order to retrieve some object left behind in a bag (their admission ticket, for example, or perhaps a sweater). There were also those who retraced their steps in order to add some object to the small collection of personal effects left in the numbered compartments on the coat-room shelves. In any case, the inclemency of the weather had been recognized by the supplementary placement of umbrella stands at the entrances to the museum and the show’s assorted pavilions: at the points, that’s to say, where tickets and passes were duly checked, and where they somewhat obstructed circulation. All of these plastic volumes were painted white, and outside indication of the purposes they served was entrusted to large black signs that

seemed to have been hand painted and that adhered to the form and concept of all the exhibition’s visual communications, as epitomized by the logo, where the number twelve was written with ten little vertical bars, and two oblique ones, much the way that prisoners count off the days they have spent in their cells. The desire to imitate handwriting translated into a series of illegible scribbles, in the cases both of words and of ideograms that offered an indication of use. I don’t remember if I actually checked to see if they were really handwritten, but they much more likely consisted of adhesive, pre-printed decals. There is also, of course, a more stable and solid *documenta*: the *documenta* of the exhibition, which occupies robust, historical halls. In addition, that’s to say, to the “*documenta light*” made of oil-cloth roofings, plastic sheds, and café chairs and tables near all the open-air stands, sponsored by various brands of beer, where snacks are sold for immediate, informal consumption. The air of the spacious meadow in front of the Fridericianum and the *Documenta Hall* wafted an inviting odor of grilled Frankfurters. In the late afternoon, tired visitors sat or stretched out on the grass, sipping beer and munching sandwiches. All of the event’s collaborators who’re in direct contact with the public (that lowest level of the professional hierarchy, probably consisting of interns with temporary contracts) wear shapeless white cotton bibs, rather like the blouses worn in certain sporting events. These bibs, on top of the wearers’ street clothes, bore the *documenta* logo and served to increase the sense of the presence of *documenta light* throughout the city. They reminded me of the uniforms of sales personnel in supermarkets. I have also been in stores where phrases were emblazoned on their backs. In Chile, one such phrase was particularly

striking: “Just ask! I’m here to serve you.” The two documentas are strictly interrelated. The first is firmly rooted in a network of monumental eighteenth-century palaces that constitute the groundwork for the plan of the city’s center, just as in other German cities, like Ludwigsburg or Karlsruhe. The temporary pavilion designed by the French architects Lacaton and Vassal—in front of the Orangerie in the Karlsaue Park—as well as the section of the show in the art gallery of the Willhelmshöhe Palace likewise reiterated that system of social and territorial control that was based on sweeping views and monumental perspectives that function as coordinates for the whole of the city and all its surrounding landscape. The other system, linked to apparently more prosaic needs, furnishes material support for the institution’s survival and snakes quietly out into the city’s urban fabric. It’s also free of admission fees.

In line with common practice, the official bookstore for documenta12 was entrusted to an outside organization, which in this case was a collaboration between B_books and Pro qm, both of which are small but highly specialized shops that operate in Berlin.

The bookstore’s floor plan was rectangular. And since it was housed in a prefab module, its ceiling was fairly low. When the sun beat down on its roof and lots of people were inside it, the temperature soared. There were two doors. The one on the left of the long façade, which ran parallel to the edge of the square’s great lawn, led into a smaller space, since a bookshelf separated a public area from a small rear office. To the right of this area, the bookstore occupied a rectangle about fifteen meters long by five meters wide, and it was here, next to the second door, that one found the cash

register. A simple space, with anonymous furniture. The books, magazines, and other printed materials also defined its various sections. In the smaller space, the shelves along the walls were decked with most of the international magazines that took part in the documenta program, including some from areas that aren’t often represented in Europe (Indian, Mexican, or Columbian magazines, or publications from Thailand or Korea).

Laid out on a fairly high table were piles of fashion books and magazines, and others connected with the worlds of design and graphic design. They seemed to have been chosen on the basis of their covers’ visual impact: all of these covers were highly colorful. The fashion publications largely took their cue from a teenage street aesthetic (Dazed and Confused, I-d) that toys with a certain bloodless sensuality (lots of photos in squalid interiors peopled by pallid youngsters).

The graphics publications returned to unknown episodes of recent history that today might furnish inspiration. A book on the work of Sister Cirita, an activist Los Angeles nun of the 1970s, was promoted with particular vigor.

The main part of the bookstore seemed to be governed by the greatest possible confusion, which in turn, however, seemed to have been consciously orchestrated, so as to allow the readers to imagine that they had made some discovery, maybe down at the bottom of a pile of something, and also to insinuate that everything displayed had been chosen in the light of certain criteria of taste..

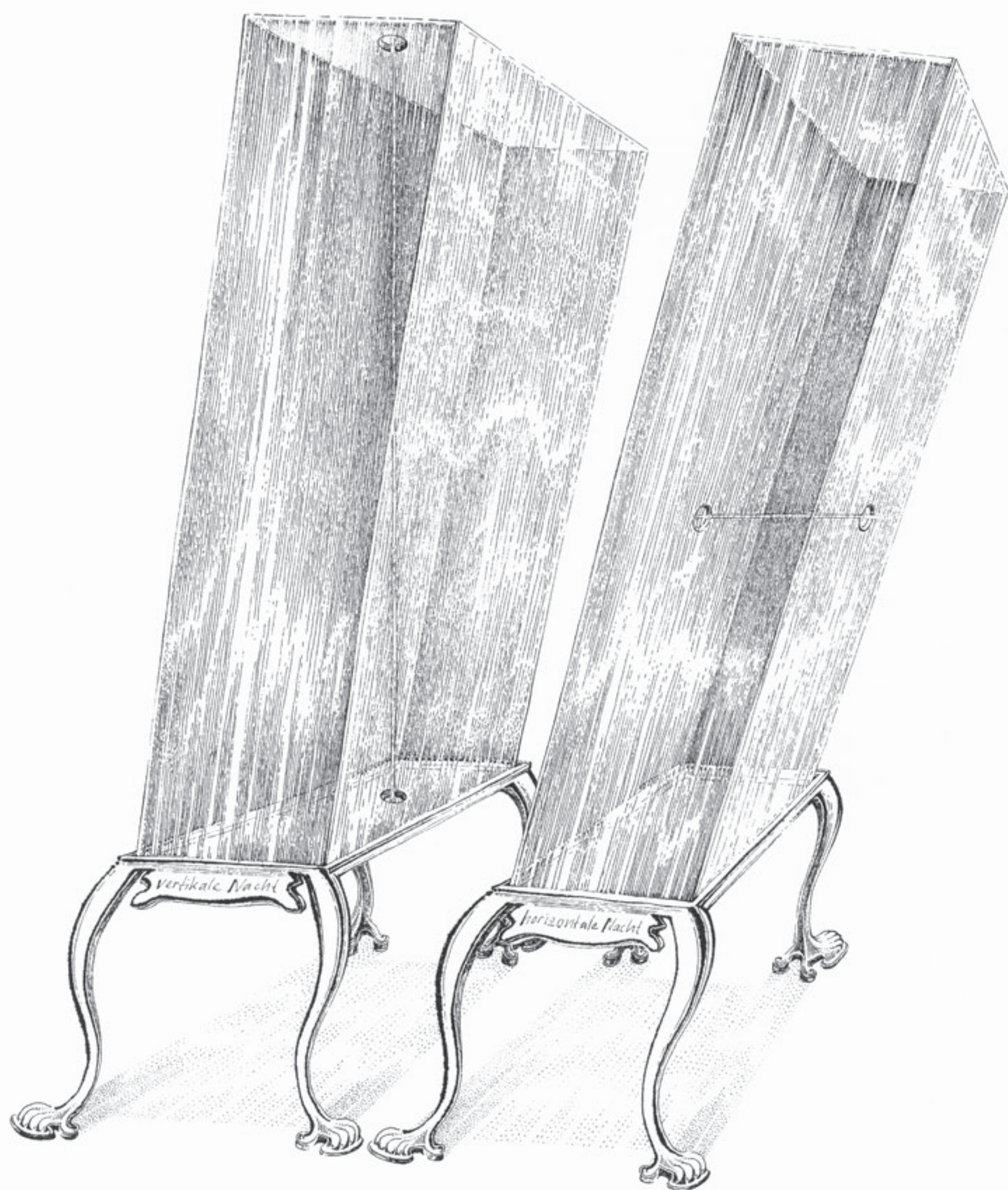
The room’s perimeter was covered with bookshelves, with a further, wider shelf below them. One sees the spines of the various books, and the most recent publications were displayed on the lower shelf, with their covers in full view. The long wall of the bookshop was dedicated

to various themes: cinema (with lots of DVDs on sale), theater, and music. Then architecture and city planning, and so-called “social” or “cultural studies,” philosophy, and aesthetics. In general the works were essays. But there were also monographs, writings, and heterogeneous materials directly concerned with the artists whose work was included in this documenta. Many were recent, and often had been issued by museums, galleries, or specialized publishing companies.. The short side of the shelves also held material by the various artists, arranged alphabetically. Potential clients found it hard to move around, since their paths were encumbered by piles of books, and by book-laden tables: recently published books, or books good to look at, in the middle of the space; or large-format books, again from documenta artists, towards the short wall of the shop. Other more classical books, on general or historical subjects, lay against the glass wall between the two entrances. The exhibition’s official publications were scattered everywhere.

You could also find post cards and stationery (like Moleskine notebooks). Next to the cash register were small, inexpensive books (Point It, for example, is a pamphlet that allows you to point with a finger at all sorts of objects if you don’t speak the language of a place you’re visiting; there was also a compilation of images by Hans Peter Feldmann, as well as drawings by Gordon Shrigley, and by Fishli and Weiss) to be added at the very last moment to the things you’d decided to purchase.

The weight of the carrying bags crammed with printed paper discretely suggested when time had come to undertake the pilgrimage back towards the various check rooms, or counseled postponing your purchases until the very last moment.

No novels, no poetry.





EVENTUAL SPACES

Project by Nasrin Tabatabai
& Babak Afrassiabi (Pages)
www.pagesmagazine.net
Rotterdam
Tehran

The page you have before you is an introduction to a series of evolving contributions to the *Museion Journal* which will run parallel to an ongoing project titled *Eventual Spaces*. These contributions are re-appropriations of the material encountered or developed throughout the course of this project.

One can only trust the *eventuality* of anything if its occurrence remains inevitable, but also if it is subjected to continuous postponement. But what if this eventuality comes to define one's being and practice, one that is defined by what it's not and what it is yet to become? As such, eventuality always refers to a certain lack or closure in the field of practice, be it political, social or cultural. On the other hand, it is the very ambivalence of eventuality that makes such practice to exceed control and predefined designations. Thus eventuality, as a disposition of practice, is a political one. But it is also an experimental space in the sense that it is always in the process of repositioning itself in relation to its context.

The recently published sixth issue of Pages Magazine is the starting point of this project, in which the particularities of the Iranian condition are taken as the context of the magazine's editorial approach. What is hoped for is to develop the practical aspects of this project in order to look at the inevitability of interruptions which are an integral part of cultural practice. In other words to find out what makes and necessitates cultural practice to lack an uninterrupted flow.

Note on the image:

Majlesi Restaurant, former Gandriz Gallery, Enghelab Avenue, Tehran

[In an early afternoon, while searching for the actual place of the former Gandriz Gallery – an artists-run space functioning from 1964 to 1978 – in the Enghelab Avenue in Tehran, we found ourselves in front of a restaurant. Upon entering we got informed that there has been a black out in the whole of the avenue, and that the kitchen is closed. Explaining that we had only come to take a few pictures inside from the interior and asking if we are allowed to, the doorman kindly replied that its just too dark to take any photos but we may try.]



Sandra Boeschentstein *Horizontal Night/Vertical Night* 2007, Indian Ink on Paper

DYING BEFORE DYING; OR, LIVING TO TELL THE TALE

Jalal Toufic
Istanbul
Turkey

Dedicated to martyrs (*shuhadâ*), who—past their death (before dying)—*lived to tell the tale*. For example Jesus Christ, who was crucified but lived to tell the tale—which is “not recorded in this book [the Gospel of John]¹”—to Mary Magdalene and his disciples, including Thomas (John 20).

Should the Lebanese who were born prior to the cessation of their country’s civil war in 1990 say: “We went through a dreadful civil war and foreign invasions, but we lived to tell the tale”? Indeed is living to tell the tale not what Hamlet demands of Horatio when the latter decides, on becoming aware that his friend is mortally poisoned, to follow suit and poison himself? Hamlet: “Horatio, I am dead; / Thou liv’st; report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied.” Horatio: “Never believe it. / I am more an antique Roman than a Dane. Here’s yet some liquor left.” Hamlet: “As thou’rt a man, / Give me the cup. Let go. By heaven, I’ll have’t. / O God, Horatio, what a wounded name, / Things standing thus unknown, I leave behind me! / If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, / Absent thee from felicity awhile, / And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, / To tell my story” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 5.2.291-302). Did Horatio have to *live to tell the tale* because, we are told by another saying, *dead men tell no tales*? A number of militiamen who “have... ears but fail to hear” (Mark 8:18), and who thus believed that dead men tell no tales, assassinated a member of their armed group because they were afraid he might reveal their secrets. Claudius too seems to believe that dead men tell no tales, that “people who are dead cannot tell secrets” (*Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*), specifically that the king he has treacherously assassinated by pouring poison in his ears would thus be unable to reveal that what his subjects were misled to believe to have been a poisoning caused by a snake bite was actually a murder most foul. Hamlet, who was told a tale by the ghost of his assassinated father, should know that it is false to say that dead men tell no tales,² and therefore should know better than to beseech his friend to live to tell the tale. To those who believe in the saying *dead men tell no tales*, which is symptomatic of the heedlessness of most people, the following Nietzsche words apply: “Let us imagine an extreme case: that a book speaks of nothing but events that lie altogether beyond the possibility of any frequent or even rare experience—that it is the first language for a new species of experiences. In that case, simply nothing will be heard, but there will be the acoustic illusion that where nothing is heard, nothing is there” (“Why I Write Such Excellent Books,” *Ecce Homo*). The dead tells tales, whether to “himself”/“herself” through the infamous voices talking through his or her head; or to the living, through mediums (Kurosawa’s *Rashomon*); or through assuming spectral apparitions (King Hamlet’s ghost in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*)—whether the living hear these tales or not (because of repression, etc.) is another matter. “Have you, an undead, kept a minute of silence—before starting to speak again?” “If you consider only me, then yes, I kept a minute of silence of your time, of your reckoning of time—to me anywhere between 245 days³ and 35 years⁴; but, if you include in me the disembodied voices I hear and that at times give me the impression that they are not only in my mind but originate or at least are audible outside my head (*thought broadcasting*), then no, I’ve not kept a minute of silence. You should ask ‘my’ voices, the voices in my head, to keep a minute of silence!”—the dead wishes not so much that the living would keep a commemorative minute of silence, but that the voices he or she hears in his or her

head would do so. A great theater artist, Antonin Artaud, tried in his radio play *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* to make us hear the voices (“You are saying some very bizarre things, Mr. Artaud,” “o reche modo / to edire / di za / tau dari / do padera coco,” etc.)—unfortunately, after hearing the radio play, Wladimir Porché, the director of French Radio, appears to have wished to promptly revert to one of those who have “ears but fail to hear,” and seems to have wanted to spare potential listeners of the radio station the possibility of having ears and hearing (the voices), canceling the broadcast the day before its scheduled airing on 2 February 1948. Would he have cancelled Rabih Mroué’s performance *How Nancy Wished that Everything Was an April Fool’s Joke*? Regarding Mroué’s performance, “is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?” “To the curious incident of the voices in the theatrical performance.” “The voices did nothing in the theatrical performance.” “That was the curious incident.”⁵ One who has ears and hears, indeed over-hears is justified in deducing: “That I did not hear the voices in Mroué’s performance *How Nancy Wished that Everything Was an April Fool’s Joke* would indicate that we are not really dealing with the dead telling us tales, but with living persons impersonating dead ones.”⁶ There is in classical Western theater, and consequently in the Lebanese theater that’s a more or less creative offshoot of it, a repression of the voices and thus of madness and undeath, an exclusion of them to the non-diegetic realm, to the underground figure of the non-diegetic prompter—in Mroué’s variant, the customary non-diegetic prompter is replaced with a text, consisting for the most part of newspaper reports, projected on the floor in front of the four seated performers. To really deal with madness and undeath, theater has to make the prompter diegetic; the aforementioned voices would be one sort of such a diegetic prompter. Taking into account that the Lebanese are notorious for not waiting in line and not taking turns to talk, how incongruous that now that these four Lebanese characters are dead, hence in a realm of interruption, whether by disembodied voices or due to *theft of thought*, they politely wait for the one talking to finish speaking before they start telling what happened to them! Can one then legitimately view Mroué’s performance as a glaring exemplification of what I decried in (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993; 2nd ed., 2003): “Notwithstanding over a hundred thousand dead in the years of war and civil war, the Lebanese seem not to have learned to die”? Yes, one can. Can one legitimately view it as failing in what I advanced as “one of the great tasks of art and writing in Lebanon for the foreseeable future... to teach this people famed for being ‘life-loving’ to die,⁷ that is that they are already dead”? Yes, one can. In which case, Mroué’s performance (as well as some of the works of a number of the interesting Lebanese video makers and filmmakers) would be doing something affined to what hundreds of thousands of contemporary Egyptians are doing in the Cairo cemetery, and what is worse than leaving the dead alone: infringing on the dead, in Mroué’s case by talking “in their name”—as if each of the latter still has *one* name! In which case, this text can appropriately be also known as: *To Have Done with the Usurpation by*

the Living of the Dead’s Enunciation. But I prefer, heeding the performance’s title, *How Nancy Wished that Everything Was an April Fool’s Joke*, to view this provocative Mroué work otherwise: as a theatrical April Fool’s Joke concerning how the Lebanese do not know how to die, that is how they do not know that they are already dead. From this perspective, my text can appropriately be also known as: *How Jalal Toufic Wishes that Rabiḥ Mroué’s “How Nancy Wished that Everything Was an April Fool’s Joke” Is an April Fool’s Joke*. It would therefore have been felicitous had Mroué’s performance had its premiere at the Tokyo International Arts Festival on 1 April 2007 rather than on 23 March 2007, or had its one-night stand in Kochi, Japan, been on 1 April 2007 instead of 31 March 2007. My recommendation is to perform it henceforth every year only on 1 April.

Are not the two sectarian militia leaders the Druze Walid Junblat and the Christian Maronite Samir Geagea, who had, during the Israeli invasion in 1982 as well as in the aftermath of Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 1983, waged murderous campaigns of sectarian cleansing against each other in Mount Lebanon, but who have been allies since 2005, when Junblat and his parliamentary bloc were instrumental in the amnesty law that granted pardon to Geagea, then life-imprisoned for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rashid Karami in 1987, the killing of Dany Chamoun and his family in October 1990, the assassination of former Lebanese Forces cadre Elias al-Zayek in 1990, and the attempted assassination of former minister Michel al-Murr in 1991, and who have endorsed if not sponsored a national advertisement campaign with the motto, “I Love Life,”⁸ accusing their main opponent, the self-proclaimed Hizballah (the Party of God), of propagating a “culture of death,” not behaving, with their frequent volte-faces, like the dead? Since we are going to change our allegiances anyway in death, why not experiment the possibility life gives us not to change them,⁹ to have a calling? Do not take at *face value* the dead’s assuming a name, even numerous names, indeed all the names of history (Friedrich Nietzsche, at the onset of his psychosis, of his dying before dying: “I am Prado, I am also Prado’s father. I venture to say that I am also Lesseps... I am also Chambige... every name in history is I”¹⁰), including yours!—ask him or her to stand in front of a mirror, where you will see—not knowing whether it is actually the case or whether you are hallucinating it—that his or her mirror image does not face him or her; or else walk behind him on some pretext and call him by several of the names he had explicitly assumed, and you’ll discover that he does not answer. While the living can be successfully called, and hence can have a calling, the dead cannot be successfully called (except by those who are able to resurrect him or her), either because he has all the names of history or because he undergoes over-turns, and therefore cannot have a calling and cannot resist and fight *in the name of* something. This inability to have a calling may take the manner(ism) of assuming not only the names and ordeals of his victims, but also the names and acts of his enemies, the deserving ones (Nietzsche, who had written in *Twilight of the Idols*, which was completed, as the Foreword indicates, on 30 September 1888, “I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus,” and in *Ecce Homo*, which was finished on 6 December 1888, “Have I been understood?—*Dionysus versus the Crucified*—”, signed less than a month later several of the letters he wrote at the onset of his psychosis, of his dying before dying, with “The Crucified”), but also the undeserving ones; or it may take the form of accepting the lowliest mode of existence of a particular culture, that to which the living who has no calling in that culture is reduced (“Say not a word,’

he [the ghost of Achilles] answered, ‘in death’s favor; I would rather be a paid servant in a poor man’s house and be above ground than king of kings among the dead” [Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book XI]); or it may take the guise of becoming subject to the drive, to that which cannot be satisfied even when the unfinished business has been settled,¹¹ and cannot be placated even by an angel, who ends up abandoning the driven, whose site, whatever it is exoterically, is henceforth hell, that from which the angel has completely and irrevocably withdrawn. Would it be enough for one to die for a cause, if he would thenceforth be every name in history, including that cause’s undeserving enemies and its undeserving supporters, and therefore betray that cause? Certainly not. A cause’s true martyr has to continue to be alive past his death: “Call not those who are slain in the way of Allâh ‘dead.’ Nay, they are living, only ye perceive not” (Qur’ân 3:169; cf. Qur’ân: 3.169: “Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allâh as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provision”; John 11:25: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies’”; and John 11:26: “and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”)¹²; it is only on this condition that he can choose not to betray the cause he died for. Through the vicissitudes of the protracted civil war and the invasions of Lebanon, the four protagonists of Mroué’s performance repeatedly switch sides—*after being killed*. For example, we are told by the protagonist performed by Rabiḥ Mroué and assuming the name Rabiḥ Mroué that on 7 July 1980, while a member of The Tigers, the militia of the National Liberal Party (NLP; *Hizb al-Wataniyyîn al-Ahrâr*), he was killed in a battle with the Lebanese Forces during Bashir Gemayel’s military campaign for the “unification of arms in Christian territories”—joining the ranks of the Lebanese Forces a week or so later, and then dying on 27 October 1980 in the battle for the elimination of the remaining party quarters of the National Liberal Party in ‘Ayn al Rummâna! Similarly, we are told by the protagonist performed by Ziad Antar and assuming the name Ziad Antar that, as a communist, he took part alongside the Palestinian forces in offensives against various military positions of the Saad Haddad army, dying in an ambush on 9 November 1979. He then tells us that he was killed again on 27 May 1980 during armed clashes between the Communist Party and the Amal Movement, but that he found himself on 4 January 1982 in charge of an Amal unit and leading an attack against the positions of the Communist Party in Sfeir. He asserts that he was killed again on 28 January 1982 in the Baalbak battles against the Communist Party, and was killed yet again on 15 April 1982 in Nabatiyeh in battles against the Palestinians. He also asserts that in 1987 he found himself fighting on the side of the (self-proclaimed) Party of God (*Hizb Allâh*) against Amal in a number of battles, dying in three of them: the battle of Tyre, the battle of Nabatiyeh, and the battle for Beirut’s Southern Suburb. Can one view Mroué’s performance as providing, through these volte-faces, an apology for a figure such as Walid Junblat, notorious for his opportunistic, self-serving switching of positions? One can do so only if one disregards that Mroué’s protagonists switch sides only after their deaths. Since I do not consider the late, those who did not die before they died physically, martyrs, I would not believe their testimonies from beyond the grave. In order to tell the tale, one has to be a true witness, one of those whose “eyes were opened” (Luke 24:31); who “have eyes that are blessed because they see” (Matthew 13:16); whose covering has been removed and who thus have *piercing*

sight—for that one has to have died before dying (“And the agony of death cometh in truth... Thou wast in heedlessness of this. Now We have removed from thee thy covering, and piercing is thy sight this day” [Qur’ân 50:19-22]). In addition to the number of things I was dying to tell the reader, myself and Lyn Hejinian in the revised and expanded edition of (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (2003), *Two or Three Things I’m Dying to Tell You* (2005), and ‘*Âshûrâ’: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2005), I am dying to tell the deserving readers of this text that, basically, only martyrs can live to tell the tale.

¹ For example, his descent into hell: “It is said in the Creed: ‘He descended into hell’: and the Apostle says (Ephesians 4:9): ‘Now that He ascended, what is it, but because He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?’ And a gloss adds: ‘that is—into hell.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*.

² Should one object to a dead person telling us tales: “Dead men tell no tales”? Saying this to him may actually have the intended effect, but not because the statement is true; rather because it can act as a jolt, making the dead question whether he is actually alive, possibly ending up coming to the conclusion, “I must be dead,” and then, being one who feels, “Every name in history is I” (from a letter by Nietzsche during his psychosis, his dying before dying physically), exclaiming: “History is my mass grave.”

³ Qur’ân 32:5: “He directeth the ordinance from the heaven unto the earth; then it ascendeth unto Him in a Day whereof the measure is a thousand years of that ye reckon.”

⁴ Qur’ân 70:4: “The angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him in a Day whereof the span is fifty thousand years.”

⁵ A paraphrase of one of the exchanges between inspector Gregory and Sherlock Holmes in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Silver Blaze*: “Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?” “To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.” “The dog did nothing in the night-time.” “That was the curious incident,” remarked Sherlock Holmes. Holmes later indicates: “I had grasped the significance of the silence of the dog, for one true inference invariably suggests others. The Simpson incident had shown me that a dog was kept in the stables, and yet, though someone had been in and had fetched out a horse, he had not barked enough to arouse the two lads in the loft. Obviously the midnight visitor was someone whom the dog knew well.”

⁶ How little aware are these performers, who *talk in their names* in life in the performance, that they are already dead even as, in their life, they impersonate dead characters in Rabiḥ Mroué’s performance, repeatedly reporting, rather nonchalantly, that they died violently on multiple occasions.

⁷ According to Lebanese theater artist Roger ‘Assâf, theater, as opposed to technology, can and should provide us with “a living person before other living persons” (*un homme vivant en face d’autres hommes vivants*). Given that technology is heading in the direction of providing man with an indefinite life span, it is not life that has to be stressed against technology, but mortality. It is not as a simple living being but as a mortal that man can, for a while at least, resist technology. Theater should provide us with humans *dead set* on being mortal.

⁸ <http://www.lebanon-ilovelife.com>. Only those for whom while life is lovable, love is unlivable (my beloved lover Graziella knows all too well about this), or else while love is livable, life is unlovable, can exclaim, in a *shath* (an ecstatic, often paradoxical, exclamation): “I love life!” Thus the Christian God, for whom while life (i.e. Jesus Christ [Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25)] is lovable (“a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love’” [Matthew 3:17]), love is unlivable (“Is not pity the cross upon which he who loves man is nailed?” [Nietzsche, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*]), can exclaim through the third hypostasis, the Holy Spirit: “I love life!” All those whose assertion “I love life!” (in ads and otherwise) includes conjointly “life is lovable” and “love is livable” are insidious nihilists, cheapening both life and love.

⁹ It is legitimate for the living to be radically changed by what has “broken the history of humanity [Nietzsche

included] in two” (Nietzsche), for example the revelation of eternal recurrence, or the maddening realization: “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him” (Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science*, #125, which continues with “Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto”). Indeed, he or she should be radically changed by such events.

¹⁰ From Friedrich Nietzsche’s 5 January 1889 letter to Jacob Burckhardt, in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 347.

¹¹ Those who wish to pursue vengeance “further than death” (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*) should, as they sneak behind him, call him, for his failure to answer may give them pause, since they may be taking revenge on *the wrong man*.

¹² See “Martyrs” in my book ‘*Âshûrâ’: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (Beirut, Lebanon: Forthcoming Books, 2005).

THE HISTORIAN OF DOUBT 2

Vincent Labaume
Clichy, France
September 3, 2007

The body is a montage.
Marcel Mauss

Translated from the French

I'm bereft of body. Not mine, of course, since I have a body, as the expression goes, one with which I can do a variety of things, like walk for hours on end or not move for hours on end. But, deep down, this body of mine leaves me indifferent. I'd go so far as to say that it exasperates me at times. Nothing of all the things it can do really fills me with joy. And I draw at best a very limited satisfaction from all of the activities to which it willingly or grudgingly submits – a satisfaction related to a great extent to the degree of flexibility, accuracy, and skill that my body demonstrates in submitting to the performance of a task. I appreciate its virtuosity in accomplishing certain chores, even the most lowly, such as cleaning a window, but I wouldn't go to the point of making it perform more ambitious tasks simply to increase my satisfaction by a few degrees. Anyway, nothing offers me less satisfaction than physical exercise. Like most of my fellow creatures, I once received what's known as a "physical education." I raced. I did warm-up exercises. I did long jumps. I did high jumps. I played soccer. I played ping-pong. I went skiing. I did karate. And like everyone else, some time later, I too had sexual experiences. In none of these movements, in none of these positions or disciplines, did I ever feel good about my body. The only thing that could procure for me, from time to time, an appreciable sensation of complicity with my body was its fatigue, or rather its near-total extenuation. This complicity could even be tinged with sincere compassion in conditions of extreme frailty, pain, or sickness. But it never lasted: as soon as my health returned, the bitterness moved right back in. In short, is it possible to imagine a more dubious association, a better failed harmony, than the one between my body and me?

For a long time I tried to hide from myself this inner consciousness of a separation, of an interior divorce with this ever so ill-suited flesh of mine. As I spoke to no one about it, I could always imagine that everybody felt the same, that other people were also living with bodies that they had to make do with and that they were looking forward to leaving sometime in the not so distant future. I saw that day as a release. What would become of it thereafter? Did one become, at last, this

disembodied "self," this good, dear "soul" of the ancient superstitious civilizations that the undivided absolute reign of the "body" has brutally consigned to oblivion? Regarding this question, I sometimes got mixed up in lively conversations in the most sophisticated circles of thought of our time, where I discovered, much to my astonishment, that the idea of a beyond for the body was not only invariably shattered by the most convincing arguments, but that, to boot, the eventual defender of such a notion was lavishly heckled and humiliated. Everyone seemed to get along well with this body. So I kept quiet. I accepted half-heartedly the good news that there was one body only, or rather – and the distinction is not a trivial one – that there were only bodies. I simply hadn't been given the right one. But was it possible to change bodies? To adopt another, like you'd exchange a piece of clothing that was not well-cut, that you'd found yourself wearing without having been consulted, without having the time to try it on and compare it? Could it be exchanged for a new one, tailored this time especially for you?

To be sure, it would have been hard for me to hide from myself the fact that certain bodies that I'd discovered in visual representations troubled me in a way that rendered them almost instinctively closer and more intimate to me than my own. Those bodies plainly took up space as full and complacent entities, and offered not the slightest hint of any latent bitterness coming from some "pilot" lurking inside who secretly despises his machine. They bodied forth, embodying all the visible, ponderable dimensions of the flesh, as naturally as an anatomical representation, be it drawn at whim and with your hands behind your back. Did these bodies have no "self"?

Even though they did not have the vacant or petrified look of robots, or the awkward look of a photomontage, I could not keep myself from thinking that these uncanny bodies were there, moving around, even though they were totally lacking in that hardly spare and yet detached part that we conventionally call a conscience. But wasn't it rather that this "conscience," far from lacking, was totally dissolved and assimilated in them to the point of permeating every molecule with its character, like sugar and salt will

diffuse in water? In that case, I said to myself, there must be some profitable lesson I could draw from spending time with them. And so I set out in search of these bodies endowed with great powers of corporeity, which I knew only through icons.

As it turned out, it wasn't as easy as all that. First of all, those bodies didn't seem to spend time in the same spaces as "my" body, and so I imagined that they must live at a very considerable distance from me, in a far away place sheltered from inquisitive eyes, where their corporeal upkeep would admit no impediment. But my hopes were soon dashed. It wasn't, as I had initially thought, a simple matter of geographic distance, because I visited, on the strength of precise cross-checked information, the remotest of places where I should definitely and infallibly have bumped into them, but I didn't catch sight of a single one, not even a furtive glimpse of one vanishing into the darkness of some carriage porch. Having given some thought to this failure, it came to me that their distance was not so much in space as in a way of inhabiting space, even the most common space. They were right there amongst all the other bodies but nobody could see them because it was as if they were imperceptible. Just as their conscience had blended into their bodies, so their bodies had merged into the anonymity of ordinary bodies. What then could be done to flush them out? According to this new theory, anybody and everybody could be this body, dissimulated beneath the most commonplace appearance. Such a prospect put a damper on my search. So I said to myself, what if the most ordinary looking person, and even the most ordinarily repulsive looking person, was ultimately offering only the possibility of an insulating interface, the better to reserve the display of their dazzling radiance to true connoisseurs in private? Isn't it written, "The last shall be the first"? This restrictive phrase seemed to me to be a godsend. I resolved to concentrate on following a few individuals who were drabber than the walls, with faces that were strikingly insignificant and body attitudes that were strictly a-miraculous.

To be continued...



Jean-Luc Moulène, Sous le ciel blue, Vienna, 24th July 2007

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Brazil

Translated from the French

THE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

The clichés of globalization try to persuade us that we are living in a wonderful reality, that simultaneously engages all of us in an exciting common adventure and guarantees the possibility for each person to assert his or her uniqueness. All you have to do is take a look at the ads for trans-national banks and pharmaceutical corporations on all the walls and screens of every airport around the world to see what I’m saying. They hold out a promise of individual and collective happiness that presents itself as prêt-à-porter. However, even if it were indeed the case that the internationalization of capital, the cybernetization of science, information technologies, the crisis of nation-states and the challenge to all forms of borders (territorial, subjective, between species, genres, etc) are opening the access of all macro and micros spaces of the planet to a technological and economic strategy of total acceleration, don’t think that this is happening smoothly and in the same way everywhere. The dynamics is omnipresent, of course, but it is not homogenizing, and it leaves marks that no amount of makeup, no covering up, and no simulation can ever truly erase. Take, for example, the very contemporary discussion that has arisen since 9/11 around the question of whether or not we are living in a state of exception in terms of international relations as in the internal affairs of the different nation-states, be they in the First, Third or Fourth

Worlds. In geopolitical terms, the question came to the fore when George W. Bush’s government suspended the international legal order by conceiving the fight against terrorism as a “preventive war.” Based on this perspective, Toni Negri and Michael Hardt’s *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* considers that the state of emergency has become practically a “given,” but it is no longer set in motion by the modern logic of reason of state, as developed by people like Carl Schmitt and Clausewitz. For in the past the sovereignty of states was asserted by the power that they had to declare a state of exception and to wage war against one another; in this sense, war was a limited state of exception. But today the sovereignty of states has been supplanted by a new supranational sovereignty which takes the global form of Empire, and war is not waged in a limited, sporadic, and strictly speaking exceptional way, as it used to be, since we are living in a “global state of war”: “Because the isolated space and time of war in the limited conflict between sovereign states has declined, war seems to have seeped back and flooded the entire social field. The state of exception has become permanent and general; the exception has become the rule, pervading both foreign relations and the homeland.”

The revision and actualization of the concept have also been undertaken by Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer I* and *II*, published respectively in 1995 and 2003,

that is to say, before and after 9/11. For the Italian philosopher, the state of exception has also acquired a planetary dimension and the violence that it crystalizes ignores international law externally and produces a permanent exception internally, all purportedly in the name of the rule of law. Agamben argues that the exception has been constitutive of the exercise of political power itself since ancient times, that it is part of the very mode of existence of the political, and that one can observe it as much in the fundamental opposition that developed in the Roman Empire between the sovereign and the homo sacer as in the relationship between the Führer and the deported Jew in the Third Reich, or in the confrontation today between the U.S. government and the prisoner in Guantánamo. Thus, the state of exception would embody a primal political structure and what is new about it is that this age-old relationship has become explicit as the very core of contemporary power, that is to say as the naked exercise of power over life.

A question arises. How is this issue to be perceived from the perspective of the periphery of capitalism? How can the concept of the state of exception be used to describe what is happening in Brazilian society, when it is not at war with any other nation and is not the target of international terrorism? The Brazilian-style state of exception is precisely the topic of a book that has just been published called *A era da indeterminação*

(*The Era of Indeterminacy*). Edited by sociologists Cibeles Rizek and Francisco de Oliveira, the volume brings together essays by a group of researchers in São Paulo who try to understand what is going on and why the traditional human science categories of sovereignty and politics do not enable us to analytically read the present-day context.

It seems that we are living in an era of indeterminacy because the usual political parameters do not allow us to understand reality. Consider the following readily observable paradox: political democracy is in full swing and yet it has never been as thoroughly dissociated from economic and social democracy, which means that participation in the electoral and political process has taken the form of... a crisis of representation. Now, this would be serious enough in its own right, but what is even worse is the capitulation of a state, that appears to refrain from exercising sovereignty – a state that governs not for society but for the market, that finds itself in the position of not being able to ensure growth and development due to the structural adjustment needed to pay its debt, that encourages the breakdown of social and economic rights, that captures and paralyzes grass-roots movement by the agency of a neo-liberal “left-wing” government, that makes politics meaningless and creates an enormous ideological confusion by its extreme instrumentalization of language. At the same time, the indeterminacy is

seriously deepened by the elites’ overt abandonment of a social project, which ultimately revokes the collective will to make a civilized nation of the country and plunges it into a reversed horizon. In fact, following the trenchant comments by literary critic Roberto Schwarz, there is reason to wonder whether the country has not already become a semi-country or an ex-country, or a region, and whether our modernization concerns only the past. The fact is that such a breakdown suggests that there is no more political body, that it is reduced to the more or less successful management of the population and the construction of a semblance of order that can hide, contain, and control the growing disorder, expressed in urban explosions of violence and the rise of non-regulated job markets, in the crisis of the environment and the deforestation to make room for exportable monocultures, in the corruption that institutes a “get what you can” attitude on all levels of the state, etc. But this management does not conform to the rule of law. It is founded on a state of exception, in which the exercise of politics, the practices of citizenship, and the respect for the law and for norms give way to a wheeling-and-dealing pragmatism and the intensive use of the media, not so much to create consensus as to produce, as Peter Sloterdijk would say, a synchronization of the different social sectors on the same emotion, that is to say, an integration by way of stress, which can always be renewed and varied. Hence, if

the state of exception does not appear as such, it may very well be because society is mobilized and moving along the same “wavelength,” which makes it apprehend the exceptional situation as in fact normal!

Brazilian indeterminacy is thus characterized by an impenetrability that feeds a fundamental misreading of the way the Brazilians are governed, because they persist in thinking that policies are still enacted in the framework of traditional institutions, by the usual means, and according to the methods and rules of a game that has actually become a thing of the past, insofar as the real social forces only recognize them grudgingly. Hence, in the darkness of indeterminacy, we no longer know where we are and where we are going. However, we should take into account a very important nuance that the texts by Francisco de Oliveira and his friends have stressed, which decisively impacts our perception of the Brazilian issues. It is a matter of understanding that the exception refers to Western democratic norms, but is not opposed to it. Because our exception is not an exception to the norm, but rather an exception of the norm of developed countries, like the inside and the outside of a single piece of fabric, the inside that accentuates by its extraordinary multi-colored patterns, the beautifully reassuring, orderly pictures of globalization.



Guy Tillim

Statues of the founding president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, currently reinstalled at a museum in Accra. They were attacked by mobs after a military coup in 1966, and rehabilitated