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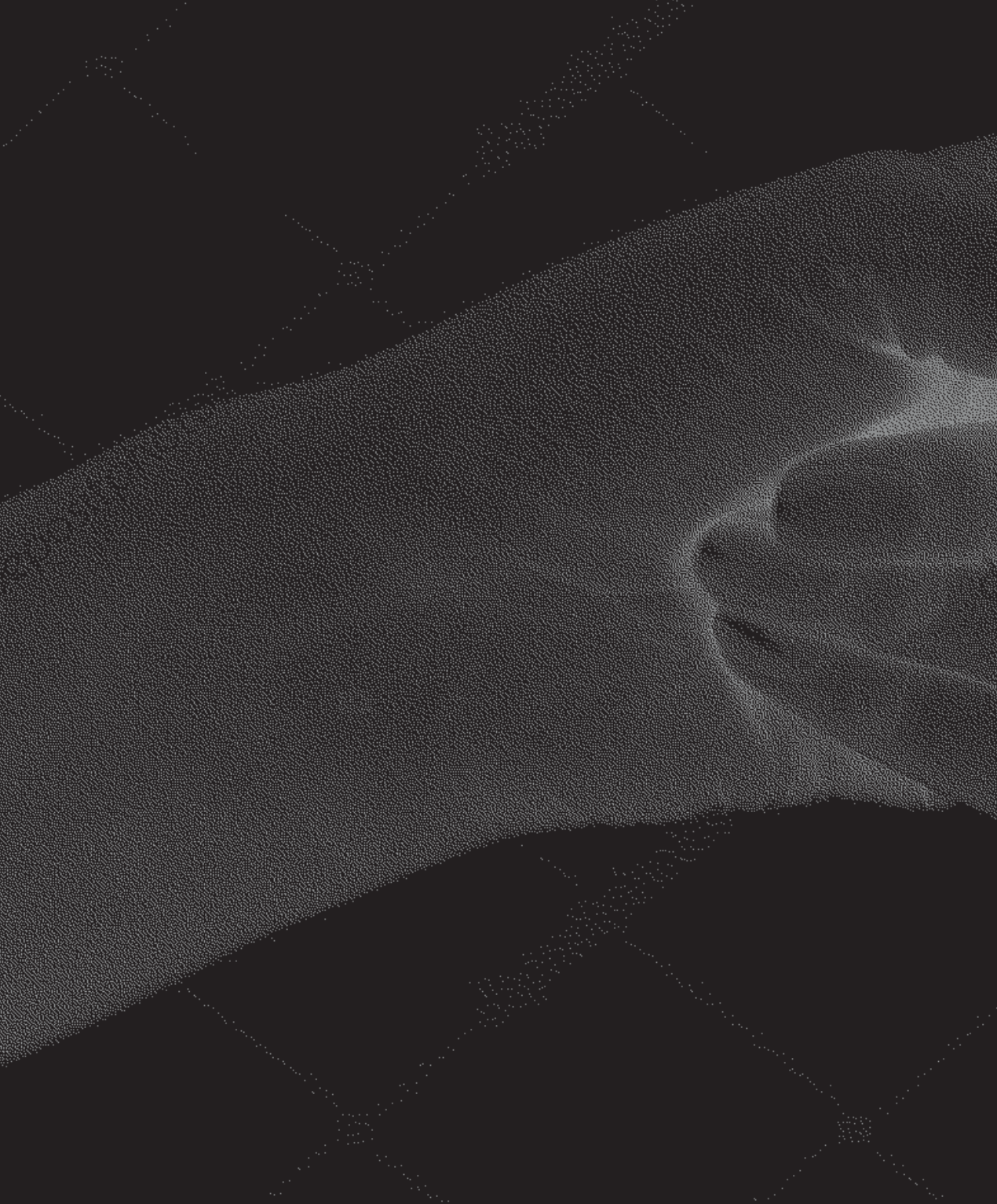




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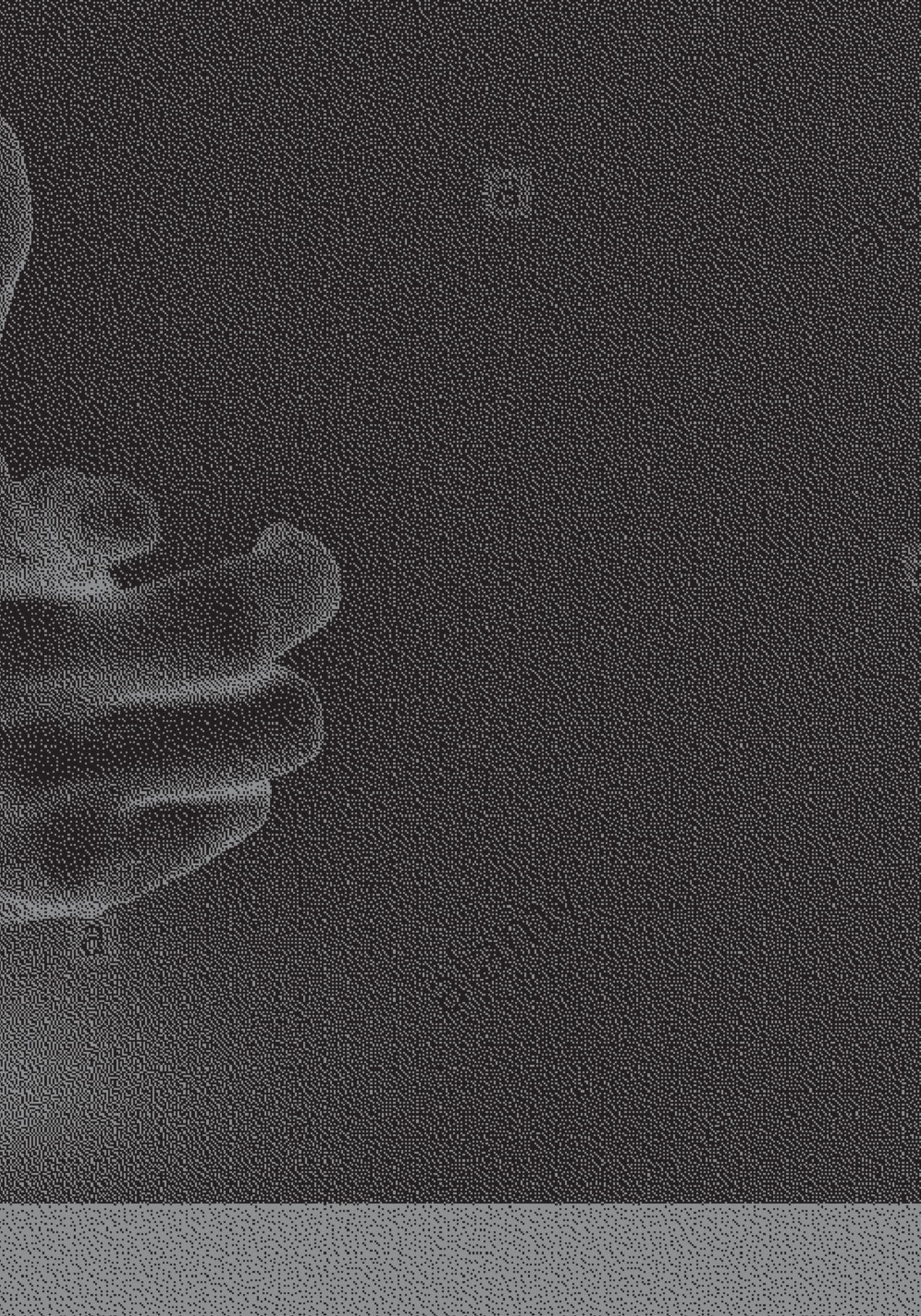


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## You Had to Be T/Here

Mary Ellyn Johnson, Federica  
Martini and Isaline Pfefferle

Restore memory. Let the one  
who is disease, one who is  
daughter restore spring with  
her each appearance from  
beneath the earth.

The ink spills thickest before it  
runs dry before it stops writing  
at all.

Close quotation marks  
Theresa Hak Kyung Cha,  
*Dictee*

Titled *T/Here*, the third issue of  
the *Blackout Magazine* convenes  
artists, writers and curators to think  
from and through the surviving  
traces of transient art processes.  
Investigating around memory gaps  
and non-linear narratives, *T/Here*  
weaves together an archival quilt  
of curatorial and artistic practices  
dealing with notions of proximity  
and distance from the events, and  
their subsequent irruption into the  
present through documentation. If  
all history is contemporary when  
there is a consciousness of ways  
in which it is performed, as John  
Berger suggests in his novel *G.*,  
how is this history going to be  
documented, by whom and how  
the archival choices are going to  
shape the memory of the events  
which are preserved?

The first section of the journal  
tracks back the collaboration  
between swissnex San Francisco  
and the EDHEA – The Valais  
School of Art in 2016. Structures  
of (in)visibility and (in)direct  
access to art historical records  
foreground Benoît Antille's writing  
on the Furka Hotel in upper Valais  
and the remaining souvenirs of

a long-lost time contemporary art residency that started in 1983 in the Alps. Antille reviews the conditions for a collective art event such as Furkart to live through oral and written memories, video documents and passed-on stories. The records of the works and experiences connect to the history of site-specific arts in the Alps through a unique conversation with Furkart curator, where facts blur into narrative.

In 2018, the afterlives of participatory and community-based art practices were at the chore of the exhibition *You had to be there*, hosted at swissnex San Francisco, and co-curated by CCA Wattis alumni MK Meador, Rosa Tyhurst and Amanda Nudelman. The show emanated from the joint workshop *Curating the Alps* held in Valais in 2016, which created a common ground between artists and curators studying at the MAPS – Master of Arts in Public Spheres (EDHEA) and the San Francisco MA in Curatorial Practice (CCA). In conversation with Rosa Tyhurst and Amanda Nudelman, Mary Ellyn Johnson traces back the exhibition's curatorial path and the challenges of showing live art events through the shared memories of those present.

The question of presence and after-presence brings into question ways of recording and transcribing collective and community art processes. A practical experiment in live recording, the visual essay *Becoming a River: Liquid Disasters and Speculative Stories* reports back from a 2019 EDHEA Summer School at the Istituto Svizzero di Roma. The essay

collects images and texts caught in a narrative network emanating from the current emergency of the melting glaciers and consequent underwater scenarios. Through poems, drawings and maps, it relates and responds to discussions and works hosted by a collective of artists, scientists, and philosophers searching for Rome's forgotten underwater routes, memories of flooding and artificial lakes.

The second section of the journal focuses on the re-emergence of art oversights and blind spots and strategies for escaping the historical record. Paul Goodwin's essay introduces yard art as a form that "eludes being captive to fixed points of view" and thinks back to curatorial strategies for (re)presenting the fugitive nature of these experimental art sites in the exhibition *We Will Walk: Art and Resistance in the American South* that he co-curated with artist Hannah Collins at Turner Contemporary in Margate in 2020. Ephemeral aesthetic and political actions are also the focus of Leslie Fernández Barrera's contribution, which brings overground and writes in the public record histories of cultural resistance at the University of Concepción's Art Institute, in southern Chile, after the 1973 coup-d'état. The flickering disappearance of affective and cultural gatherings of objects and images is at work also from Noor Abu Arafah's artist's novel. The two selected chapters hosted by *T/Here* prompt the merge of reality and fiction through tracing back the trajectory of a speculative art museum in Palestine, where

private souvenirs and fading collections are housed. Along these lines, Federica Martini's essay brings into question the fragility of memories, the media's failure to preserve them, and the re-memory processes that shed light on current artistic strategies to write (art) histories between historical silences and archival memory voids.

More precisely, *Blackout Magazine No. 3: T/Here* will be phrased around the following contents:

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# The Idea of North: The Furka Zone as a Form of Life, Followed by a Conversation with García

Benoît Antille

*García (& Co.) has emptied the cafeteria of the Furkablick Hotel of any commercial reference. All the objects present in the room are neutral and inconspicuous. No brands, no logos. The endless piles of paper containers in a corner of the kitchen prove that the same meal has been served there since the very beginning: corn and tomato soup with cheese and sausage on the side. Toward the back, a discreet door gives access to the hotel. García won't allow visitors to take pictures. Most of Daniel Buren's famous shutters are closed. The interior is a stomach, an enclosed space brimming with activity. The basement hosts the kitchen and cellars. The ground floor: an office and the dining room (where the artists Ulay and Marina Abramovic once made a performance). Upstairs: the rooms, the library*

*and the office of the Furkablick Institute. Every nook and corner is filled with works in progress, installations and assemblages, each telling a different story. The window display next to the stairs showcases a hat that used to belong to Joseph Beuys, topped with a piece of shrapnel. Except for the few remaining functional rooms, the others host thematic collections of objects inherited from the hotel's activity. The series compose a brief history of design: ashtrays, glasses, curtains, towels, buttons, strings, carpets, furniture... The whole hotel is a bachelor machine putting the life of objects at the test, questioning their memory, addressing their resistance to time... Under the tectonic pressure of the Furka Pass, categories are shattered and reconfigured: are these artworks, artefacts, relics, ruins, documents, remainders or waste? An old wallpaper competes for attention with a painting by Olivier Mosset.*

I first visited the Furka Zone on 23 July 2013, together with artist Eric Philippoz. As far as I can remember, the weather was rather mild. Eric and I were researching contemporary art projects that had a connection with the landscape for The Valais School of Art. The aim of our visit was to explore what remained of Furkart, a project as famous as it was discrete, led by Marc Hostettler, an art gallerist from Neuchâtel.<sup>1</sup> He and his wife Susy Müller owned the Furkablick hotel, built in 1893 on the Furka Pass, between the cantons of Uri and Valais.<sup>2</sup> Each summer, between 1983 and 1999, they used this venue peaking at an altitude of 2430 metres, to host some of the most famous artists of the 1980s and 1990s (including Ulay and Marina

1 Marc Hostettler founded and directed the gallery Editions média, created in Neuchâtel in 1971. A specialist of silkscreen printing, he published some 150 editions of prints by Swiss and international representatives of concrete, systematic and conceptual art.

2 The Furka pass, rich in history, has been visited by explorers, painters and famous travellers such as Goethe and Queen Victoria.



Abramovic, Daniel Buren, James Lee Byars, Terry Fox, Jenny Holzer, Joseph Kosuth, Richard Long, Olivier Mosset, Steven Parrino and Lawrence Weiner).

Furkart stems from the friendship of Marc Hostettler and American artist James Lee Byars who was fascinated by the Alps to the point of dreaming of a “grand mountain museum.” In 1983, the two friends met at the pass, where Byars presented a performance titled *A Drop of Black Perfume*<sup>3</sup> – so symbolically launching the project. The actual artistic programme, however, began the following year. One of the participants, Swiss art historian Patricia Nussbaum describes Marc Hostettler’s pioneering programme in the book *Furkart Ephemera* (Nussbaum, 2019). According to her, Hostettler selected the artists for their ability to work outside of the gallery space. The idea was not to install pre-existing artworks, but to generate a reflection on the place itself (its topography, history and context), in order to produce site-specific gestures. While some artists developed their proposal at a distance, most of them worked on site.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Hostettler undertook soft renovations. Among other interventions, he commissioned Rem Koolhaas’s Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) to rehabilitate the oldest part of the hotel.

In 1999, Hostettler decided to stop Furkart; the project was becoming too heavy. According to Patricia Nussbaum, “the number of artists who were able to adapt to that kind of environment was not unlimited; and the never-ending, exhausting search for funding was the last straw.” In terms of heritage, this project leaves behind various interventions outside of the hotel (such as

3 “The action unfolds on top of the Furka Pass, near the Rhone springs, in Switzerland. James Lee Byars, inspired by his memories of Japanese monks and poets retiring in tiny mountain observatories to contemplate the world, has invited a couple of friends. He is walking slowly, then suddenly he leaves the path to walk toward the edge of a precipice along a grassy slope. He stops and carefully places a drop of black perfume inside the tiny, hidden cavity of a huge rock. James Lee Byars is wearing a golden suit and a top hat. It’s the 24th of July. The perfume is volatile”. [http://www.mac-lyon.com/static/mac/contenu/fichiers/artistes/notices\\_collec/byars.pdf](http://www.mac-lyon.com/static/mac/contenu/fichiers/artistes/notices_collec/byars.pdf). (last accessed: February 9, 2021).

4 Significantly, Furkart coincides with a key moment in the history of art in the public sphere: the public audition organised in 1985 under the impulse of William Diamond, regional manager of the General Services Administration (GSA), to address the public complaints about the installation in 1981 of Richard Serra’s *Tilted Arc* on the Federal Plaza in New York (the installation had been commissioned by the GSA).

Max Bill's stone hearth and Per Kirkeby's brick sculpture), on the hotel (such as Daniel Buren's shutters and Mark Luyten's writing on several windows); and inside of it (a collection of works, remnants and ephemera). Beside material traces, Furkart also survives in the collective memory of a small circle of aficionados who attended Hostettler's events: the project was not meant to meet a large audience at that time. In 2014, however, it was promised to a posthumous success, as the co-directors of the Centre Culturel Suisse (CCS), Jean-Paul Felley and Olivier Kaeser, proposed the event "The Experience Furkart" in the framework of the Nouveau Festival at the Centre Pompidou, Paris.

"Posthumous" was just an assumption. In this occasion, Eric Philippoz and myself discovered that the Furkablick Hotel was still active, as we found out when we ended up meeting the person in charge of this legacy. The first encounter with García took place in the hotel's cafeteria, the only space still open to the visiting tourists and users of the Pass. During the two hour-long visit of the building and its surroundings, Eric and I didn't talk much, impressed as we were by the place as much as, if not more than, by García's personality. Back in the car that took us back to the valley, this discovery put us in a state of juvenile feverishness. The experience was so unexpected, what we had experienced so uncategorizable, that it would take me a while to understand the true nature of my growing fascination with the Furka Zone. This place is addictive; I have been going back there every summer since 2013, often accompanied by friends and peers.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of Furkart, Marc Hostettler benefited from the financial support of a

5 I am thinking, among others, of Leigh Markopoulos, then director of the curatorial practice programme at the California College of the Art; of art historian Julian Myers-Szupinska; of Adam Sutherland, director of Grizedale Art; and of William L. Fox, director of the Centre for Art + Environment of the Nevada Museum of Art.

Swiss foundation for arts and culture, the Alfred Richterich Stiftung, for which García was already working. After 1999, when the gallery owner decided to stop his project, the situation remained in standby for years. But in 2004, after much hesitation, Alfred Richterich finally decided to repurchase the building through his foundation, saving it from certain dissolution; and García accepted to take care of it.

This might be the right time to point out that García – who could be described as a deep character with penetrating and mischievous gaze – has had a rather atypical career. After dropping out of school at a young age, he made numerous experiences before starting to work in the publishing sector, which led him to work with Harald Szeemann (1933-2005). Among other collaborations, García has been in charge of the comprehensive publication of the famous curator's exhibitions.<sup>6</sup> Szeemann's wild and 'pataphysician's imaginary might have been inspirational...

When García (& Co.) started to work at the Furka Pass, Alfred Richterich left him free rein. One of his first initiatives has been to set up a framework for future activities: he thus created the "Furkablick Institute." This sibylline title – as one can postulate, had the merit of breaking with the art world's rhetoric, in order to maintain the institute's activities below the radar. García, like Hostettler does not consider public relations and marketing as priorities. For the past fifteen years, he has been going to the Hotel every single year, as soon as the pass opens in late June, until it closes in October. But, García likes to measure time in his own way; he only counts the number of months that he effectively

6 Bezzola, T. and Kurzmeyer, R., eds., *Harald Szeemann – with by through because towards despite: Catalogue of All Exhibitions 1957–2005*, Zurich; Vienna–New York: Voldemeer–Springer, 2007.

spent at the Institute, which would amount to five years in total, that he mostly spent in stylite-like solitude.

García also decided to expand the horizon outlined by Hostettler. Furkart's artistic heritage is just one of many other histories that make this place unique: histories connected to geology, to tourism, to army and to scientific research among others. These intertwined layers and their respective testimonies constitute the complex a territory that García came up to call the "Furka Zone."

Some observers described García as a "curator" in the etymological acceptance of the term, namely as a person whose role is to "take care" of someone or something. It is true; he is tirelessly working to the maintenance and enhancement of the different heritages and stories that cohabit in the area. In particular, the works and documents produced by the artistic activity, the objects that have remained in the hotel since its creation, as well as the buildings erected on this territory (the Furkablick Hotel, two outbuildings – including the one appropriated by the Belgian artist Panamarenko – nearby military barracks and a barn).

The real nature of the activities that he developed at the Furka, however, defy categorization. There is no point in trying to assign him a formal title such as "curator," "landscape designer" or even "artist." Nor shall we attempt to analyse the assemblages and collections of objects that he created. Let us focus on the practice instead.

García (& Co.) developed his activities organically, by incubation or immersion, i.e. by eating, sleeping and living on site (like Ancient Greek patients who healed

themselves through their dreams, when sleeping in the sanctuaries of Asklepios). His practice has likely been shaped by the place itself: this at once inaccessible and over-crowded transit zone, which hosts parades of tourists, drivers, motorcyclists, mountain-bikers, scientists and soldiers – if the weather allows it – before reclaiming its rights for at least eight months a year, when it is covered in snow and ice. A living and ever-transforming environment, this place imposes entropy and slowness as fundamental principles. Its polymorphic nature, capable of going from one extreme to the other in a few hours, relentlessly resists any endeavour, whatever the field, be it about hotel industry or art.

The zone does not only threaten concrete projects, it undermines our categories, discourses, models and assumptions. It draws us to into a Socratic dialogue that brings to light our contradictions and limits. Why and for whom would one create any artwork up there? What meaning should we ascribe to the accumulated objects from the past? Should we preserve all of them, or the most representative items only? Should such a heritage be restored or taken over by nature? Should this place be turned into a museum, a mausoleum, or a new destination of cultural tourism?

García answered these questions like a Greek philosopher, by adopting a “form of life” (in the sense given by the historian Pierre Hadot),<sup>7</sup> i.e. a practice whereby every action is connected to a thought and every thought to an action – in other words, a praxis, the transformation of the self through action. We are therefore in the field of a practical reason, which implies the underlying presence of an

7 The concept of “form of life” is also at the heart of the work of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who had a considerable influence on contemporary art. See for instance his text *What Is an Apparatus?*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford University Press, 2009). See also Estelle Ferrarese, “Le projet politique d’une vie qui ne peut être séparée de sa forme. La politique de la soustraction de Giorgio Agamben”, *Raisons politiques*, Presses de Science Po, 2015, 57, pp. 49–53.

*ethics* to guide our actions. And this might be where the strength and uniqueness of García's approach resides. Since he started to go to the Furka Pass some fifteen years ago, he has carefully examined each of his *decisions* without subjecting them to any limiting criteria.

Adapting to the geological rhythm of the place, García takes his time (for instance, it took him at least two years to decide that the title "Furka Zone" was appropriate). As for the results of his actions, they are not measured in terms of productivity, return on investment, visibility, number of visitors or networking, but only in terms of their consistency with the requirements of each situation. In quantitative terms, this approach is absurd – especially since it does not seem to be addressed to anybody. In qualitative terms, it is salutary. The rhythm and dedication applied to every gesture imposed by the Zone (from the most trivial to the most complex) are diametrically opposed to the prevailing management ideology, as shown by the evolution of the art sector. From this point of view, the implications of his position are at once philosophical, aesthetic and political.

By maintaining the Furka Zone active, García keeps it alive. He is constantly moving things around, bringing changes to the place, recombining the objects. And each of his actions abide to his "art" of decision-making. This might be a way to prevent the Zone from being reified, instrumentalised, or turned into a museum, an amusement park or a high-altitude suburb. Is García trying to preserve it from any form of appropriation or recuperation? At the same time, the chosen terminology is far from any romantic ideal. "The Zone" evokes a no man's land, a

hybrid space, inaccessible, unfathomable, abandoned or dangerous, purely functional or waiting to be salvaged... García embraces the complexity of the place, while working in the underlays – those that the distracted visitor will not necessarily perceive.

By turning the Zone into a permanent construction site, García feeds his own *praxis*. Wherever it looks, a careful eye can notice changes from one season to the next: the result of a decision or an on-going decision process. These changes are consistent with spiritual exercises. The dialogue with the Zone is above all formative, or even transformative: it is a daily practice, endlessly renewed, following the pace of the opening and closing of the pass... The idea, however, is not to make the apology of detachment or withdrawal, but to develop a deontology, a search for the right gesture and for self-coherence. García, however, would not let himself be reduced to seriousness... Once must also show a strong dose of humour, wit and derision to survive up there.

### **Conversation with García**

“In life it’s all about observing,  
even when participating.”

Leigh Markopoulos (1968–2017)

**You once told me that you dropped out of school at a very young age, worked for a publishing house called Voldemeer, collaborated with Swiss curator Harald Szeemann and have been in charge of the Furkablick Institute for almost fifteen years. Is that the right way to introduce you?**

“Alice did not quite know what to say to this: so she helped herself to some tea and bread-and-butter, and then turned to the Dormouse, and repeated her question. ‘Why did they live at the bottom of a Well?’ The Dormouse again took a minute or two to think about it, and then said, ‘It was a treacle-well’”.  
(Lewis Carroll)

**Early on, you developed a taste for wandering sideways. When you were a teenager, you spent some time in Paris and lived a bohemian life of sort. You used to hike along the northern coast of Normandy, on the beaches of the Allied Landing, sleeping in concrete bunkers from WWII when it rained. What can you say about that experience? Did it inform your practice?**

“Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise”.  
(Lewis Carroll)

**Since you collaborated with Harald Szeemann, I feel obliged to ask you whether this legendary curator has had an influence on your practice? And if yes, in which way?**

“with by through because towards despite”. (Harald Szeemann)

**I know that you have a very large scope of interests. Can you tell me who else has been influential?**

... in relation with the Furka Zone: among many others, Alfred Richerich, Huang Qi, Leigh Markopoulos, Marc Hostettler, Johannes Gachnang, Uwe Nettelbeck, Gabriele Goettle, Kate Fowle, Martin Hüppi, Agathe Jarczyk, Marc Egger,



Robert Wilson, Heiner Müller, Charity Oghagbon, Urs Simmen, René Mamie, Peter Zigerlig, and Dawa Yangzom Jantsentsang, all of whom I had the privilege to see in action; and of course innumerable other encounters, often short, sometimes longer, in many cases anonymous (first and foremost, though, the “Gegebenheiten”, the “given”, the catastrophes, the dead bodies, the rocks, the wild blueberries with cold milk, the ever-changing wind).

**When did you first hear about Furkart? Did you know this place before? Did you attend Hostettler’s events?**

No, I just had a fleeting, remote notion about the place.

**When you have been proposed to manage the legacy of Furkart and the Furkablick Hotel, did you already have a vision of what needed to be done up there?**

I did not.

**Do you remember your first impression when you arrived at the Furkablick Hotel as the “master of the house”?**

I was never the “master of the house”, rather some kind of a caretaker, or a keeper. . .

**After much consideration, you decided to call it the Furka Zone. How would you describe this Zone to someone who never went up there?**

“Try and go on. The pure plateau air. Yes, it was a plateau, Moll had not lied, or rather a great mound with gentle slopes. The entire top was occupied by the domain of Saint John and there the wind blew almost without ceasing, causing the stoutest trees to bend and groan, breaking the boughs, tossing the bushes, lashing the ferns to fury,

flattening the grass, and whirling leaves and flowers far away, I hope I have not forgotten anything. Good. A high wall encompassed it about, without shutting of the view, unless you happened to be in its lee. How was this possible? Why thanks to the rising ground to be sure, culminating in a summit called the Rock, because of the rock that was on it. From here a fine view was to be obtained of the plain, the sea, the mountains, the smoke of the town, and the buildings of the institution, bulking large in spite of their remoteness and all astir with little dots or flecks forever appearing and disappearing, in reality the keepers coming and going, perhaps mingled with I was going to say with the prisoners! For seen from this distance the striped cloak had no stripes or indeed any great resemblance to a cloak at all. So that one could say, when the first shock of surprise was past, Those are men and women, you know, people, without being able to specify further". (Samuel Beckett)

**Why the name Furka Zone? What does it represent for you?**

Time will tell: "The meaning of a word is its use in the language". (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

**Do you perceive the Furka Zone as isolated? Peripheral? Why is it so important to maintain your activities "below the radar"?**

...

**Would it be fair to say that you have long worked in solitude? If so, was this isolation necessary to develop your practice?**

...

**You've been working at the Furka Zone for about fifteen years, right? How**



In the heart of the Zone, floating:  
"de tomaso honey" (spectra laminate  
edition) by Thomas Horvath  
Photo: Janis Osolin

In the heart of the Zone, surviving:  
Architectura  
Photo: Janis Osolin

**would you describe the activities or practice that you developed there?**

“Cheshire Puss’, she began, rather timidly, as she did not know at all whether it would like the name: however, it only grinned a little wider. ‘Come, it’s pleased so far’, thought Alice, and she went on, ‘Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?’

‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to’, said the Cat.

‘I don’t much care where...’, said Alice.

‘Then it doesn’t matter which way you go’, said the Cat.

‘...so long as I get somewhere’, Alice added as an explanation.

‘Oh, you’re sure to do that’, said the Cat, ‘if you only walk long enough’.

Alice felt that this could not be denied”.  
(Lewis Carroll)

**How would you put into words the process that guides your decision-making? What matters to you?**

“Playing with Infinity” (Rózsa Péter);

“Normal Desires.” (Bruce Nauman)

**I remember you saying that “any decision that you make excludes other possibilities”. Do you remember that? Do you still believe so? Does it mean that it is more important to maintain open fields of possibilities rather than achieving things?**

Absolutely.

**What did you learn from the Furka Zone? Did the Zone change you? If yes, in which ways?**

“In this way formless is not only an adjective having such and such a meaning, but a term serving to declassify, requiring in general that everything should have a form.

What it designates does not, in any sense whatever, possess rights, and everywhere gets crushed like a spider or an earthworm.”  
(Georges Bataille)

**What are your favourite moments in the Furka Zone?**

“When it rained, when it snowed”.  
(Samuel Beckett)

**What kind of difficulties did you encounter up there? What was the hardest part? Did you ever feel antagonised by the Zone?**

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to’, said the Cat.” (Lewis Carroll)

**In which direction can the Furka Zone evolve?**

“The forms are many in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness. Ah yes, I was always subject to the deep thought, especially in spring of the year. That one had been nagging at me for the past five minutes. I venture the hope there will be no more, of that depth. After all it is not important not to finish, there are worse things than velleities”. (Samuel Beckett)

**Since years you have been an actor, as well as a privileged observer of the art world. How do you look at the evolution of this *field* which has become a *sector*? Is this still such a good place to operate from?**

“Not that I don’t believe in eating / but I just want to make the distinction between / Art and eating.” (Agnes Martin)

**What can one learn from the Furka Zone?**

“Things are alive as much as men are.”  
(Marcel Proust)

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**I know that you are a fan of Glenn Gould – not only because of his music, I imagine, but also as a character. In a series of radio broadcasts titled “Solitude Trilogy”, Glenn Gould created “The Idea of North”, a documentary on the influence of the Canadian far north on the life of its inhabitants. Do you feel close to that experience?<sup>8</sup>**

Always inspiring, always a pleasure...  
“e bianca neve scender senza venti” (Guido Cavalcanti).

8 In 1970, PBS aired an experimental film based on this series (produced in 1967), directed by Judith Pearlman.

# You had to be there

Mary Ellyn  
Johnson

Amanda  
Nudelman

Rosa  
Tyhurst

This conversation was recorded in October 2019. It follows the exhibition *You had to be there*, that took place from 8 February to 20 April 2018 at swissnex San Francisco, co-curated by MK Meador, Amanda Nudelman, and Rosa Tyhurst, including contributions from Postcommodity, Thomas Hirschhorn, Kateřina Šedá, Futurefarmers, and the Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI), amongst others.

The exhibition examined what remained after public artworks or actions, and proposed various methods for experiencing these projects in their aftermath. Consisting of usually unseen products of artistic process, subjective documentation, re-enactments and re-imaginings, the exhibition posed questions about the perception of public-facing artworks; it reflected on authorship, the lore around projects that develops through rumor, legacy and memory, and the slippery context between the public and the private. Through unconventional presentations and highly subjective readings, *You had to be there* aimed to tell a story that is not necessarily *the* story. What follows below is a conversation between two of the exhibition curators (Amanda Nudelman and Rosa Tyhurst) with Mary Ellyn Johnson, Head of Exhibitions at swissnex.

**Mary Ellyn Johnson (MEJ):** It would be good to start at the beginning, the origins of the exhibition and how it came about. Perhaps we could start by talking about the workshop that it developed from?

**Rosa Tyhurst (RT):** In the fall of 2016, Amanda, MK, Dan Cassidy and myself traveled to Switzerland with our teachers Leigh Markopoulos and Liz Thomas to participate in a residency with students from EDHEA – The Valais School of Art. The residency was conceived by EDHEA researcher and California College of the Arts (CCA) Curatorial Practice

Alumnus Benoît Antille, as a testing ground for ideas related to site, audience, public space, civic participation and interdisciplinary collaboration.

**Amanda Nudelman (AN):** And we were able to partner with swissnex to make an exhibition responding to the experience.

**MEJ:** Which was the result of years of conversations I had had with Leigh. She loved Switzerland and its “secret” art places, people and ideas. When swissnex first moved to Pier 17 in 2016 we discussed how we might support the CCA students she had been taking on “field trips” to Switzerland to discover its great arts archives and history. We couldn’t fund the students to go to Switzerland but could help facilitate an exchange with a Swiss University.

**AN:** When we returned from the trip, we [the original curatorial team] gathered at a studio in Sausalito to review documentation from Furkart—a little known artist residency that’s been operating in the Swiss Alps since the early 1980’s—that we’d received from Janis Osolin, the program’s caretaker. There were pieces of ephemera including maps, guides, and postcards, but the heart of the materials was a set of DVD recordings of many performances that had taken place in Furkart over the years.

**RT:** They were super rare and only seen outside of Switzerland once before.

**AN:** I remember sitting for what felt like hours watching them and then we had lunch at a nearby diner. It was there the exhibition started to take shape, in part because Rosa, you, came up with the title: *You had to be there*. It was a reaction to these videos we’d watched—amazing performances by artists like James Lee Byars and Terry Fox that for reasons of the residency’s total remoteness were not experienced by many people. But we *had* visited the place and seen the landscape and the

context within which the performances had materialized.

**RT:** Even having visited that location though, it was still a struggle for us to imagine that those things had happened there.

**AN:** Right! We thought it was interesting to make an exhibition around the idea that a lot of art, especially public art, site specific art, performative art, is often very hard to translate after the fact. If you hadn’t been there to witness it, some of its essence of magic or meaning or whatever was lost.

**RT:** The idea was always quite tongue-in-cheek, and the title acknowledges that. *Of course* you had to be there to fully experience these things, but this way it allowed us a freedom to investigate methods of research and presentation to grasp and communicate what happened.

**AN:** Obviously, we were not the first to try to represent these complex installations or performances or projects that took place over long periods, or in remote places, or a single time. But we did want to try and conceptualize a different approach to displaying and talking about them.

**MEJ:** So how did this take shape as an exhibition?

**RT:** One of our curatorial challenges was: how do you represent something that is not there anymore? We initially tackled this question by researching projects that had occurred in the public realm, and that used different approaches to build community. We wanted to have a range of examples and methodologies that, as a group, we thought were exemplary.

**AN:** After much back and forth the artists we included were fieldfaring (Ted Purves & Susanne Cockrell), Futurefarmers, Thomas Hirschhorn, Xandra Ibarra, Postcommodity, Kateřina Šedá, Cassie Thornton & The Feminist Economics Department (FED), and Mark Tribe.



**RT:** We also looked at larger-scale projects, foundations, and institutions that worked with the public and site in notable ways and called them “nodes.” They were CLUI (the Center for Land Use Interpretation), EDHEA’s MAPS, CCA’s BA/MA in Social Practice, and Furkart.

**MEJ:** It was at this point that I connected the team with the fantastic Swiss designers Anthony Guex and Camille Blin to develop the exhibition design. I think their input really helped inform the exhibition’s aesthetic.

**RT:** They conceived of a modular display system – free-standing plywood temporary walls with an integrated low shelf; tables in various sizes that came with and without plexiglass protective coverings/hoods; multi-purpose stands that we used to elevate TV monitors; and a series of wall-based shelves.

**AN:** We hung frames, flatscreen monitors, archival documents, and photographs on the walls – creating a display that suggested a kind of “work in progress.” It looked something like how we imagined our office or studio might have appeared: noticeboards and tables covered in materials as we worked to piece them together into a legible format.

**RT:** There was something temporary about it that was attuned to the projects we were looking at, something that wouldn’t last, and that could be assembled and taken down swiftly almost as if it was never there.

**AN:** Having this system also allowed us to create flows within swissnex’s large space and to suggest dialogues between individual projects. For example, the work of Thomas Hirschhorn and Kateřina Šedá both operated with a specific community for a specific period of time, but the artists’ aesthetic and goals were entirely different.

**RT:** And it was important to us that the materials could be reused and that they wouldn’t be dispatched off to a junk yard when the exhibition was over, and so

all elements were created from untreated plywood, which we left unpainted. And the brown hue of the plywood henceforth became quite a prominent design element in the exhibition, which was only further enhanced by the exhibition identity created by Jon Sueda that was predominantly coloured a rich green. He too used a modular system, providing us with risographed sheets that we could print exhibition labels, directions and hand-outs on, in-house.

**AN:** It also helped as we were in a bit of a time crunch when writing most of them! [laughs]

**MEJ:** To come back to the research you did, what strategies did you employ to present these very different typologies of projects?

**AN:** In some cases it was really straightforward, some artists and organizations had a very specific idea of how they wanted to represent themselves.

**RT:** Like CLUI, for example, they opted to show posters of past projects. CLUI looks at the use of land, and I think Matthew Coolidge [the director of CLUI] is quite provocative in that sense, as he finds beauty in the destruction and change of the landscape. They didn’t want to show materials from specific projects instead opting to stay at arm’s length. Coolidge mentioned to me that he wanted to ensure that CLUI was not visualized as a project, but rather a tool or resource. Together we opted to display a collection of promotional posters from past CLUI projects. These included *On-Site Office Trailers: Invisible Architecture of the Urban Environment* that originally was an exhibition of photography presented within a construction trailer and a series of tours at construction sites around Los Angeles; *Executive Decisions: The Personal Landscape Legacy of American Presidents* an exhibition at CLUI’s HQ and online that investigated the lasting landmarks that each American presidency

leaves on the physical map of the nation and *Foreground: The Landscape of Gold in America*, a programme that considered the site-specific, distilling qualities of golf courses. CLUI produced posters for each of these, with a ubiquitous almost “anti-design” aesthetic, which we framed and hung grid-style on one of the walls. This display method flattened out their practice as each project was displayed in the same way. They actually requested that very little context be given about the presentation, which we thought fit nicely into the overall conception of the exhibition.

**AN:** Some others were a bit more complex. For example, I worked closely with Cristóbal Martínez from the collective Postcommodity. We wanted to present their project *Repellent Fence*, 2015, but in a way that was different from how the widely known and exhibited project was usually displayed. It often included photos of the striking “scare eye” yellow balloons, or the actual object, which Postcommodity had installed along the border between Arizona and Mexico. Yet for them, as Cristóbal explained, the bulk of the labor that went into making this project was virtually invisible. At least in an exhibitionary or kind of retrospective sense.

**RT:** Which is at odds with this large bombastic representation [of the “scare eye” balloon].

**AN:** Exactly. The group spent more than eight years negotiating, building relationships with, and navigating contentions zones in communities in Douglas, Arizona and Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico, which included engaging a number of diverse groups that included the citizens of both towns; drug cartels that were, if not officially then effectively in control of those areas; farmers, who did officially own the land but knew that they were not necessarily in control of it; and the police factions

on either side, all of whom were integral to making the project work. In order to replicate a direct, consistent, and accessible description of the project’s motivations with each constituency, Postcommodity referred to a short introductory paragraph recorded in a small notebook that fit in a pocket. Whenever they met someone new, they could read it verbatim, in either English or Spanish. For them, this was at the heart of the project—a simple statement that made their intentions known, and attempted to convey a sense of openness, vulnerability, and good intentions.

**RT:** And this had never been shown had it?

**AN:** No, never, and for Postcommodity it represented one of the most important parts of their project. So they chose to present the notebook in our exhibition alongside an English and Spanish translation of the statement. This kind of ineffable gesture characterizes many of the representations of projects presented in the exhibition.

**RT:** That brings up a point I wanted to mention about the authorship of the artists in the show. In her essay, *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents*, Claire Bishop argues that a lot of socially engaged arts practices encourage authorial renunciation, which subsequently limits the opportunity to expose such practice to critical reception. Postcommodity certainly can’t be bracketed under this description, but there were a few projects in the exhibition that totally left it up to us to decide what we did and didn’t want to show. Thomas Hirschhorn’s *Gramsci Monument* (2013) might be an example of this?

**AN:** I think so. As his entire project was documented and archived online, we could pick and choose what we wanted to show and what narrative we wanted to tell.

**MEJ:** Can you say more about that?

**AN:** It was the fourth in a series of projects Hirschhorn made that looked at the work of four different philosophers and theorists, and tried to enact or embody each of their ideologies in collaboration with a community somewhere in the world. For the *Gramsci Monument*, he worked with Forest Houses, a housing project in the Bronx in New York, and over the course of a summer held performances, poetry readings, radio shows, lectures, etc. in temporary structures built by the community on the communal grounds—all in reference, of course, to Antonio Gramsci. For the exhibition we sifted through the online archive to present a handful of photographs which were taken on what appeared to be a point-and-shoot camera, and we also printed and presented a number of newspapers that were produced onsite at Forest Houses, which were available as a takeaway.

**RT:** The work by Mark Tribe that we exhibited: *The Port Huron Project* (2006-2008) has a slippery relationship to authorship too. The project was a series of six reenactments of protest speeches from the New Left movements of the Vietnam era. They were originally by Cesar Chavez, Angela Davis, Stokely Carmichael, Howard Zinn, Paul Potter and Coretta Scott King, and for Tribe's work they were reenacted by an actor at the site of the original event. For *You had to be there* we showed materials and a recording from *The Liberation of Our People*, a speech delivered by Angela Davis in Oakland in 1969. There were two posters pasted onto the wall, the audio from the reenactment, it's transcript, alongside call-sheets and other production documents.

**AN:** I like the fact that people wouldn't know whether they were looking (and listening) to the original recording or the reenactment. And that if you weren't paying attention, this could be a very current provocation, rather than

something that happened about fifty years ago.

**RT:** Which I like to think happened during the restaging's – especially in Oakland, you could stumble across the event in 2008 and sadly, a lot of the rhetoric and struggles are still prevalent today.

**AN:** But perhaps it's a choice to have discrete authorship or not, so not really authorial renunciation. I remember you saying that Jeremy Deller had no idea much of the materials we displayed at *You had to be there* even existed!

**RT:** Oh right, yes – he didn't know it was still around and didn't have much of a desire to keep it. When researching his project *After the Goldrush* (2002), we found copies of travel itineraries, photographic snapshots, some business cards from contacts he met, letters (sent via fax) to students and CCA professors that all related to his work.

The project was the outcome of the Capp Street Residency Deller had undertaken in San Francisco. Yet the project for Deller was explicitly *not* about objects he made or found, but about the people he met and the stories they told.

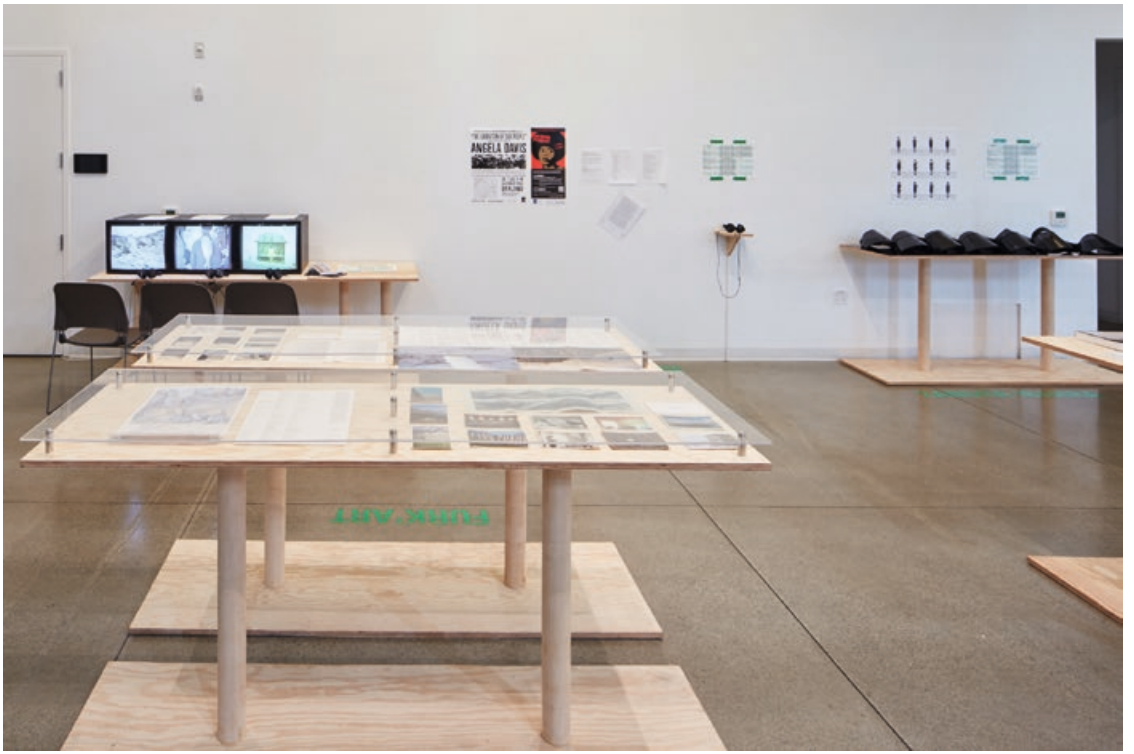
**AN:** Which maybe makes our presentation of these found materials antithetical to the project?

**RT:** I don't know, I think it's because it was *our* experience of the work, our journey and what we found along the way it's different. He writes in the foreword to the exhibition's accompanying book,

“I couldn't see how a static gallery exhibition could begin to encapsulate my firsthand experience of being in California for a year. I wanted to celebrate the physical and personal openness that I have encountered here through enticing the reader on a journey.”<sup>1</sup>

And he did entice us to a journey

<sup>1</sup> Deller, J., *After the Goldrush: Capp Street Project 2001–2002*, San Francisco, Ca.: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2002.



*You had to be there*, swissnex San Francisco, exhibition views, 2018  
Courtesy of swissnex San Francisco  
Photo: J. Astra Brinkmann



it was just one that went through the dusty archives of the Wattis in the CCA basement! Deller's result was a kind of guide-book that was not of people, but of places. And to encourage people to follow his journey and to have their own experience, he made a treasure hunt, leaving gifts with five of the people he met (well, four people and a library), as an open invitation for them to make their own story through his work.

**AN:** And he left a gift as a kind of coda to the project at swissnex too!

**RT:** Yeah that was awesome... can we say what it was?

**AN:** [nodding] I think so, it's been almost twenty years!

**RT:** So the gift was a bumper sticker. They were bespoke for each place he visited: the Oakland one said "Oakland, I are we," and the one left in Trona said "I'd rather be in Trona". At swissnex it said "I blame Zuck".

**MEJ:** I remember the day the Cambridge Analytica scandal broke and suddenly everybody was clamoring for those bumper stickers! [laughs] We had to order more!

**RT:** Were there any other reactions from visitors?

**MEJ:** I remember people being really excited about the Furkart materials, there even were some people who came to the show who had visited or stayed at Furkart and it was a special opportunity for them to reconnect with that place. There was also a lot of discussion about the Thomas Hirschhorn project, and the controversy that surrounds it.

**RT:** Reflecting on the exhibition now, it seems there were three different methodologies we employed to understand the traces of these works. The archival presentation (Furkart etc., that included a mixture of artworks and ephemera surrounding the place or project or artist), documentation/props (as in the presentations of Mark Tribe's,

Jeremy Deller's or Xandra Ibarra's projects) and reinterpretation (like Cassie Thornton and The Feminist Economics Department or Futurefarmers), both revisited their projects and created new works for the exhibition. I'll always remember Futurefarmers washing the "deck" of their installation on the walkway outside of swissnex, with water fresh from the bay, shouting "all hands on deck!" it was such a great moment.



Futurefarmers installing at swissnex San Francisco, February 2018.  
Photo: Rosa Tyhurst

**AN:** Falling under that last category, Cassie Thornton and The Feminist Economics Department (The FED) made a new version of a project developed in 2017 called *Secret Chakra*.

*Secret Chakra* was a yoga workshop designed to help participants visualize their relationship to debt. The process consisted of a guided Kundalini style yoga class (developed by Cassie), as well as a guided visualization of what their debt might look like if it took a formal concrete shape. These visualizations were recorded and archived as drawings, writings, and audio recordings. Instead of presenting these archival materials, Cassie integrated the debt visualization imagery created by the *Secret Chakra* participants into a virtual reality environment that created a new work called *The People's Virtual Reality*, 2018. We couldn't work our budget to develop it as a true VR application, so she presented an analog version, which was a projection of the visuals with an accompanying voiceover narration. This defined another approach to presenting a project that's highly subjective, highly personal, and in no way replicable. But in some sense, this allowed the viewer to have their own immersive, and new, experience of the original *Secret Chakra* project.

**RT:** They're more like retellings I suppose? As the curators, and aside from the artist or author, we have the deepest and most vivid impressions of these projects. What the visitor experiences is completely mediated through us, which potentially might have made it difficult to access in some ways. That points to one of the questions we discussed lots while on the residency: who are these projects for?

**AN:** These kinds of public and socially engaged projects often become quite personal for the curator, and I can see why. No matter how much you consider the public and the people who will come to view the artwork, so much of it has to do with your own subjective experience in developing it. Because the space for formal characterization is so

much more intangible for these projects in comparison to a sculpture or painting or whatever, the attitude of the curator is potentially more strongly felt.

**RT:** Working in the public domain is so complex. Not everybody needs public art, much is ignored, but more and more it's there. More than ever I think it's important for us to recognise that seeing these things is privileged. It requires access, time, and money— not all artworks can be seen by everyone who wants to see them.

**AN:** Yeah, all those things are part of what made organizing this show so challenging. Coordinating the Furkart parts made me feel much closer to that place, perhaps even more so than when I was actually there in some aspects. It deepened and enriched the experience, which for me was too fleeting, and the continued engagement provided a richer connection to that site and subsequently as a component of the exhibition. I hope that came across for some people who came to see the show.

**RT:** In retrospect, I am struck by the very different locations that we spent time in developing the exhibition. In Switzerland, of course, but also in that diner in Sausalito, looking over the bay by the pier near swissnex, and in those strange open classrooms at CCA. We also spent that surreal afternoon in the San Francisco public library, didn't we Amanda?

**AN:** I feel now, in reflecting on it, that it was more successful than I thought it was at the time [laughs]. When I look at the pictures it comes across as a fun, dynamic, and accessible way to experience a bunch of projects that are basically inaccessible unless re-performed, which in many cases isn't even possible. Like we've been discussing this whole time, it reads like an anecdote of sorts.

**RT:** It almost feels like the exhibition

has become one of the projects we presented. It's nice to have the opportunity to talk about it with you two over a year after it closed. We are not usually afforded the chance to reflect, as we're moving on to the next project, and then the next. I imagine the same could be said for many of the artists we worked with in the show. When an exhibition closes what remains? Documentation, maybe a catalogue, discussions like this. But I also wonder what happens to the sensorial and temporal experiences of being in a room with objects? Perhaps that's another project though.

**MEJ:** That's probably a good place to end, thank you both so much.

**List of projects represented in the exhibition**

- The Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI)
- Shaghayegh Cyrour, *Klozar Weaving Project*, 2015–ongoing
- Jeremy Deller, *After the Goldrush*, 2002
- Furkart
- Futurefarmers, *Seed Journey*, 2016–ongoing
- Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 2013
- Xandra Ibarra, *Training for Exhaustion (For The Unintelligible)*, 2015
- MAPS, Master of Arts in Public Spheres, projects: *Belalp, Beyond the Timberline* (curated by Hannes Brunner, Petra Koehle & Sibylle Omlin, 2012), intervention by Martin Jacob; *HomeZone: Shared Space and Artistic Engineering* (curated by Sibylle Omlin, 2015), intervention by Hannes Brunner; *Constructions Sensibles* (curated by Robert Ireland, 2016), intervention by Alexandros Kyriakatos; *Cerbère – Media Spheres* (curated by Jérôme Leuba, 2012–13)
- Gilda Posada, *Chismeando*, 2015–16, posters
- Postcommodity, *Repellent Fence*, 2015
- Ted Purves and Susanne Cockrell, *fieldfaring*, 2004–7
- Kateřina Šedá, *Bojárt Market*, 2015
- Cassie Thornton, *Secret Chakra*, 2017
- Mark Tribe, *Port Huron Project*, 2006–8
- Lindsay Tunkl, *Nothing Human Loves Forever*, 2015–17



# Becoming a river: Liquid disasters and speculative stories

Notes and documents from the Summer School curated by Cecilia Canziani, Federico Luisetti and Federica Martini at the Istituto Svizzero di Roma, 25 August – 1st September 2019

In 1962, J. G. Ballard imagines a “drowned world” as a result of global warming. The temperature in the Equator is 180°C, the ice caps have collapsed, and Europe is breaking into an archipelago of lagoons. A group of scientists is trying to map the surviving nature in a submerged London city. Artificial lakes, multiple waterfalls and liquid platforms occupy the urban space following the failures of “synchronization” between the rhythm of industrial modernity and that of imperfect nature.

Starting from Ballard's dystopian 1960s cli-fi novel *avant-la lettre*, the Summer School *Becoming a River* brought into question memory and present tense of water-related disasters and hosted at the Istituto Svizzero di Roma a week of aesthetic and scientific discussions and speculations on exceptional floods, inundations, the disruption of dams and artificial lakes.

**Team:** Cecilia Canziani, curator and art historian, Rome; Federico Luisetti, philosopher, Professor at the Faculty for Italian Culture and Society, University of St Gallen; Federica Martini, Head of Fine Arts at the EDHEA – The Valais School of Art; Aurélie Strumans, artist, Assistant at the MAPS – Master of Arts in Public Spheres, EDHEA; Marie Velardi, artist and researcher, Professor at the EDHEA; *with the assistance of* Ghalas Charara, Maëlle Cornut, Patricia Comby, EDHEA

**Guests:** Dayron Carrillo Morell (art historian & PhD candidate, University of Zurich), Dario Gentili (philosopher, Università Roma 3), Wilko Graf von Hardenberg (historian, Max Plank Institute for the History of Science), Aria Spinelli (curator and researcher, Radical Intention), Sergio Sarra (artist), Giulia Fiocca, Lorenzo Romiti (Stalker), Elettra Stimilli (philosopher, Scuola Normale Superiore).

**Screenings:** Ursula Biemann, Deborah Ligorio, Uriel Orlow, William Raban, Maya Schweizer, Marie Velardi and Rhino Ariefiansyah

**Participants:** Omar Adel, Francesco Alberico, Seba Ali, Simone Camerlenghi, Dona Cetoute, Caterina Giansiracusa, Anna-Tina Jedele, Lorenzo Kamerlengo, Gianmaria de Lisio, Andrea Herrera Poblete, Lucia Masu, Carlos Morado, Gioele Pomante, Rachel Nisbet, Gianluca Ragni, Eliano Serafini

Here again the rise of global water levels would have been little more than a few feet, but the huge discharging channels carried with them billions of tons of top-soil. Massive deltas formed at their mouths, extending the continental coastlines and damming up the oceans. Their effective spread shrank from two-thirds of the world's area to only slightly more than half. Driving the submerged silt before them, the new seas completely altered the shape and contours of the continents. The Mediterranean contracted into a system of inland lakes, the British Isles was linked again with northern France. The Middle West of the United States, filled by the Mississippi as it drained the Rocky Mountains, became an enormous gulf opening into the Hudson Bay, while the Caribbean Sea was transformed into a desert of silt and salt flats. Europe became a system of giant lagoons, centred on the principal low-lying cities, inundated by the silt carried southwards by the expanding rivers. During the next thirty years the pole-ward migration of populations continued. A few fortified cities defied the rising water levels and the encroaching jungles, building elaborate sea-walls around their perimeters, but one by one these were breached. Only within the former Arctic and Antarctic Circles was life tolerable. The oblique incidence of the sun's rays provided a shield against the more powerful radiation. Cities on higher ground in mountainous areas nearer the Equator had been abandoned despite their cooler temperatures because of the diminished atmospheric protection.

J. G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (1962), London: Harper Collins, 2014, pp.33–34.



«E dalla baia vediamo New New York  
ordinata dal Monumento Continuo,  
come un gran piano di vetro o di ghiaccio,  
nuvole e cielo...»  
Una foto ricordo del Superstudio  
Studio di architettura e industrial design  
1, piazza di Beltoguardo / 50124 Firenze

82/00



Superstudio, *Il Monumento Continuo, Manifesto New York (in nero e azzuro)*, 1969  
Lithograph, ink on paper, 70x100 cm, Edition 2/100  
Photo: François Lauginie, Collection FRAC Centre-Val de Loire, Gift of the Superstudio Archives, Florence

The words that come to mind most often first came to mind on a spring morning, on my way back from a walk. The water had suddenly lowered, and for a few hours the old walls reemerged, the meadows covered with grass and sand. Erich took me by the hand and then to the window. It seemed to me that nowhere is there more water. I still see the village, the fountain with the cows queuing up to quench their thirst, the barley fields, the wheat fields with Florian, Ludwig and the others who mowed them. [...]

Behind here, above the old town, there's his tomb. It's in a small cemetery overlooking the artificial lake. A few days before putting the TNT in the houses a Montecatini foreman went to Father Alfred to tell him that they would cover the cemetery with a bitumen casting. Then Father Alfred took him by the neck, made him kneel under the altar and forced him to repeat what he had said in front of the crucifix. For the last time, Erich went around all the farms. For the last time, people, even those who had always slammed the door in his face and puffed on him, gathered in front of the church to shout that our deads could not be submerged first under the concrete and then under water. [...]

In summer I went down to take a walk and skirt the reservoir. The dam produces very little energy. It costs much less to buy it from French nuclear power plants. In just a few years, the bell tower that stands over the dead water has become a tourist attraction. At first, the holidaymakers were amazed and after a while, distracted. They take pictures with the church tower behind them, and they all make the same dumb smile. As if under the water there were not the roots of the old larches, the foundations of our houses, the square where we gathered. As if history had not existed.

Everything has regained a strange appearance of normality. On the

windowsills and balconies geraniums have returned, cotton curtains hang at the window. The houses we live in today resemble those of any other alpine village. On the streets, when the holidays are over, you feel an impalpable silence, which perhaps no longer hides anything. Even the wounds that don't heal sooner or later stop bleeding. The anger, even that of the violence inflicted, is destined, like everything else, to slip away, to surrender to something greater whose name I do not know. You would have to question the mountains to understand what it was.

Marco Balzano, *Resto qui*, Torino: Einaudi, 2018.



Deborah Ligorio, *The Submerged Town*, 2008  
Video still, Courtesy of the artist  
Photo: Deborah Ligorio

Bright volumes of vapour through

Lothbury glide,

Bution of

By chemicals

By original usage, a river is

flowing water in a channel with

defined banks (ultimately from

Latin ripa, "bank").

Character

Climatic shifts are known to be

capable of effecting fill or

clearance of channels and valleys;

They can also change the channel

Habit.

Redell Olsen for Roni Horn, "Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)", *Shark*, No. 4, Summer 2002, pp. 70–71.

## Aubade per Il Petrolio

*'Basti sapere che è una specie di  
«summa» di tutte le mie esperienze, di  
tutte le mie memorie'*

*Pier Paolo Pasolini on writing Il Petrolio*

How was the Tiber? 18:10

You know Anthony's lines to chiding Cleo,  
who says his wife is nagging he gets  
home: 18:15

'Let Rome in Tiber melt...Here is my  
space?

Seems the Tiber' 1598 flood  
was huge. Did viewers of A & C's premier  
know the Tiber lapped a metre below  
the Santa Maria Miracolo? 18:16

Imagine Rome's plebeians as a stressed  
mud logging team

Assessing a ruined city, sloughed by  
drear, sludgy streams. 18:21

A river in spate creates faster and  
muddier work. 23:15

If your reservoir's cored, are you drilling  
Bajocian shales?

What car driver pictures you, logging  
in a 'shed of pain'  
after the intact core is cut and lain  
like those fallen Imperial pillars? 23:23

Or remembers the rushed Tiber coursing  
up the street past Canova's workshop,  
and pausing between Psyche and  
Cupid's half-carved lips? 23:49

Now the Tiber's flood channels are paved  
roads  
where cars' lamella flow stalls sight-seers.  
In Rome, petrol runs freely. Can it drown  
hurt like Psyche's at the hands of  
Sorrow? 00:04

A 2 trillion-dollar oil & mineral market is a  
good anaesthetic. 00:34

All wealth's alchemy. Stock markets chirr  
endlessly: *sogni d'oro*. 00:44

I swim from sleep, through clear, sweet,  
fresh water  
to surface as you fin towards the deep,  
leaving grey drizzle and blast walls behind.  
In this oiled world, ripples spread like  
heartache.

My showered hair drips. Can you wash  
the smell  
Of crude and drilling fluid from your skin?  
When my song is better dressed to travel  
I may ask. To clothe it, I climb the tower  
as *papageni* wake and preen  
bright green birds, yawning, soft, serene.

The sea has washed into the air  
salt swirls around me with no care

the sun is lost and bilious  
the horizon blushes, anxious

for the wayward sun, too. I wait  
then, the sun's hull washes up, late

capsized, an ebb tide dragging it  
into the sea air, which fires it

a tender, eye aching orange.  
Buoyed upwards, the sun rains, rains  
orange

over Rome, irresponsibly.  
St Peter's waits, uncomfortably

but grey ticks show the dawn can't raise  
the deep sleep, slicked upon your face. 08:14

Rachel Nisbet



Marie Velardi, *Roma, il Tevere*, 2013  
Watercolor on map, 50×69.5 cm  
Courtesy of the artist, Photo: Vincent Locatelli





Marie Velardi, *Roma, alluvioni del Tevere*, 2013  
Watercolor on map, 50 × 69.5 cm  
Courtesy of the artist, Photo: Vincent Locatelli



Marie Velardi, *Roma centro, falda acquifera*, 2013  
Watercolor on map, 50 x 69.5 cm  
Courtesy of the artist, Photo: Vincent Locatelli



Marie Velardi, *Roma, falde acquifere*, 2013  
Watercolor on map, 50 x 69.5 cm  
Courtesy of the artist, Photo: Vincent Locatelli



Marie Velardi, *Idrometri*, 2019  
Digital photograph series, various dimensions  
Courtesy of the artist



A moment in the walk to the Lago  
Ex-Snia with Stalker  
Photo: Aurélie Strumans

Shortly after Robert Smithson completed his monumental Earthwork *Spiral Jetty* in the summer of 1970, the level of the Great Salt Lake in Utah rose several meters. *Spiral Jetty* was submerged under water and hidden from view for many years. It was only visible by airplane, as an outline beneath the waves. More than twenty years later, in fall 1993, *Spiral Jetty* at last reappeared. Initially it could be seen only during the fall and winter, but now, with the water level continuing to recede, it is often completely dry.

Philip Ursprung, *Allan Kaprow, Robert Smithson, and the Limits to Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013, p. 1.

## The Emergency Suitcase

Among the mute spaces and objects transformed by water above and below the visible world, human beings experimented with new expedients to recover lost objects.

Marine archaeology had undergone considerable development, as had the black market for lost things. Archaeologists and looters patrolled the submerged cities scattered along the perimeter of the island, especially where people were surprised by the storms and quickly evacuated.

Those who had left the coast in the emergency regretted having abandoned artefacts and furnishings left in the evacuated houses; the relatives of the deceased claimed the emotional objects that belonged to the dead.

Alongside the archaeologists in search of artistic finds and significant examples of that piece of history, the looters resold their discoveries in the field of antiques and private collecting. Underwater laid the ancient columns, vases, capitals, menhirs and the most impressive works and then junk and articles of all kinds, abandoned voluntarily or involuntarily by their owners.

After the coastal city was made safe by demolishing or reinforcing the unstable buildings, the area was opened to the first sporadic visits of its original inhabitants. Some governmental agencies were active in the service of displaced people eager to find lost or forgotten things.

In Marina, the inhabitants had been able to anticipate their departure, selecting what they wanted to take away. Recourse to the recovery agencies was irregular and concentrated more in areas where cyclones had hit unpredictably. Sometimes, the die-hards who had left the city at the last moment and the Advocates of the New World who had renounced all their possessions found themselves returning directly or indirectly

to their steps in search of lost things. This also happened to centenarians or almost centenarians with a fragile memory, like Aunt Lia.

There were agencies with evocative names, mostly run by women, which were linked to the water cult inscribed in the history of the island. Agencies such as The Water Lilies, Divining Wives or Sea Nannies expressed the idea of no longer being at the mercy of the elements, but of taking an active approach in support of life. According to some, the rupture of the waters with the consequent flood had inaugurated the birth of a new era. This new time in history demanded an empathic form of adaptation rather than the submission of life forms other than human. After the catastrophe and the violent transformation of the earth's geography, it was possible to return to the water where life had originated and rebuild a society mindful of its mistakes and open to transformation. Water had destroyed the geometries of buildings and the certainties of humans by flooding the frontiers. Everything had become possible, every form could assert itself in the formless liquid. The shards were the raw material of reconstruction. The fragments of the past could be assembled by experimenting with unprecedented solutions.

In this rich panorama, I turned to a group that operated beyond regional borders and shared an ethic of care and reparation of the past. The SCRIVO<sup>1</sup> were concerned with the conservation and repair of objects of subjective identity value. They published images of submerged places and an archive of the things and testimonies that they had managed to find. In their research, they included the presence of the client, depending on age, physical and psychic form. Finding a lost or abandoned object

<sup>1</sup> Besides being the name of an NGO in the story, in Italian "scrivo" also means "I write".

could mean climbing the walls of a building, as well as diving underwater and entering the submerged rooms with cylinders. If the object was found in the emergency room, precautions and organization became complicated and even dangerous. The clients were subjected to a detailed interview and asked to tell their lives before the exodus from the city, and the reasons for their wish to recover the specific object. ...

It was Chiara who dealt with my case. I met her in Portoterra in a cafe with a view of the port. She had very black eyes, straight black hair and olive skin, the typical features of the island and the people of the interior.

During the whole interview, she was never distracted for a moment. She was always attentive to my every movement and reaction and never diverted her eyes from mine. She recorded our conversation with my signed authorization while at the same time filling out a form on her portable screen. The audio recording would be part of the SCRIVO archive. Chiara told me that through their work, they wanted to record a painful piece of history that seemed to be submerged like many coastal cities on the island. She had lived for some time in the central city after her exodus from the southern coasts and had had the feeling of continuing to live in apnea. The displaced people were rebuilding a new life by watering down memories of the past. Heaviness continued to reign in the souls, just as it had in the years before the relocation. Few shared their history, which remained most frequently hidden. Their silence was a ploy that made it possible to look forward while running the risk of being overwhelmed by memories in the most unexpected moments.

Chiara had become a SCRIVO to recompose the deep fracture that had broken down the perception of her own history and reflected the stories of others.

The sound archives made it possible to create a space for the unspoken, and the recovery of objects filled the gaps in lost memories.

Chiara listened, recorded, took notes and watched me in silence in front of the expanse of rippling water.

Telling my story I had the impression that the sealed container inside my head emptied, letting the sharp and multiform objects that pressed outwards slide. ... She confided to me that listening to the stories of the coastal refugees made her think about when they and the other SCRIVO women penetrated the safety chambers still unaltered and dry. The water that flooded the spaces allowed the life cycle to reactivate and time to flow.

My request was to find Aunt Lia's emergency suitcase.

Presumably, it was still lying in the entrance of her apartment submerged and protected inside by the windows and the door with waterproof and anti-theft locks. I had begun to imagine it, to dream about it and to desire to recover it.

Lucia Masu

“Fieldwork is central to this ontological orientation because it locates the research within time, space, and the obstinacies of physical existence. Fieldwork takes place in a series of present moments. There is something absurd in trying to locate and define the qualities of a particular place based on flowing water; one can only hope to get an approximate test result, and the researcher and artist both know that even when the results are returned from the lab, the water will have already changed. However, the classical scientific method is still the most attentive form of observation we have, the most focused advertence one can grant any object under investigation. As a gesture of earnest civil concern for water quality, there is certainly some merit in this acute, focused attention. For me, the purpose of measuring and obtaining quantifiable water data was less about determining the variable degree of water pollution than it was about the care brought to learning about it. [...]

Before it was tamed by engineers, the Nile was more generous and democratic: with every high flood, it evenly spread its fertilizing mud over the entire valley. After hydraulic structures were introduced, chemical fertilizers began to be used and market dynamics were established through the political mechanisms of agricultural subsidies. The seasonal occurrence thus became a matter of the social sphere. It is in pivotal sites like these where geophysical and social processes most dramatically intertwine.

With the infrastructural intervention of the Aswan High Dam in the watercourse, the ecology of the Nile inevitably changed. The fish that migrated from Ethiopia through the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and back were interrupted by this monumental architecture. It is important to remember, however, that the hydraulic regime of the Nile was already altered a century before by the construction of a

series of barrages designed to raise the water line on the upstream side in order to feed irrigation canals without the use of pumping, but they had unintended consequences. The barrages reduced the velocity of flow, which diminished the supply of oxygen. This process facilitated the anaerobic decay of organic pollutants, infecting pools and, eventually, the land through the millions of irrigation canals. The result was an insurgency of tiny pollutants that reconfigured Egypt on a molecular level. While environmental engineers had a tremendous impact on the hydraulics of the Nile by regulating its velocity, gauge, and seasonal flows, the variations of water quality—based on its salinity, acidity, oxygen content, mineral composition, nutrient systems, organic pollutants, suspended particles, and silt—largely escaped human control. Although the hydraulic regime of the Nile was deliberately changed, the biological and chemical composition of the water was inadvertently though equally affected.

These water transformations in Egypt allow for the detection of emergent forces as various combinations of natural, technological, and social processes alter realities. Such modified water chemistry transforms soil quality, interferes with land management, drives urbanization processes, and disrupts food supply chains, infiltrating the human sphere through multiple venues and illicit channels. These components do not line up as a simple causal chain of reactions, as they constantly shift and create strange feedback loops—nor are they solely the result of specific economic policies. Each element interacts to create hybrid ecologies in which global organizations, desert developers, and tiny pollutants all forcefully affect the water and topography of Egypt.”

Ursula Biemann, *Metachemistry and Other Planetary Perspectives*, in Davis, H. and Turpin, E., eds., London: Open Humanities Press, 2015, pp.54–57.





Ursula Biemann, Main irrigation canal of Toshka, giant land reclamation project on the Upper Nile, Lake Nasser created by Aswan High Dam, Video stills from *Egyptian Chemistry*, 2012, Photo: Ursula Biemann



# Yard art: Fugitive Encounters and the Aesthetics of Fugitivity

Paul Goodwin

## Introduction

In this text I want to respond to the problematic of disappearance in art by focusing on curatorial and theoretical research I undertook for the exhibition *We Will Walk: Art and Resistance in the American South* which I co-curated with artist Hannah Collins at Turner Contemporary in Margate, UK from February 7 to September 6 2020. The exhibition showcased works from African American artists in Alabama and the surrounding states of the American South through the lens of 'yard art' and the precarious ecology of fugitive practices that simultaneously embody an aesthetics of disappearance and refusal while at the same time being subject to the destructive forces of racism and extreme economic inequality.

Most if not all of the works in the exhibition *We Will Walk* were created in and for yards: front yards, back yards, gardens, adjacent parcels of land and woods. By curating an exhibition such as *We Will Walk* for the express purpose of giving these works wide exposure, historical and social context and a place in the sphere of cutting edge contemporary practices where they invariably belong, we, the curators, have nonetheless contributed to their displacement and dislocation from the sites where they were produced in the first place. In other words, we contributed to the process of their disappearance. The yard as a site of artistic and cultural production has a very long history but has had relatively little documentation or study outside of a number of anthropological studies and the rare but seminal contribution of pioneering work by art historian Robert Farris Thompson within the context of his history of Afro-Atlantic or Black Atlantic visual culture (Farris Thompson, 1983).

In our curatorial statement for the second room of the exhibition, Hannah and I speak about the 'yard as witness' – the yard as a space for gathering, making and remembrance. In this room we made the argument that the yard is not just a passive, neutral space or decorative location for showcasing the sculptures, paintings, drawings, quilts and other beautiful art works that are in the show. We argued that the yard is also a site of production; an important cultural and spiritual sanctuary and an expressive space. We wanted to make a statement in that room about the experimental as well as the ephemeral nature of the yard as a location of artistic production

that has been neglected in mainstream accounts of art history. We speculate that through ‘yard shows’ African American artists from the South developed new languages and forms involving highly specific use and re-use of found and sometimes created materials.

In this text I want to develop this line of thinking about the Southern yards as experimental spaces and develop it further by engaging with some more recent thinking about black aesthetics and the black radical tradition, particularly in relation to what might be called ‘fugitive practices’ or the arts of refusal. It may in fact be possible to think about yards – in the context of artistic production by African Americans in the South – as being laboratories or experimental spaces of fugitive practices. By fugitive practices I mean in the sense theorized by Tina Campt where she argues that fugitivity – originally in the form of the runaway slave – necessarily involves “... *refusal* as a generative and capacious rubric for theorizing everyday practices of struggle often obscured by an emphasis on collective acts of resistance” (Campt, 2019). In this conception of fugitivity which I draw on in my argument, refusal, resistance, and contestation are central features. In my observations of the works of Southern yard artists I not only discern a historical connection to the territories, landscapes and struggles of fugitive slaves but further there are forms of fugitivity and radical refusal encoded into the very works themselves, the locations in which they are produced and in the ways in which one is often obliged to ‘encounter’ and experience them.

I will make my argument in three parts. The first part will examine the notion that the ways in which we experience yards can often be characterised as ‘fugitive encounters’ where people are in some cases confronted with shifting and ephemeral compositions. They are assemblages and environmental formations that do not readily yield up stable meaning as ‘art’ understood in a conventional sense, blurring the boundaries of fine art, popular culture and vernacular traditions. The second part looks at scholarship on yards and their structures and physiognomy in the African American South, while exploring their grammar of fugitivity and disappearance. The third part then focuses on some theories of fugitivity and makes the case for an understanding of yard art and yards themselves as experimental spaces of fugitive practice and resistance.

### **Part 1: Fugitive Encounters – approaching the yard**

There is a long history of accounts of encounters with African American yards, gardens and plots of land going back to detailed descriptions of slave quarters and tenant life where many African Americans claimed their home ground, buried their kin and engaged in spiritual practices of remembrance. In his classic 1912 work “Autobiography of an ex-Coloured Man”, writer and activist James Weldon Johnson recalls early memories of his family’s yard:

“I have only faint recollection of the place of my birth. At times I can close my eyes and call up in a dreamlike way things that seem to have happened ages ago in some other world. I can see in this half vision a little house...I can remember the flowers that grew

in the front yard, and that around each bed was a hedge of varicoloured glass bottles stuck in the ground neck down. I remember that once, while playing in the sand, I became curious to know whether or not the bottles grew as the flowers did, and I preceded to dig them up to find out; the investigation brought me a terrific spanking, which indelibly fixed the incident in my mind” (Johnson, 1912 cited in Gundaker, ed., 1998: 4).

Johnson’s memory of his family’s yard evokes a hazy, dream like quality in which multicolored bottles are mistaken for flowers, an indication of the poetic and sometimes surreal aspects of the yards. It’s not exactly clear when the tradition of what came to be known as the ‘yard show’ started. Accounts of encounters by outsiders with yards shows become more numerous in the early twentieth century but particularly after the late 1960s and 70s in the wake of the upheavals to the social and racial order in the South of the Civil Rights movement. Numerous anthropologists, folk historians and an art historian called Bill Arnett (who later went on to found the Souls Grown Deep collection) began to record environments with art objects amassed along roads and in front yards, back fields and the woods across the South. These assemblages included discarded television sets, fans, auto parts, bottles, abandoned appliances, toys, broken furniture, and other found items, often combined with features of the surrounding landscape – trees, plantings, lined walkways, rock boundaries, swept ground, and fencing. Curator Joanne Cubbs has argued that “many of these object clusters have their origins in the secret displays at early African American grave sites and continue the practice of commemorating

ancestors, recording the past, and providing conduits between this world and the next” (Cubbs, 2011).

Cubbs notes that in approaching the yard, their qualities of camouflage or fugitivity become furtively apparent:

“To the uninitiated, black yard constructions appear to be only piles of junk, a purposeful deception that once prevented their discovery by a brutal white overculture with a long history of suppressing or destroying African American cultural expression. Once again, oppression necessitates a strategy of disguise, and clandestine messages are hidden in the seemingly mundane. In the covert lexicon of African American yard shows, throwaway objects assume many meanings and associations that vary with the individual maker” (Ibid.).

We could say that how the yard is invariably encountered or, as many white outsiders have termed it ‘discovered’, is part of its constitutive fugitivity – blink and you will miss it. It disappears. Yard art requires intense looking. Yard art’s sense of camouflage and fugitivity requires you to look again and to look differently; to ask the questions “what am I looking at? An art work? A pile of trash? A disorganised pile of junk and material? A form of landscaping? Or a neo-conceptual joke?”. The fugitive dilemma that confronts the outsider is cogently captured in an account by a prominent photography curator from Atlanta of his first visit to the yard of artist Lonny Holley in the summer of 1988. The curator’s account is both evocative and highly instructive of the kinds of encounters that prominent figures from the art world have



had with art produced in African American yards. The curator describes his visit to Holley's yard as part of an excursion on the trail of his research into two famous white photographers who had documented the lives of people in the South, Walker Evans and William Christenberry. The language used is akin to that of a colonial explorer visiting a strange and foreign land that both fascinates and provokes fear in equal measure:

“Lonney Holley's home, just on the edge of the Birmingham Airport was our first stop. It was a revelation that contradicted many of my cliched expectations about eccentric folk artists. After passing through his chain-link gate, we were immediately enveloped in a strange world where manifestations of Holley's vivid imagination popped out of the open spaces between the dense growth of trees and scrub. The dirt road into his compound was like a neutral zone surrounded by animated figures resting against the trees and peering-out between the openings in the brush. The feeling was both engaging, and a little threatening making me almost prepared for a surprise ambush like in a Hollywood adventure film. These strange figures and sculptures appeared to emerge from the debris haphazardly, yet at the same time seeming to be in a process of returning to earth” (Southall, 2004).

Aside from the obvious colonial undertones of the attraction-repulsion dynamic present in the curator's address he does go on to make an important argument about the challenge of photographing these kinds of environments. He is notably struck by the way these spaces, with their seemingly endless accumulation of objects and sense

of always-on-the-edge chaos, defy effective capture by the lens. He states:

“The experience of Holley’s and other great folk art environments is not looking at or into it, like in a photograph or traditional pictorial space. Instead, the power comes from being part of it, being enveloped on all sides, even overwhelmed with the chaos of the images and ideas” (Ibid.).

The curator here in some sense captures an important paradox at the heart of yard art spaces – or rather the dilemma of photographing it or capturing it within frames and technologies of representation such as exhibitions (including *We Will Walk*): the yard resists representation, it eludes being captive to fixed points of view. In other words, it is a fugitive space that resists being captured on anything other than its own terms.

The example of Lonnie Holley’s space also reminds us of another vital aspect of yard art environments which in many ways complements their fugitivity: their precarious, fragile and ephemeral nature. The incredible yard environment that Holley had cultivated for many years next to the airport in Birmingham was brutally bulldozed in 1997 by airport authorities (who had collected Holley’s work) to make way for a runway that was never built.

My own encounter with the yards in 2019 on a research trip with Hannah Collins is also worth noting in terms of my own observations not only of the complexity of the works themselves but also in gaining an understanding of the orientations of some artists who, adopting what might be called a ‘trickster mode’, constantly evade attempts to fix their work into standard ‘art’ interpretations. In the summer of 2019, I

visited the yards of both Dinah Young and Emmer Sewell in Newbern and Marion, Alabama with Hannah Collins who had seen both on many previous occasions. Before the visit I had spoken with Hannah who had briefed me on the poetic and abstract nature of many of the assemblages in Dinah and Emmer's yards and their vulnerability to destruction and disappearance. I had also read accounts by Bill Arnett and others about the enigmatic and elusive nature of both of these legendary yard artists whose works by and large (apart from a few works by Emmer) had largely escaped capture by museum collections and consisted of complex assemblages and environmental interventions.

Dinah Young lives in Newbern, Alabama a small town in Hale County that was once a commercial centre for the cotton plantations in the area. To get to Dinah's yard you have to turn off the main street in Newbern and follow a windy path into the woods. On arrival I saw an unswept space with many cluttered objects, apparently random arrangements of junk, clothing, pots and pans and other stuff covered in blue tarpaulin sheets. My eyes flitted about searching for the 'art' in this seemingly rather unstructured place. We soon met Dinah who was immediately welcoming and engaged in a general greeting and small talk before trying to coax her to speak about her art and how she makes her works. As I looked closer at the various arrangements and piles of objects stacked into precarious but stable assemblages I began to see evidence of Dinah's method of what I thought of as 'barely-there art'. What she makes can be seen as a form of environmental management or intervention

based on rigorously meticulous and forensic observations of nature and the space around her which influences and shapes her aesthetic choices and placements. In thinking about Dinah's work, aesthetics takes on a meaning much closer to the original use of the word referring to sensory feelings and emotions rather than the 'beauty' or 'taste' of objects of art. I still to this day don't think I've fully grasped what exactly her art consists of but it has nevertheless left a powerful impression on me; a sense of warm, lyrical poetry and a strong spirituality which Hannah's panoramic photographs in the exhibition ventured to convey. Every attempt to pin Dinah down both visually and in conversation – to get her to admit to her artistic and creative 'genius' – is doomed to fail. She prefers to speak about 'storage' and 'management' rather than 'making' or 'art'.

"I find the best way is just to give it all up" – she says when I ask her about her approach to accumulating all these objects and stuff. "Life ain't nothing but promises. Do you see anything out of it? I don't! I like to see what I had but it's gone!" she says. Then the conversation would always veer back to Dinah speaking about animals, especially her dogs and other animals that she interacts with in her yard.

The writer Theophus Smith who encountered Dinah's yard in the 1990s argues that Dinah's work is an art and craft of concealment or disappearance both in relation to the art works themselves and the way the artist positions herself in relation to her art (Smith, 2001: 362). Citing the writer Ishmael Reed, Smith argues that Dinah's disavowal of her art, her 'performance' of refusal and disappearance, is in fact a

cunning protection strategy that shields her from the vicissitudes of the hostile, racist environment in which she lives and also the art world which has become increasingly interested in her work. Smith argues that by her disavowals, Young appears to be instinctively protecting herself from caricature as a “crazy woman” on the one hand, and from censure as a hoodoo practitioner or “conjure woman” on the other. Here he was drawing on from Ishmael Reed’s powerful observation that:

“The assumption that art is only white man’s work is built into the very culture itself. Art which pays homage to the idea of reaching all of society and influencing it, becomes embarrassed when it is actually expected to do so. ... [Works of art] which seemed like revealed truth when [presented] by the white artist have tended to cause doubt and embarrassment when [presented] by a black one” (Reed, 2011: 362).<sup>1</sup>

Emmer Sewell is an artist whose work is represented strongly in *We Will Walk* by Hannah Collins’s photographs of her yard with Emmer’s house at the centre of the images. Emmer’s house comprises a display of objects and installations from political posters and imagery to careful assemblages of everyday household goods and arrangements of household pottery. There is also her iconic ‘scarecrow’ assemblage which adorns the poster of the exhibition and makes references to Black nationalist colours and activism as much as it does the functional work of scaring off strangers and crows. For many years Sewell has been gathering junk from “here and there” and turning it into sculpture throughout her yard just outside the small town of Marion not far

1 Ishmael Reed quoting the ‘young White painter’ in Alex Gross’ writing in *The East Village Other (EVO)*. See Reed, I., “Introduction”, in *19 Necromancers from Now* (1970), New York: Doubleday, 2011.

from Dinah's yard in Newbern. Bill Arnett, the collector, observed that few people understand her works with its sophisticated and mysterious forms of language and placement that only she seems to be able to comprehend. As with Dinah she has always been reluctant to discuss her motives for making them. "I just pick up junk and piece it together. It ain't nothing but crazy stuff", she would often tell Arnett and others that approach her yard. Having met Dinah I was even more excited to meet Emmer. Hannah and I drove past where we thought her yard was located a few times looking for her signature mail box – itself an enigmatic piece of improvised sculpture – but eventually when we found it the yard had been abandoned, much if it decayed and lifeless, and Emmer was nowhere to be seen. Once again, the precarity and ephemeral nature of these vulnerable and fugitive works made itself felt much to my chagrin. We later found out that Emmer, now in her late 70s or 80s, had been moved into a home. The reality of the harsh socio-economic contexts in which these yards exist – a constant struggle to survive poverty, neglect and racist hostility – hit home to me. The fugitivity of these works and their eventual disappearance have a material basis in the historical violence and ongoing predicament of the racial and social inequality of the American South.

## **Part 2: Yard Scholarship**

An important part of my research for this exhibition involved taking a step back and casting a wider lens on the yards themselves: where do they come from? What is the history of yard art? What is the scholarship on yard history and how can we account for the

structure and physiognomy of yards? There is an extensive anthropological literature on yards in African American culture and in the wider African diaspora but the work of anthropologist Grey Gundaker and art historian Robert Farris Thompson stand out as the most influential accounts.

Gundaker maps yards and yard art to what she calls 'grounding home ground' by which she means the central importance to African Americans since slavery of making and cultivating a sense of 'home ground' often in the sites where parents, siblings and ancestors were buried (Gundaker, 1998). Some of the rights of the living in a place therefore derive from proximity to the family dead. This proximity spawned a complex network of commemorative practices in or near the home that date at least from the era of enslavement. These practices were also embedded in and linked with ancestral practices occurring in many areas of Africa especially the Kongo area and religion in West Africa from where a large number of enslaved Africans were brought to America. In her analysis of the development of yards, Gundaker makes an interesting observation about differential African and European American relationships with the land. She discerns a significant distinction between *landkeeping* – an African American ethic of reciprocity between people and their location as evidenced in African American yards and *landscaping* – the craft of staging and maintaining vistas, which was the mainstay of European and White American principles of gardening and garden design (Ibid.).

Art historian Robert Farris Thompson also traces African American yards and yard art to funereal practices and burial

grounds but for Thompson this history is strongly bound up with the powerful and ongoing influence of Kongo spiritual and cultural traditions which form, he argues, the essential backbone to understanding the specificities of African American art histories (Farris Thompson, 1998). Farris Thompson traces the influence on yards of Kongo derived spirit vessels or *minkisi* – adornments that hold the spirit such as bottle trees. Like all *minkisi* (spirit catchers/vessels), he argues, African American yard shows carry a double edge: “Power to give and to take back, to greet and to defend”. Yard shows assimilate the artistic and philosophic values of classical Kongo culture which manifests itself across several recurring motifs and visual languages such as: rock boundaries; mirrors on house porches, “to keep certain forces at a distance”; jars or vessels, placed by the main door to the porch, “to send evil to it’s sources”; motion emblems, like wheels, tires, hubcaps, hoops; and trees hung with shiny bottles, or light bulbs, tinfoil, or shiny metal disks and sometimes the bones of animals. These “decorations” or emblems may seem casual to persons passing by but the sheer repetition of themes, across many African American homes and yards throughout America (not only the South), suggest a common historical lexicon of yard practices as evidenced by yard shows. Much of the language of the visual culture of the yards can also be traced to the trickster tradition of deliberate disguise and subterfuge for protection in African American and African diaspora visual cultures. Yards and the artworks displayed in them embody a DuBoisian sense of double consciousness, of encoding and withholding information that



they do not want to communicate to white overseers and hostile outsiders.

### **Part 3: Yards and the aesthetics of fugitivity**

I want to conclude by returning to Tina Campt's articulation of fugitivity because it relates very strongly to the fugitivity of the encounter with the yards, the terrible history that produced these fugitive encounters and the aesthetics of the works themselves. How can fugitivity be defined? In the recent literature of radical black studies questions of fugitivity and refusal have come to the fore in terms of thinking through political strategies of resistance and in theorising about the ontological definitions of blackness in a time of renewed and urgent concerns over the fragility of black life and the resilience of black sociality. The writing of photography and black studies theorist Tina Campt in her research on Black fugitivity in image culture has been particularly influential and is very relevant for my analysis of yards and yard art. Campt defines fugitives as those who do not conform to the places assigned to them in relation to the 'proper'. For her fugitives "cannot or do not remain in the proper place, or the places to which they have been confined or assigned" (Campt, 2012). Campt thus goes beyond the notion of the fugitive as engaged purely in acts of flight and escape. Campt finds fugitivity in a range of practices that are out of place and that inhabit the everyday lifeworld of average black folk not just the overt acts of rebellion of the fugitive. Everyday minor acts of refusal, resistance, and contestation are central to Campt's fugitivity.

She states “**refusal**: a rejection of the status quo as liveable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation i.e. a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible; the decision to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented, using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise” (Campt, 2019).

This conceptualisation of the cultural power of refusal’s ability to channel negation as a generative and creative source of ‘disorderly power’ to embrace the possibility of other modes of living, perfectly captures the spirit and dynamics of yard art and its modes of disappearance. The fugitivity of art produced in the yards is arguably related to the constitutive and paradoxical nature of the yards themselves as ‘public’ and therefore highly visible sites. On the one hand the artists want to show their work, to make manifest their creations to local communities and peers sometimes even with a view selling works. On the other hand that showing and mode of display had to be tempered, disguised, and even at times rendered subversive or hidden, due to the long history of racialised terror in the Black Belt of the South where any signs of overt recalcitrance, deviance or protest could attract unwarranted attention with potentially catastrophic and deadly consequences. The art and even the yards themselves therefore often had to be fugitive, embedded and camouflaged in ‘everyday practices’ by design. In many ways it is analogous to forms of improvisation in music produced under slavery and Jim Crow. The ‘secret’ or meanings of the works or yard arrangements are embedded in

and concealed by the forms and languages that had to be invented and evolved for communication and survival.

This radical fugitivity has arguably given birth to new aesthetic languages or evolutions of radical vernacular practices such as roots (often used for medical and spiritual purposes) and the repurposing of objects and materials – collages and assemblages but also exuberant forms of abstraction and conceptualism that poses crucial questions for the rethinking of the artistic genealogies of those much heralded ‘modern’ forms. One of the many remarkable legacies of yard art and its constitutive fugitivity and disappearance, is that it connects abstraction, assemblage and conceptualist gestures to a form of ‘big hearted’ exuberance and joyfulness that can provide an antidote to the preponderance of a soulless seriality and decontextualised reductionism often found in some expressions of mainstream modern art.

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# Visual Arts and Cultural Resistance during the Chilean civic-military Dictatorship: The University of Concepción, a Local History<sup>1</sup>

Leslie Fernández  
Barrera

A new concept of teaching and expression must aspire to re-establish, first and foremost, a vital connection between society and art, remove the artist from his or her isolation and integrate them into the vast process of realizations which burst from a mode in motion.

*From the Preliminary project for the of the Art Institute, University of Concepción, 1971.*

The election of Salvador Allende as president of the Republic of Chile on September 4th, 1970

<sup>1</sup> This text emanates from the collective research *Concepción te devuelvo tu imagen. Arte y política 1972-1991.*

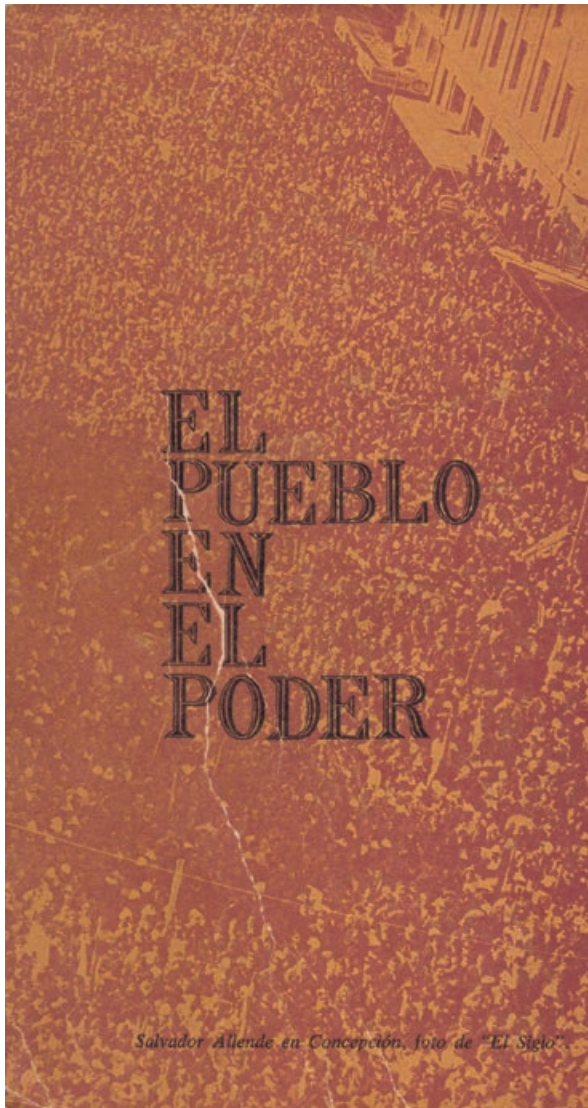
supported the implementation of the University Reform under discussion in various institutions of the Chilean university system.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, this was in tune with the changes that were occurring in Latin America and the world.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, at the local level, Allende's triumph would allow to materialize the standing objectives of the 1968 Reform in Chile. A document issued by the Honourable Superior Council of the University of Concepción stipulated the vital importance of strengthening the relationship with the working class. This further played out in a social approach that aimed at connecting the community, the city and the region to the university, in order to transform it into an open and pluralistic institution.

A fundamental part of the structural changes prompted by the Reform in the University was to unify the departments of similar studies in Institutes. This approach aimed at enabling further integration between their students and professors, facilitating the communication and exchange outside of the institution, especially with those who found themselves in educational and socio-economic inequality. Another important change concerned the inclusion of the university community, consisting of students, administrators and professors, in the election of the leadership of the institution.

In 1971, the plans for an Institute of Art were established as a way to articulate different artistic areas at a higher educational level. An institute with a contemporary approach was being presented, which meant the rejection of "crafts-only" artistic teaching and an opening to the political,

<sup>2</sup> The universities that were part of the higher education system and that were affected by the university reform (1967–1973) were: University of Chile, Catholic University of Valparaíso, Catholic University of Santiago, Federico Santa María University, State Technical University, University of Concepción. <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/602/w3-article-705.html> (last accessed: February 9th, 2021)

<sup>3</sup> Support of the Honourable Superior Council of the university. Formed from October 1973 to June 1975 by the Dean, scholars and students aligned with Allende's government. On September 20th, 1973 the Council is dismantled, same for the collegiate body.



# EL PUEBLO EN EL PODER

*Salvador Allende en Concepción. foto de "El Siglo".*

## VOTO DEL CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE CONCEPCION

El Honorable Consejo Superior de la Universidad de Concepción, ante el histórico veredicto del pueblo de Chile —4 de Septiembre de 1970—, acto por el cual fuera elegido y libremente honrado como Presidente de la República el Dr. Salvador Allende, en una contienda democrática de resonancia continental y mundial, viene en declarar lo que sigue:

—La elección del Presidente Allende es la respuesta integral y popular a cuanto significa la construcción de una sociedad nueva y de un hombre nuevo, lo que coincide plenamente con los principios que informan la misión de esta Universidad Reformada.

—La elección del Presidente Allende es un imperativo del más alto humanismo para los trabajadores universitarios, y nos exige situarnos en definitiva ante la realidad que debemos transformar junto a la clase trabajadora y demás sectores populares, de acuerdo con un compromiso estricto entre lo que pensamos y lo que hacemos.

—La elección del Presidente Allende y la decisiva responsabilidad de la ciudad y de la región en ella, ponen de relieve otra vez la idea de que siempre fue Concepción un ámbito dinámico en la historia de Chile desde las primeras décadas de la independencia nacional.

—La elección del Presidente Allende para esta Universidad templada en la lucha constructiva se identifica con un impulso plenamente compartido por el desarrollo de esta Cuenca geo-económica y por la liberación creadora, tanto nacional como latinoamericana.

Por tanto, este Consejo Superior saluda en Salvador Allende al Presidente electo de Chile, y acuerda realizar unas Jornadas Universitarias de Estudio y Compromiso con esta hora de cambio social que vive el país para analizar y, necesariamente, defender el triunfo popular que podría ser vulnerado por un fraude constitucional.

El pueblo en el poder (The People in Power), back cover of the *Revista Nueva Atenea*, No. 423, Universidad de Concepción, 1970

social and economic transformations experienced by the country and the world at the time (Mellado, 1972).<sup>4</sup>

As a consequence of this, the Art Institute made its way within a departmental system, that featured the creation of five divisions: Musical Arts, Plastic and Visual Arts, Theatre Arts, Choir and Orchestra and Education through Art, which sought to join together these artistic areas and pedagogy.

<sup>4</sup> Participated in the preliminary project of the Institute of Art: Atahualpa del Cioppo (Theatre), Nelson Mellado, Ana María Castillo and Ovide Menin (Music) and Tole Peralta (Plastic and Visual Arts).

The departments, as mentioned by the regulations, group professors and students by activities of similar disciplines. They constitute a basic unit of this organization [...]. By no means could the department transform itself into a closed substructure, static, devoid of any connection with the other departments.<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned, the Art Institute fundamentally aimed at forming contacts with the community and raising social awareness through artistic practices. The Theatre and Art Education sections were particularly active in this respect. For this reason, they were the first to be removed in the so-called Restructuring that took place over a month after the *coup-d'état*.

Thus far, the Art Institute approach to its departments organisations had reaffirmed the democratic role that art was thought to have. This included as beneficiaries the students of the institute, the university community, and also, in a broad sense, the outsiders of the institution, especially those who found themselves educationally and socioeconomically disadvantaged.

## **1. The Department of Plastic and Visual Arts, 1972**

It is through the Chilean-Mexican Fraternal Cooperation Plan (1960-1964) that the Mexican government donated to the University of Concepción the building that would host the *Pinacoteca* (Art Gallery). The gift implied the University of Concepción commitment to open an Art School and provide professional training for local

<sup>5</sup> Preliminary project for the creation of an Institute of Art, 1971.

<sup>6</sup> Curriculum of the School of Plastic and Visual Arts, 1971.



artists. Later, in 1965, the mural painting *Presencia latinoamericana* (Latin American Presence) by Mexican artist Jorge González Camarena was added to this donation and inaugurated in 1965.

The wish to create this department was initially mainly driven by Tole Peralta together with Iván Contreras and Eduardo Meissner. The aim was to generate a contemporary educational centre that would be responding to the economic, social and political changes and provide an alternative to traditional art teaching. In the brief time the Institute of Art was functioning before the *coup-d'état*, numerous outreach activities were realized. Fine arts workshops were coordinated together with the Education through the Arts Department as part of an initiative connected to the University Reform, that was also related to the *Unidad Popular* (Popular Unity) education approach.

Although the military government's intervention affected the entire University, since the Department of Plastic and Fine Arts was a new body, it became an easy target to intervene. Because of its recent establishment, it had a small group of professors, the majority of them activists close to leftist ideologies, a situation, which contributed to the strong feeling of fragility.

## **2. Restructuring the Institute of Art and Department of Fine Arts, October 1973**

The *coup-d'état* took place over a year after the formation of the Department of Fine Visual Arts.

Thereafter, on September 20th, 1973, an immediate intervention occurred in Chilean universities, and intensively so in Concepción, given its notorious left-wing position. Part of these first measures taken

aimed at centralizing the power to the Dean and the dismantling of the Superior Council of the University, composed of academics and students. Starting in October of that same year, the institutes and their departments were restructured with implications from academics all the way to the administration.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, within the Institute of Art, the reorganization consisted of eliminating the departments which demonstrated greater social commitment, and in particular Theatre Arts and Art Education. As a consequence of this, the faculties of these departments were suppressed by the Dean's authority and the Institute of Art was disassembled, reducing their five units to merely two.

This happened under the rule of the first Dean appointed after the *coup-d'état*, Guillermo González Bastías, who considered the department's focus irrelevant to the curriculum (Frindt Garretón, 2006).<sup>8</sup> Years later, in the 1980s, with actions that we now consider as resistance, the practices of the popular workshops were reactivated by collectives of students and alumni of the Department of Art such as the *Taller Marca* (Marca Workshop) or the *Teatro Urbano Experimental* (Urban Experimental Theatre) – collectives that existed outside of the boundaries of the institution.

Santiago Espinoza, a student of the first graduating class of the Fine Arts Bachelor's Degree, states that despite the tense environment, the years of dictatorship were full of work, camaraderie and production, though everyone had to proceed with caution and gather in hidden places. Nevertheless, the loss of individual freedom

<sup>7</sup> During the restructuring period, the Plastic Arts studies limits the study duration to only 4 years, first 2 are high school and the following are bachelor. There is no further mention on Doctorates.

<sup>8</sup> Guillermo González Bastías was Dean of the University of Concepción from October 1973 to June 1975.

and vast prohibitions did not mean a shutdown of the artistic activity, not even during the first years of the military regime. Owing to the restrictions on the right to assemble, some of the spaces in the centre of Concepción became unofficial meeting points composing an underground route for artists from all disciplines. Some places publicly displayed an official activity related to food and sustenance, such as the restaurants El Castillo, El Lord, El Nuria. Other spaces were of more selective nature, including the University Parish or the Society of Carpenters and Woodworkers.<sup>9</sup> Many of them also hosted different artistic and cultural activities of the opposition, though with caution. In these places, projects and exhibitions slowly enabled the organization of collective actions:

I was at the University on September 11th and the first thing they attacked was the Art School and the Institute of Philosophy. They said that artists are dangerous [...] so they shut down the school and the mere fact that we faced a political cataclysm of repression made us reflect our experience through our artwork. Since it was forbidden to meet and exhibit, as almost everything was forbidden, we established hidden meeting places, contacts for those silenced, going to another country to exhibit under another name. In those times there was a common enemy.<sup>10</sup>

While the majority of the faculty remained in silence, intimidated by the threats of the university control,

<sup>9</sup> The Society of Carpenters and Woodworkers is located in Aníbal Pinto Street and Ejército. It is a well known venue and fundamental place of resistance in the dictatorship, where many artists of different disciplines, mostly music and plastic arts, met.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Santiago Espinoza, March 2015.

some of the professors who were committed to the initial project and had clear leftist

connections, were dismissed from the newly organized department. The case of the painter, engraver and muralist Julio Escámez is meaningful, as he managed to hold his professorship for one year only. Before the persecution which he would suffer due to his political activism, he took refuge for one year in the home of friends, first in Concepción and later in Santiago. In the meantime, he arranged protection abroad, in Costa Rica, where he finally lived in self-exile until he passed away in 2015. An important reference about his political approach is the creation of the mural *Principio a fin* (Beginning to end), in the Hall of Honour of the Municipality of Chillán, that was inaugurated by President Salvador Allende on July, 1972. After the *coup-d'état*, the mural was one of the first works which the Military Government wanted to dispose of, and was eventually covered by paint and later destroyed.

Situations of violence and repression were common in the Department of Art. Searches were regular, and justified with the excuse that there could be hidden subversive material, or other claims and rumours coming from within the school itself. Various raids focused on the administrative offices, professors' lounge, workshops and lockers. These situations created an environment of suspicion and mistrust between colleagues and within that period, students were also detained, while assistants and professors were threatened to be fired due to their political views.

Apart from these actions against academics, there were many acts of censorship that affected the production and exhibitions by both professors and students. Professor Jaime Fica recalls that, to avoid

11 Víctor Ramírez, Carlos de la Vega and Santiago Espinoza, students and engravers of the Department.

the prohibition of exhibiting his



Exhibition documentation of *Arte acción* at the Chilean North American Institute of Culture, Concepción, December 10th, 1979 (Munael Fuentes Archive / Iván Cárdenas/ Pilar Hernández)

artworks, he entitled them with ambiguous names when in reality the images were representing the repression and the violence which they were living. This was the case of the exhibition *Raíces Precolombinas* (Pre-Columbian Roots) in the University Hall in 1980. A more radical aspect of the censorship is described by Santiago Espinoza, engraver and student during those years:

They invited us to exhibit in Mexico, through a professor that was exiled [...] Everything that exited Chile had to pass through the Museum of Fine Arts, and from there (Mexico) they sent us a ticket, and between the three engravers we decided for Víctor<sup>11</sup> to travel [...] Osvaldo Cáceres, an architect and old friend, helped us. When the engravings arrived to the museum for the seals, the military men said to us:<sup>12</sup> we have all the background

information of the exhibitors and these works cannot leave, then they took them to an incinerator and they burnt all 33 works.<sup>13</sup>

However, according to Espinoza, this action of censorship did not end with the burning of the engravings, and continued when the military raided the School of Art. They were looking to burn the woodcut blocks and the patterns of those same engravings, so that artists would consequently lose the possibility of ever.<sup>14</sup>

Under the severe leadership of Dean Guillermo Clericus, a chemical engineer and military man (1980–1987), recognized by many as the toughest, professors Tole Peralta and Pedro Millar were expelled. The first, who was at that time director of the *Pinacoteca*, was accused of appropriating artworks housed in the University's collection. This event was never clarified and prevented any form of mediation even though Peralta had been the main driving force of the Department of Art. As for Millar, explains Iván Díaz,<sup>15</sup> his expulsion was due to the solo exhibition of engravings that took place in the University Hall in 1977,<sup>16</sup> where engraving – seen, at that time, as a threat – was presented as a tool for communication. It is possible that along with that reason, the authorities questioned his closeness to the students, and his constant meetings with them outside of class

hours, which was absolutely prohibited. Millar is remembered to this day as a professor who encouraged students to work, exhibit and develop critical projects, both individually and

of Art of the University of Concepción, developed collective exhibitions but with individual works such as in the University Hall in November 1974.

12 Dismissive name to refer to the military.

13 Interview with Santiago Espinoza, March 2015.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Iván Díaz, a student of the Department of Plastic Arts in 1976. Creates the Marca Workshop in 1982 with Ricardo Pérez. Interview via Skype (Chile – Germany) October 2015.

collectively, in accordance with the founding pillars of the art school and its specific attention to the contexts of art.

Eventually, in the 1980s, the changes imposed on to the Chilean universities were considered a counter-argument against the 1968 reform that they formally repealed it. In Concepción, this meant the official shutdown of the bachelor studies in the Faculty of Humanities. From this moment on, only Pedagogy studies were allowed, because the rigorous State control of the educational system was expected to apply to the teachers' own education as well. Since then, the study program was named bachelor's in education, major in Fine Arts.<sup>17</sup>

### **3. Students' organization and mobilization**

The students of the University of Concepción began to organize in a more public manner starting in 1983, the year in which the Student Federation (FEC) was re-established. Manifestations began within the campus as a direct reaction to the leadership of Clericus, who, along with implementing strong internal control measures, authorized the entry of *Carabineros* (police) into the university when he considered that orders were being broken. Among the manifestations which began in a collective manner in the early 80s, are the "sittings", which consisted of coordinated actions where the students of different faculties would do sit-ins at the University Forum at noon, remaining silent, demonstrating this way the discontent with what was going on in the country, as well as internally.

16 Grabado, Pedro Millar solo exhibition, University Hall, 1977.

17 The termination of the Bachelor of Arts program was extended until 1990, the same year in which it reopened due to the insistence of the students who entered in the last year of the dictatorship and continued in democracy.

In March 1984, the mechanical engineer student

Caupolicán Inostroza was murdered by the *Carabineros*. The incident emanated from the strong repression of the protest initiated in the university and aiming at reaching the city centre. In an action condemning this incident, in April of the same year, art students organized the painting of a mural near the Law School as a tribute to the murdered student. However, the mural was erased with red paint that same night and the slogan “Nation and Liberty will attack” was written on it. A second mural was insisted on and located within a sector of the forum, which featured the text “Here you will be resurrected every day without ever having died Caupolicán”.<sup>18</sup>

The beginning of the 80s were fundamental years for the students who started more organized protests against the regime, and also against the regulations of the University of Concepción. This brought about a complicity among the different departments, allowing each student to contribute from their own expertise towards the strengthening of the opposition movement.

#### **4. Art action, an action-exhibition against censorship**

I believe this is justified among other reasons, by the fact that just as a landscape can be used as a reference, human relationships or human tragedy, one can also take as a reference a sociological fact, anthropological or the ecology to do an art action or an object of art action.<sup>19</sup>

Pedro Millar

The systematization of the control and surveillance over art and culture imposed by the military *Junta* was achieved

18 <http://metiendoruido.com/2013/11/30-anos-de-la-fec-de-la-radicalidad-a-la-cooptacion/> (last accessed: February 9th, 2021).



through the Ministry of Education law No. 19, signed off on January 14th, 1976. The regulation stipulated in the following terms: “All the initiatives of both public and private origin which relate to cultural issues, must be subjected in first stance to study and revision by the advisory committee of the Ministry of Education and the Cultural Advisor to the *Junta* Government” (Sagredo Astudillo, 2013). If we add this regulation to the searches in the institutions for higher education, plus the restructurings implemented right after the *coup*, then we see how the state apparatus was interfering in every context related to art and culture.

Because of this control, artists from different disciplines began to reconsider their way of working, both in terms of languages and exhibition sites, while they also revisited the themes addressed by their works. In this context, new forms of action-based art proved the obsolescence of traditional art languages. This implied a reflection over a notion of art merely oriented towards the production and execution of a material object. The stake was to unite art and life, going beyond the limits of both, introducing the factor of temporality and in many cases, the ephemeral.

At the end of the 70s and during the 80s, artists who worked individually or collectively started to form larger groups to demonstrate with more strength against the systematization of the military regime. This movement dealt with a moment in which they sought to go beyond the simple logic of resisting, and to claim the place of art through concrete actions and facts that, in most cases, symbolized similar states of the complex situations the country was going through. However, it

was necessary to use non-literal suggestive resources strategies, which implied a greater processing of work methods. The state's intervention directly influenced the lives of individuals and the practice of their freedoms. This made it urgent to act taking advantage of the fissures left by the imposition of power. That's how, for example, in 1979 arose in the city of Santiago, the collective of actions CADA<sup>20</sup> and Alfredo Jaar began to carry out his urban actions in the streets of the Chilean Capital, one of which was called *Estudios sobre la Felicidad* (Studies on Happiness).<sup>21</sup>

In this context of state control over universities, one of the first exhibitions censored in Concepción was *Arte Acción* (Art Action, 1979), organized by Pilar Hernández and Manuel Fuentes (Munael), students in the last years of art studies of the University of Concepción. For this exhibition, the University Hall<sup>22</sup> was arranged as a venue, thus they had an official authorization along with a promotional poster stamped by the Office of Extension directed at the time by Hagen Gleisner.<sup>23</sup> The poster announced the opening for December 3rd, nevertheless, very close to that date and without any formal justification, the exhibition was suspended. Pilar Hernández recalls the event as follows:

I got the University Hall for our artistic action, which was authorized by the Extension of the University of Concepción.

Manuel and I brought our posters to the Extension office, which itself was our artistic action. Suddenly, I get a call and they tell me it was no longer

20 <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/602/w3-article-3342.html> (last accessed: February 9th, 2021).

21 <http://www.alfredojaar.net/> (last accessed: February 9th, 2021).

22 The University Hall is located in the underground of the University Gallery, in front of the Independence of Concepción Square. Currently named David Stitchkin.

23 The position stated in the University of Concepción's records is Vice-Dean of Extension and Communication. From 1975–1981 engineer Hagen Gleisner was in charge.

authorized. I don't know how things were managed in order to un-authorize.<sup>24</sup>

Although the authorization being revoked first meant a halt to the activity, Hernández and Fuentes quickly organized a new space that could hold the initiative without any issues. Through its Head Director James O'Callaghan, The Chilean North American Institute of Culture hosted the exhibition. The show opened one week after the original date on Monday, December 10th, 1979. Due to the initial censorship, it generated great intrigue. As it was an exhibition supposedly showing "nothing". Much expectation was built around it, mostly from the artistic circle linked to the University of Concepción, which resulted in a full room of attendees. *Art Action* was a unique exhibition, announced in its poster as conceptual art, which differed from the academic education of the Department of Art. However, there was a clear alignment with artist and Professor Pedro Millar, who taught art that reached beyond technical skills and disciplinary boundaries. Millar complemented his teachings with texts from authors who combined written language and contemplative images, such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Marshall McLuhan, and Roland Barthes.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, Millar also integrated subjects derived from varying source, including sociology, anthropology or ecology.<sup>26</sup> Former students Pilar Hernández and Manuel Fuentes recognize Millar's teaching as a great stimulus for

developing works that would reflect on social occurrences, with links to mundane, considering art as a tool for

24 Interview with Pilar Hernández, Santiago, December 2015.

25 Iván Díaz, artist and student during those years, refers to these authors as being included in Millar's lessons and as part of his research. Interview via Skype (Chile- Germany), October 2015.

26 Interview with Pedro Millar, cit.

communication and furthermore would encourage workgroups or collaborations.

We both proposed this, but we needed a lot of visitors, many people because it was an art action, therefore the public was essential. Word spread and everyone was coming, so when for no apparent reason they unauthorized the exhibition, we began looking for another venue and the Chilean North American Institute of Culture offered us a hall, which in the end was for the worse because this hall was over packed.<sup>27</sup>

We can interpret this statement as an ironic action against the control and censorship that the military government was instituting, through the attempted purging of art remains from the *Unidad Popular* (Popular Unity) period. Furthermore, there was a deliberate attempt to control the works exhibited and their subjects, especially those questioning and protesting the military impositions. Through this art action, artists sought to counter the limitations of creating, gathering and exhibiting. Along these lines, the organizers decided to coordinate an exhibition, showing just a few posters on the walls and ironically taking advantage of the permanent sign in the hall which stated: "It is forbidden to touch the artworks". The text of the two posters exhibited, the only works mounted in the hall, read the following:

THIS ACT IS MANIFESTED THROUGH  
GESTURES, MOVEMENTS, GROUPING OR  
DISPERSION OF SUBJECTS INSIDE THE  
HALL. ALSO THROUGH A DISCURSIVE  
SITUATION.

27 Interview with Pedro Millar, cit.

INTENTION:  
PRESENT THE FACT NOT AS THE  
FORMULATION OF ADDITIONAL MESSAGES  
TO THIS EXHIBITION HALL, RATHER AS THE  
EXPERIENCE OF MESSAGES THAT ARE  
DEVELOPED AND EVOLVE IN A SPECIFIC  
SPACE AND TIME.

The exhibition consisted of an empty hall, where the public – their bodies, their movements, their dialogues, their physical presence in the space – was part of the *work*. Pilar Hernández and Manuel Fuentes affirmed that through this exhibition they sought to make a work of sociological nature, which would allow to study and document what happened with this broad group of people, that had been called to an exhibition of “nothing” where the underlying socio-political climate they were currently living could not go unnoticed. There was a feeling of uncertainty and concern between those who participated, nevertheless, others understood very well what it was aiming at and what it meant to gather in those times. Throughout the opening, flyers were handed out to the public which were practically a manifesto in light of what was happening in the hall, their testimonies were audio recorded and photographs on the current situation. Those who attended *Art Action* were mostly students of the Department of Art and related university faculties, while among the professors only Alvino<sup>28</sup> and Paulhardt were present. Iván Cárdenas, one of the art students assisting this action, realised the photographic documentation asserted that the organisers and their

28 German artist, educator of the Department of Plastic Arts in the University of Concepción that appears in documents in 1977.

closest circle were considered as conflictive by the Head of the Art Department.<sup>29</sup>

## 5. Audiovision, the retrospective of an exhibition

For the first time, the public participated in the motivation itself, meaning, the initial process of artistic creation. In a second phase, this public will be able to see the result of this motivation and the situation that gave form for the documents.

Interview Manuel Fuentes (Munael), Laraquete, January 2015.

On January 14th, 1980, a month after *Art Action*, the second official part of this exhibition called *Audiovision, retrospective of an exhibition* was also mounted in the Chilean North American Institute of Culture. It exhibited the audio and photographic documentation collected in the December 10 opening.<sup>30</sup> This second part was considered a socialization of the documents of the previous experience. Journalist Anamaría Maack reviewed both exhibitions in an article for the *Diario El Sur* titled *Arte acción o arte vivo* (Art Action or live art),<sup>31</sup> where she suggested that an avant-garde raised new codes for art in Concepción. The two exhibitions gave way to many collective actions and most likely influenced the creation of a students' group formed

<sup>29</sup> Iván Cárdenas, a student of the 1976 cohort, points that this group of students was very active in organizing exhibitions outside of the traditional circuit and was subjected to pressure from the management of the Department, run by Eugenio Brito. Interview conducted in Concepción in January 2015.

<sup>30</sup> La Gaceta's article points out that the exhibition *Audiovisión*, prior to being shown in the Chilean North American Institute of Culture, was mounted in the very same Department of Plastic Arts, which could be understood as a clear provocation against the censorship they experienced from the Department of Extension.

<sup>31</sup> Maack, A., *Arte acción o Arte vivo*, cit.

from several cohorts of the Art School who much later would publicly appear under the name of *Art80 Collective*. In relation to this, Manuel Fuentes remembers: "We did many art

actions very underground, which only we, the close circle, documented; but we don't know where they are, no one knows that we did them". Fuentes himself said that they would only peruse these actions because of their concerns: "We said to ourselves, let's do an opening of nothing, for example. We did not know at the time how to name that language, we just performed it. If they won't allow us to exhibit, let's do something where there is nothing, an opening of nothing".<sup>32</sup>

*Action Art* and *Audiovision* were two fundamental examples of what we can call the resistance from the Visual Arts in Concepción, which emerged as actions against the control and loss of freedom that was imposed by the Military Government and their interventions in the universities. They have a special value because they were made before the massive demonstrations in the university environments and in the streets of Concepción. Without a doubt, both experiences marked a before and an after in local artistic development, not only for the organizers but for the spectators and actors as well. Possibly, this marked the beginning of self-organised artist groups which emerged under the wing of the University's School of Art, and, from there, started to demonstrate against the complex political and social situation that surrounded them. From these actions emerged the *Experimental Urban Theatre* (1980), the *Art80 Collective* (1980), and the *Marca Workshop* (1982).

## **6. As a way of closure**

Examining the recent history of Concepción, and more precisely what happened after the *coup-d'état* in 1973, provides us with a better understanding of our present, as it helps identifying

32 Interview with Manuel Fuentes, Laraquete 2015.

the processes that have that surrounded them. Due to the significance of the University of Concepción as the main institution of higher education in the region, the military government's interventions caused a series of readjustments that affected the many academic disciplines that were taught. Furthermore, they caused the dismantling of the University link with the community, a consequence that still affects the academic endeavour of Concepción.

When reviewing the sources for a history of Chilean Fine Arts in the last forty years, we see that what is called Chilean art is mainly shaped on works by artists or collectives from Santiago. No attention is paid to the specificity of each regional and urban art scene outside the capital – although speaking about “Chilean art” as a comprehensive category is virtually impossible. This is due to a lack of research and documentation on the Visual Arts of Concepción, during and after the dictatorship, which may be explained because of the protagonists' proximity to the events; the wound is still open. Secondly, the lack of disciplinary training to develop more specific research, for example in theory or art history, is a situation that is likely being repeated in other cities in Chile. Nevertheless, in these past few years, we have seen an increase in research concerning local subjects, predominantly from people who did not directly experience the dictatorship. These were mostly developed under the academic system, and may point at a wider acknowledgment of inhabiting a territory that has its own history as well as to a greater sense of empowerment. The possibilities that emerge from these investigations allow for cross referencing between social, political, economic, and cultural fields, and enhance an understanding of relationship between these diverse areas.



Through the examples studied in this article, in addition to others that were not possible to include, several acts of resistance of the visual arts against the civic-military dictatorship are revealed. This resistance did not only play out in the production of artworks, but also included teaching formats at the University of Concepción as well as the media, broadcasting projects and exhibitions that included controversial gestures. The review of interviews, personal files, press clippings, and institutional documents have allowed us to assemble, like a puzzle, a local narrative for the visual arts of Concepción. Achieved, undoubtedly, from a targeted perspective that does not include condescending art, which stayed completely aloof and indifferent in the face of what had transpired from the history in the making.

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# The Earth Doesn't Tell its Secrets, His Father Once Said

Noor Abu Arafah

**Chapter  
01**

**'Rumour'**

**05**

**A small space, on the second floor of a city-centre apartment block, is where the rumour was created. Or was it found? I can't remember the exact date it happened, but it must have been sometime between May and June 2005. I'm sure because it was already dark by six o'clock.**

**The rumour started slowly and in such a gentle way, that initially its form was pleasant. Its announcement became a celebration; men were dressed in tuxedos, women wore fancy gowns. Holding glasses of wine and champagne in their hands, one could interpret happiness and pride in the gestures and faces of those who had gathered. Of all the city's inhabitants, there were around fifty people who had the honour of hearing the news first. They were mainly lawyers, doctors, architects, and artists, all crowded in the small space.**

Two years later, the rumour circulated faster and faster through the groups of people who spread it. When those who'd heard the rumour met accidentally, it took over the conversation. It made people feel closer, as if they'd known each other since a long time ago, just because they'd heard the same news. Consequently, their listeners also passed it on, adding and deleting parts until eventually, everyone had their own narrative.

The rumour self-generated this way until it grew out of control. There were times when its presence in the city was impressive, and other times that it suddenly disappeared, as if it had never even existed. When that happened, it was as if all the memories that saved it had been lost.

The rumour tricked both its believers and its denouncers. Some witnessed it directly; they were present when it was born and accepted it as truth. This group later split in two: people who still welcomed that it was going to happen, and others who later lived in denial of it. Others mostly heard it from people, who heard it from other people; everyone was convinced it was mere gossip, but still spread it. They enjoyed it, talked about it, talked it up, talked it down, and

heard many different versions of it. For them it was out of the question and unattainable: the situation didn't help, and the timing wasn't right.

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It's a nice idea, with good intentions, but it will stay so—as something imagined. It will never happen, and that's not really what its purpose is, it's just a beautiful rumour forming dreams in people's minds. This group eventually also grew divided, when some started doubting its impossibility. Each group remained concerned with its own subjects and conjecture. The rumour, however, was never completely hearsay alone. Each group in the city had evidence to prove their discourse and point of view. It started with something ambitious, that held the prospect of change. It even triggered other rumours. For the first two years of its life, it was perceived this way by both groups. Since then the rumour had kept going and growing, disassembling and reconstructing itself in different shapes. Changing consistently, it would turn from itself, stray far from its original form, and then quickly turn back. Ultimately, for various reasons, they both ended up orbiting around fact and fiction.

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Two days before the rumour started, Ismail, a painter by night and head of a social development institution by day, received a call from his old friend. Imad was also a painter, but a full-time painter. He studied art in Cairo twenty-seven years ago, as did most artists of his generation. At any rate, Imad invited Ismail to join him on an excursion. Despite the mysteriousness of his phone call, Imad couldn't be taken totally seriously, Ismail knew his friend was playing with him by only mentioning the word 'place', Imad couldn't elaborate more. Nonetheless, he confirmed that it would delight Ismail, and added there would be a bigger surprise besides the place: great news was going to be announced, and Ismail should be there to hear it personally. Apparently, he, as well as many other people in the city, would be fascinated. Although Ismail had no idea what the news might be, or where it would be shared, he was intrigued. His sense of curiosity added much anticipation, Ismail liked surprises. He decided to join, and with much confidence, trusted that his friend had a good idea. Before they ended their conversation, Ismail confirmed his interest to Imad and asked if it would be suitable for his young daughter to join too.

I was one of those who witnessed the event when I joined Imad and my father, Ismail, who always enjoyed me calling him by his first name. Ismail was highly inquisitive on the way. He was unable to remain calm, and kept asking Imad about the space: what was it related to? Could he give a hint? Or simply tell him where we were heading? Imad insisted not to answer, opting to keep quiet altogether. From time to time he would smile at Ismail's stress, and try to convince him it wasn't a kidnapping, adding that it was supposed to be a surprise. How could it remain one if he told him what it was? So he smiled, but would not answer my father's questions. Ismail tried to distract himself from his mind—which was eating itself to try and work out what would happen—by looking out the window and counting various things on his fingers, although I couldn't be sure what.

On the way we passed Ismail's office in the city centre; apparently, the place we were headed was not far now. Imad parked the car. The three of us were a bit anxious, by this time including Imad. We entered through a small green door on a four-story building and began climbing the stairs. When the first flight ended we paused.



Imad said, 'Not yet, there is one more floor; it should be on the second.'

- 10 He led us until we'd ascended the additional flight and pulled back a door to enter a corridor, where we immediately encountered a group of people standing outside an apartment, drinking wine, and eating snacks. Ismail and I felt partially underdressed, especially because several people turned their heads to observe us enter while they continued vaguely talking to their companions. I could see from the way Ismail was looking at Imad that he was mad at him for not, at least, giving him an idea about what to wear for the mystery excursion. Imad entered the space, then my father, and I after them. We were surprised indeed to find ourselves in an art space, as we knew there wasn't one in the city. There used to be one in the centre, as well as a gallery in the old town, but neither was active anymore. Later, we understood this was the new venue's first exhibition. It was a small place, and even though not many people attended, there were enough to fill it.

**It seemed as though only local residents knew about the event, but of course, not all of them: mostly those who showed an interest in art, or who worked in the art field. I recognised not a single face. It must have been through their discussions the people who were there came to know about the opening. I couldn't recall hearing anything at all; from neither the television or the newspaper; about the new space or its opening event. Even Ismail and I knew about it by pure coincidence through Imad, who had an invitation from a friend unable to make it.**

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**Few of the visitors knew beforehand that the night held an announcement of such importance. It seemed people instinctively regarded it as a certainty, and something that would bring much revision along with it. No one knew what it was exactly, or how to appreciate it. But of course, at the time, no one would have guessed it might be a rumour. That was the first time I encountered it personally; yet somehow, when I think about it, I feel that maybe it's a figment of my memory, my imagination, or a hallucination. Maybe none of it actually happened; the call from Imad, our visit to the space, the people in the event, the announcement of the**

rumour...nothing. What's more, I don't have any evidence—except my father Ismail, who is also a dreamer—to prove that it really happened. It's not so clear to me whether it indeed took place, or whether I fabricated it; however, it still exists as fragments in my memory.

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I remember I was next to Ismail while we walked a line alongside the high white walls that held the artworks, taking his time, looking at them one by one. He stopped in front of each painting and gazed at it, moving his eyes over every detail as if he was looking for something. When he couldn't find it, he would proceed to the next painting. I walked with him, not looking at the works, but looking at him, at the space, and the people who were attending the event. I watched the guests' clothes, the frames of the paintings, the captions, and the way in which people talked to each other. It had been a long time since I'd attended an exhibition. I had a strange feeling about the space itself. The floor, covered in ceramic tiles, gave me the distinct impression I was in an old house similar to my grandparents'. This one, though, seemed colder in its vacancy.

Not only the floor gave me this impression, but also the arrangement of the volumes. I could imagine where the bedrooms may have been, which part was a kitchen, and which a living room. Considering its structure, it could function perfectly as a house. Besides, it nestled on the second floor of the building—which, I assume, had families living in it; another obvious hint that the gallery had been a home in its past life. This was confirmed after I needed to use the toilet and discovered a giant bathtub.

Once greater numbers of cultural and art spaces started emerging in the city, I began to realise that most were converted houses. They were old houses, but maybe not all like the one I visited on this occasion. This one wasn't as old, or beautiful. When I went back home, I drew a layout of the space, trying to imagine the bedroom, kitchen, living room, etc. After the visit, I started making layouts of each art space I visited in the country, imagining what each room might have been in the past.

The works shown were all paintings that hung on the walls; at the time, exactly what I expected to see at an art exhibition. I don't think I was the

only one who thought this way. Other visitors must have also been under this impression, or at least the majority of them, because this is what the city's art spaces usually showed in them. Some people moved through the space looking at the artworks on display, others socialised and had side discussions. I was young at the time, a naive companion of my father on his visit. I would mainly listen to others, but sometimes I couldn't follow the conversations. All I was hearing was sound with no words in amongst the crowd. People couldn't stop talking and eating, which created a great ambience for me to focus on the appearance of the space.

The speech started when a woman—the director—took the microphone and asked for people's attention. Silence was ushered in only very slowly. Two individuals in the back paid no attention, they turned red when all they heard was themselves, just as others heard them talking over the proceedings. The director, as well as a curriculum committee representative, were speaking in turns with such harmony between them; it was as if one person was talking with two voices. They talked about the new art space and the exhibition on display that eve-

ning. During the speech some people continued whispering to one another, others were forcing themselves to focus and feign interest. This continued until one of the space's most important goals was about to be announced, the news which Imad, Ismail, and many others including myself, were waiting for. The room was mesmerised, alert, curious, and ready to hear it, the air pulsed with exuberance. Before giving it away, the director described how the project would change the city, transform it, and elevate the status of the whole country. They elaborated on the story behind the project: how it started, its motivation, and the core idea. The objective was a bigger project for which this art space would be the heart: the first of its kind in the city, and even the country. The project's announcement caught everyone's attention. There, and at that time, is when and where the rumour started.

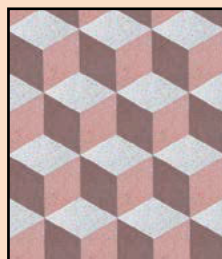
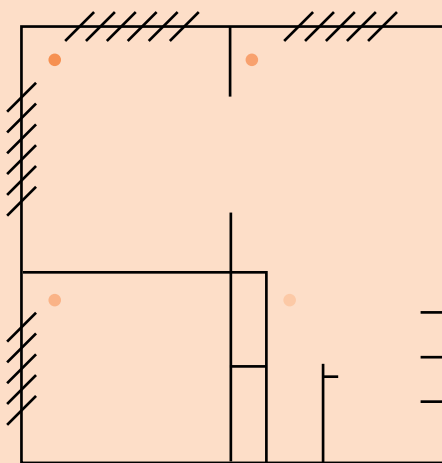
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That was twelve years ago today. Whenever one could be sure it was a rumour, something occurred to prove it wasn't, it was actually going to materialise. The ones who believed it would explain to others they were in denial; that they

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were self-haters, standing against improvements taking place in the city. Although, when something was really happening, no one could prove it. All there was were thoughts and ideas, still far from concrete reality.





18

- Living Room
- Eating Room
- Bedroom + Bathroom
- Kitchen

**Chapter  
03**

**'The First Museum In The City' #1  
May 2005—Current  
Jerusalem**

**27**

**We'd visited this art space several times, but on this occasion, we discovered it's location had changed. The new premises was also in the city centre, close to the previous one, but was now substantially bigger. Otherwise, it was the same: it was in an old house on the second floor of a building.**

**Even though Ismail didn't like openings, he ensured he was present to hear another speech concerning the museum, and to be updated about the project's stages and developments. Others who were curious would gather for some kind of celebration whenever there was news. People were so extraordinarily excited that someone had even decided to contribute his own collection. At least, that's what I understood at the time. I went to the table where brochures had been laid out and took one for myself, and another for Ismail. Its cover was**

orange and featured an image of a painting by the artist Suleiman Mansour. It depicted a woman wearing traditional dress, I wondered if the influence of the workshop he gave us long ago in Al-Wasiti was still there. She was similar to the woman we'd painted, but this time she wasn't Virgin Mary, she was a local woman. She was looking at the viewer, holding some oranges in her hands. During the twenties of last century, and before, oranges had been so popular in the country they became something of a national symbol. In 1929 they appeared in several proposals for the national flag, one of them similar to the Japanese flag but with an orange in its centre. Jaffa was one of the cities in the area that exported massive quantities of oranges to neighbouring countries. There had been a resurgence in the popularity of the symbol in the seventies, and eighties too, when painters were forbidden to use the colours red, green, white, and black in their paintings. Artists began looking for other colours that could work as national symbols. Many times in exhibitions at that space, or even others, I would find at least one painting with oranges in it, whether it was the fruit or the colour.

I flipped the brochure open and began to examine the pages when, at that moment, it became clear the evening's speech was about to start. Me, Ismail, and the rest of the attendees would learn then that the whole idea of the museum came from a lawyer and his wife, both of whom had shown an interest in art for many years.

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Over time, the lawyer had collected many artworks from across the country, but he and his wife never thought they'd end up having a collection; it wasn't intended to be one from the very beginning. At first, they bought one painting. The director described the story like this at the opening: it started with a lawyer liking an artwork so much he wanted to own it, so that's what he did. Then he became fond of more and more artworks and was wealthy enough to afford what he liked. Besides, prices were not as high in the nineties and before as they are today. By the end of the nineties, the couple became aware they were starting to form quite a compendium, but it still lacked what it needed to make it a collection. It had been a random accumulation, there was no theme; they were aware of that. As a result, they decided to focus on what they added and what kind of collection

they wanted. It shouldn't be predicated solely on works they liked, something else should connect the paintings. They started to buy the works of artists they'd never bought from before. Moreover, they didn't want to procure the works of famous artists exclusively; they collected works from younger generations as well. They selected pieces that dealt with subjects that weren't represented in the collection already; they even started to create a historical narrative based on what the works were capable of constructing. Their collection had since begun to demonstrate a more precise form.

In 2005, the lawyer, and others who had an interest in art and in the city's art scene, made a decision to open a new art space. This was the genesis for establishing a museum that would house the collection.

Over time, the exhibitions kept changing, and the visitors too, but the topic of the museum rarely left the table. I was growing up, and the idea of the museum was growing with me. Four years later, and four years older, the museum had reached the juncture of searching for a space, and I was looking for a space to move

into for my studies. One proposal was for a garage, close to Damascus Gate. Another was for an old, beautiful house on the east-west Jerusalem border. Unfortunately, it was impossible to secure either space.

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Exhibitions continued to accumulate in the institution's history. Since leaving the city I missed many of them, but whenever there was something important Ismail would update me if he remembered to. After nearly a year of not visiting, I finally managed to be there at the same time there was an exhibition opening. I found myself close to my father and two people he knew: Azmi and Nazmi. The speech had ended, and they were still discussing the idea of the new museum. One of them, Azmi; who also worked in the social development institution with Ismail, where he'd spent most of his life; was a great teller of tales. During Ramadan, he held shows in one of the city's theatres, where he would play 'Hakawati,' the storyteller. He wore traditional clothes and, with a shisha in hand, would narrate stories. After this, he developed a keen interest in writing and has since published three

novels. During the course of the conversation, Azmi explained that after all this time the idea behind the museum was still not clear to him. He didn't get it: 'Is it an institution of the kind that gets named after the owners of the collection, as with the Guggenheim? Or the kind for Palestinian art, containing artworks from different collections and artists? What does it mean, a 'Palestinian Museum?' Is it for works by Palestinians? Or about Palestine? Can international artists show their works in it too?'

Nazmi, a member of the future museum's curriculum committee, responded to Azmi by saying that it won't be a museum with one collection procured by one person and his wife, that's for sure. This idea was proposed, but the rejection came from the collectors. The couple wanted to show their collection among others, and they wanted to do something for the city, not for themselves. In response to his other questions, Nazmi told Azmi, with a strict voice as if he was fed up with these kinds of embarrassing quizzes, said he should be aware that building a museum is not as easy as he may think; his questions are a good deal more complicated than they simply sound.

Two more years passed and I would hear less and less mention of the museum from Ismail. Little by little, it started to disappear; and people started to forget about it. Those who used to visit the space to hear about the museum either stopped going or lost interest. Instead, they turned their attention to the exhibitions and artworks on display, as if they were autonomous, unattached to any other imaginary institution.

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The new generation of artists—who'd never heard any of the speeches detailing The Palestinian Museum—started to doubt, based on the lack of evidence, that it had even happened. They only started visiting the space once the museum debate had died down, how could they have believed? Younger generations imagined the whole idea was a collective dream, conjured by people who were interested in art and fascinated by the concept of a museum, a continuation of building a nostalgic future that would take the country to the past more than moving it forward. It was then, for the first time, that the news showed its other face as the rumour. People started to perceive it as such, and the majority wondered how the whole story may have started.



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**The museum had to prove to itself that it wasn't a rumour:**

**The museum is not a rumour..**

**The museum is not a rumour..**

**'I'm not a rumour!'**

**It's coming, the process is taking place, it's going to happen. Sooner or later, The First Museum in the city will exist. The institution's website was updated, and the art space changed directors several times since its move to the bigger location. Tiles were replaced by wooden flooring, and the space had been divided into three parts. The first part was designated for offices, where workers could plan future exhibitions and conduct any correspondence deemed necessary. Another room was allotted to curriculum committee meetings, where developments concerning the museum were discussed. Often, these meetings were open to the public to convey their thoughts. It was hoped through this inclusion the institution could prove itself to a wider audience, and lessen the distance that had been created, allowing people to feel they belonged to it. They ended up deciding it would contain the production of artists in Palestine, the production of Palestinian artists, and art produc-**

tion about Palestine, whether it was produced by a Palestinian or an international artist.

The temporary exhibitions were installed in the second part the new space. A variety of shows were organised there, and included both Palestinians and international artists. I remember one exhibition executed by architecture students from a university in London. Their museum studies professor asked them to design a potential museum for the country, that would be The First Palestinian Museum. From the many designs, one could see some students had been conscious not to reproduce the aesthetic of museums in Europe. Instead, they demonstrated an awareness that any structure should exist in harmony with the rest of the city.

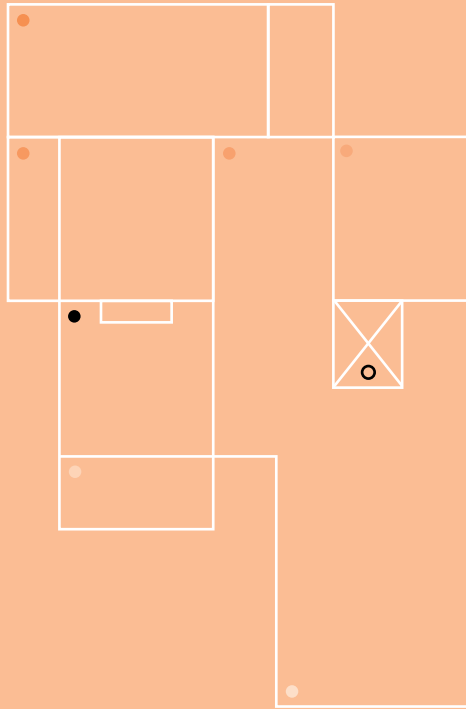
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I was particularly attracted to one design and could see that other visitors were too, although many of them made fun of it. The proposal was a white page with no drawing on it: an empty page. Many people wondered about this one, which leads the professor to give this proposal some context, so he spoke about it and the decision to include it in the exhibition. He explained that the student thought there shouldn't

be a museum in Palestine. He thought there should be neither a design nor a museum because the whole idea of 'a museum' is Eurocentric. Moreover, any attempt to incorporate an Eastern design would be even more problematic.

The third room was equal in size to the exhibition room. For each show in this room, part of the permanent collection would be exhibited. To be honest, it contained a great number of paintings. For many people, it presented the first opportunity to see artworks that were produced in the thirties, forties, and the fifties. Every temporary exhibition displayed different works from the permanent collection. It looked like the collection was never ending, and that new pieces were added all the time.

Another two years passed and the permanent collection was still being displayed in the temporary space. At the openings, I hardly heard a mention of The First Palestinian Museum.



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- Bedroom
- Bathroom
- Corridor
- Livingroom

- Bedroom
- Fireplace
- Lunch table
- Balcony



# Ways of (not) seeing the blind spots in the photographic archive<sup>1</sup>

Federica Martini

There are records in the archives that are unclassifiable or are catalogued in such detail that they lose their way and visibility in the intricate web of key words and cultural practices of a given historical time. To this kind of potential archival aphasia belong silenced or silence-based gestures, as well as documents that are destroyed, forgotten, withdrawn or rejected from existing catalogues.

Seen through the lens of contemporary artistic practices, the discontinuity implicit in a document that eludes archival classification are reminiscent of (and sometimes cumulative to) forms of (im)materialism. These absences invite to inhabit the peripheries of the archive programmatically and to consider their developing constellations of meaning and material traces

<sup>1</sup> The present article is a revised and augmented version of the essay "Maniere di (non) vedere i punti ciechi dell'archivio", originally published in Italian in Baldacci, C. and Cimoli, A., eds., "Archive is Power", *roots&routes research on visual cultures*, Year X, No. 33, May–August 2020.

as alternatives rather than voids. It is probably in this sense that Geoff Nicholson's narrative essay *Hunters & Gatherers* suggests that collecting objects and information is not only a matter of cataloguing criteria (Nicholson, 1991). The deviations, misunderstandings, oversights, remainders and gaps that emerge from reading the documents or from tracing their blind spots also produce narratives: "Dust collects. It falls on old moquette, on walnut veneer, on corduroy and melamine. It settles on picture rails, in the curves of porcelain shepherdesses, in the corners of junk-rooms; ground-in dirt unmoved by dusters and vacuum cleaners; [...] it passes *through doors and windows*, lodges in our clothes and hair, collects in every crevice" (Ibid.).

Dust, which Nicholson treats as a paratext and mechanism for gathering the remainders of official narratives, echoes the complementarity between reading and non-reading that Pierre Bayard associates to Robert Musil's librarian in the novel *A man without qualities* (Bayard, 2007). Of the three and a half million books preserved in the library of the novel's fictional empire, Musil's librarian has read only the titles and synopses: his love for all publications, without priorities or hierarchy, incites him to remain in the periphery of each book and show no preference to one to the detriment of another.

Musil's insistence on his librarian's apparatuses enable an abstract and all-encompassing global knowledge, one that consciously oversees details in favor of a comprehensive official narrative. Furthermore, recalls Irit Rogoff, official histories also bring along a form of narrative dust (Rogoff, 1996). These fragmentary,



granular remainders point at the desire to reconstruct the interrupted circulation of information and speculation about the absent documentation. Along these lines, the missing record is as pregnant as the historical evidence corroborated by archival materials. It allows the “serious chronicle” to be infiltrated with subjective experiences capable of destabilizing the demands that art history addresses to historical realism. For Rogoff, it is not a question of imagining an “alternative factuality” but of “annulling the distance” that academic research establishes between “what is said, who says it and the person to whom the information is addressed” (Ibid.). A comparable dynamic also manifests itself in the photographic practices of the Sixties, according to a new type of vision that John Szarkowski clarifies in the context of the collective exhibition *New Documents* (1967). The show chronicles the passage from documentary photography with social impact to a personal cognitive approach. It emphasizes photography's attention to the “commonplace” of reality and the desire to represent it both with vision devices and with a theoretical framework (Meister, 2015). To this is added, in Susan Sontag's reflections, the desire to consider photography as a material document that can be “reduced, enlarged, cropped, retouched, manipulated, made up” and that, like any paper object, can “disappear, buy value”, and can be “sold and reproduced” (Sontag, 2004). It is at the crossroads between these dynamics that the visual research of the artists Noor Abu Arafah, Maria Iorio & Raphaël Cuomo, Petra Koehle & Nicolas Vermot-Petit-Outhenin and Uriel Orlow on the blind spots in the photographic archive emerges.

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The general question concerns the first part of my title: 'Personal Responsibility'.  
– Hannah Arendt, *Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship*, 1964

In the case of *It Depends Entirely upon the Hue of the Lighting* (2012–in-progress) by Petra Koehle and Nicolas Vermot-Petit-Outhenin, it is the material and immaterial reading of two 1944 color photographs that triggers research on the controversial Farbdiaarchiv zur Wand- und Deckenmalerei fund, now preserved at the Institute of Art History in Munich. As the title of the work suggests, the clarity of a historical photographic document “depends completely on the tonality of the light”. The interdependence shows firstly on the material level involving the camera and the executor of the image, and eventually at the intersection between the commissioner and the photographer’s responsibility.



Rosmarie Nohr and Hans Geissler, from the book Fuhrmeister, C. et al., *Führerauftrag Monumentalmalerei – eine Fotokampagne 1943–1945*, Cologne: Böhlau, 2006. Photo: Koehle&Vermot

Koehle&Vermot came upon these two photographs in 2006, while leafing through the conference proceedings *Führerauftrag Monumentalmalerei – eine Fotokampagne 1943-1945*, which focus on some 39.000 slides produced during a photo campaign between 1943 and 1945 (Fuhrmeister et al., 2006). The Führer had commissioned the campaign to the Reich Ministry of Public Propaganda in order to document the frescoes, murals and other artistically valuable wall decorations of 480 historical buildings dating from the 10th to the 19th centuries. The idea was to collect the photographs into a kind of time capsule that would be used to reconstruct the artwork destroyed during the war.

The two snapshots selected by Koehle&Vermot are featured in full page in the appendix. The one on the right shows wooden scaffolding framing various stucco decorations, mouldings and the fragments of a fresco. On the upper level of the scaffolding, a woman leans over the camera in the act of portraying three white cherubs. The page on the left presents a photographer, black coat and light blue jeans, standing on a precarious pile composed of a wooden box, a coffee table and an antique white chair. At his feet one can sense the presence of a tripod; moving back in perspective toward the left corner of the scene, a studio light directs his gaze toward a mural painting framed by stucco. The backstage of the photographic production points towards an episode of the myth of Cupid and Psyche chosen that develops across nine frescoes painted by Moritz von Schwind in 1838. The shot is by Rosemarie Nohr, born in Hirschberg in 1923, at that point a student at the Leipzig

Institute for Colour Photography founded in 1940 by her teacher Hans Geissler. It was the winter of 1944 and both were assigned by the Führerauftrag Monumentalmalerei to the documentation of the Schwind Pavillon built in 1829 in Rüdigsdorf in the Leipzig area.



Petra Koehle & Nicolas Vermot-Petit-Outhenin, *Führerauftrag*, 2010  
View of the installation at the Shedhalle, Zurich  
Photo: Koehle&Vermot

The slides taken by Nohr and Geissler balanced on scaffolding can be found today in the Koehle&Vermot-Petit-Outhenin archive in Zurich. Their status as informal and stealthy images clashes with the photographs of the murals portrayed for the Führer's campaign. They show one relevant moment where the democratization of colour photography crosses path with the Reich political agenda. For Koehle&Vermot this history also reads in the materiality of the images, which prompts them to engage a series of conversations with Rosemarie Nohr to understand the intertwining of stories and the responsibilities that govern the production of images. In 2010, at the Shedhalle in Zurich, the installation *Führerauftrag* materializes the point of view

of photography through the enlarged image of Rosemarie Nohr bent over the camera. It is not a photographic installation, but an exact, three-dimensional photographic gesture in which there is a strong bond between reference and photography (Barthes, 2003). The central space of the installation, conceived as an empty scene, welcomes art and architecture historian Philipp Ursprung and media theorist Yvonne Volkart in conversation with images and history. Recorded and transcribed, the conversation at the Shedhalle enters the project's archives along with interviews with Rosemarie Nohr. The latter feeds the partition of the exhibition *It Entirely Depends upon the Hue of the Lighting* presented at the Galerie de Roussan in Paris in 2013. At the entrance to the exhibition, a series of monochromes reproduces the chromatic scales of primary and complementary colours on which the colour of photography is measured. This is followed by three colour still lifes created by Rosemarie Nohr during her studies at the Institute in Leipzig. What makes Nohr's photographs possible is, in principle, the ideological encounter between the new colour film that Agfa produced between 1935 and 1936 and Goebbels' partial aesthetic defection from the neoclassical monochrome dictates of Nazi architecture to support the development of "German colour photography" (Berghoff, Kolbow, 2013). Between 1943 and 1945, the group of German photographers hired in the Fürherauftrag Monumentalmalerei, of which Nohr was a member, will be equipped with this film. In the basement of the gallery in Paris, a thick curtain crosses the space in which the artists' interviews with Nohr

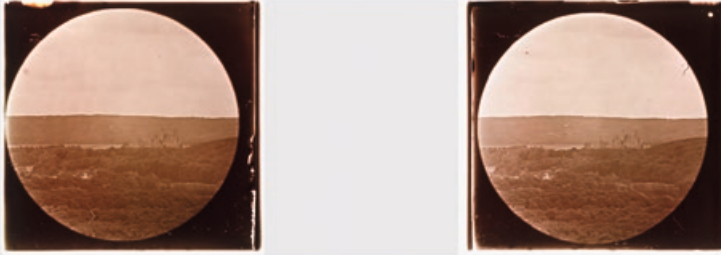
become a screenplay that alternates the voices of three roles, unidentified if not by the responsibility of those who take the floor from the memory of the conversation. The words in the performance situate the chromatic scales, still lifes and photos of Nohr and Koehle&Vermot in a broader historical scene. On the one hand, the responsibility of two individuals who accept to collaborate with the Reich People's Propaganda Ministry. On the other, the magniloquent and identity-related history returned by the works selected by the Reich heritage conservation agencies. In this field of forces, the two informal shots of Rosemarie Nohr and Hans Geissler offer a latent vision of an intimate and precarious act where the constellation of power relations contextualizes the existence of these images: the imbalance of power between the teacher Geissler and the student Nohr; Nohr's collaboration with a project of identity documentation of the Reich and, later, after the war, his involvement in the documentation of the first restorative exhibition of works that the Nazi regime had defined "degenerate art" (Koehle, 2020). The paradox of those who created the images as part of the assignment, recalls Petra Koehle, is that the blind spots and absences of the archives are historically linked to the version of history that was not in power.

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“The archive has become the deliberate and calculated secretion of *lost memory*”.

– Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les lieux de Mémoire*, 1989

As an introduction to the essay *Latent Archives, Roving Lens*, artist Uriel Orlow quotes in epigraph historian Pierre Nora’s reflection on the archive that “secretes” memory (Orlow, 2006). Orlow further describes archives that are swollen with information as part of the post-Industrial Revolution acceleration and the consequent perception of more intensely volatile memory. The question of who keeps the documentary material (institutionally and personally) enters into relation with the archive and the records’ physicality, while also highlighting the subjectivities that produce and take care of memory. In the video *Les Veilleurs d’images* (The Guardians of Images, 2017) these interactions apply to the collection of stereoscopic images gathered by a certain Kostioukovsky between 1904 and 1939, and acquired in 2000 by the Mucem (Musée des civilisations européennes et méditerranéennes), Marseille. This institutional framework further relates to the subsequent digitalization of the images in 2013 with the help of a prisoner from the Maison Centrale prison in Poissy in northern France. Kostioukovsky, a former czarist soldier who repatriated in France in 1915, became an entrepreneur and amateur photographer of stereoscopic images in Paris.



Starting from an in-depth reading of the collection, Orlow reconstructs Kostioukovsky's movements through France and Europe, traces back shifts in the ownership of the images, records the material traces of the archival regulations governing the classification into folders and cabinets. Through these abstract institutional entanglements, Orlow introduces flesh, bodies and materials that emerge from field research; information is collected and analysed, witnesses to the events are met. Aspects of care and conservation contribute to defining the images' visual field and their latent material history. If the photos could speak, the presence of the prisoner-guardian of images would be revealed, whereas his traces are erased by the quality of the images, as his presence "becomes completely invisible when the work is well done".





*Les Veilleurs d'images* focusses on the physical and sensory, material and latent shifts of the images in the Kostioukovsky collection. The camera watches the preparation and delivery of the photographic film slides from the “Arts de la scène” section of the Mucem archives to the arrival and digital treatment at the Maison Centrale in Poissy. The dual channel view echoes the stereoscopic nature of Kostioukovsky’s camera while the wheeled doors of the archive shelves are opened, the documentation boxes are placed on the table, the images are discarded and then thrown back by the gloved hands of a woman in a white coat.

The following screens frame the door of a prison and follow the Kostioukovsky images to the digitizing room – computer, dual-screen, camera, the noise of capturing images – and the prisoner’s gloved hands that dust and (re)photograph them. His voice, transcribed in subtitles, remembers his birth in the Paris region, son of workers, memories of summer family travels, of his grandfather reporter, and slowly gets to his present condition as a prisoner paid four euros per



hour to digitize images. In the video, the places photographed by Kostioukovsky are juxtaposed with the prisoner's personal reminiscences, and the repair of the archive is accompanied by the "construction, repair, restoration" of the living ("Archival work always involves the question of conservation and restoration. There is a link between this work and the repair of the living", says the prisoner).

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So even now that the novel is over, sometimes I dream of these three-black people – Edmonia [Lewis], Sarah [Parker Remond], and Frederick [Douglass] – walking around Rome. Three African Americans, three people who changed the world with their persistence, wandering around the Eternal City... but did the city know about them? That was the question that obsessed me. Did the city know about their freedom?  
– Igiaba Scego, *La linea del colore*, 2020

Uriel Orlow's reference to stereoscopic images produces documentary alternatives

through engaging sounds, voices and visions on the double track of personal and historical memories. In the absence of archives, informal and collateral art historical narrations tend to take the form of rumours, anecdotes and, on an intimate level, become a secret shared by groups and art scenes. This anonymous knowledge is difficult to attribute to a precise historical time, but fundamental when investigating alternative situations to the given institutional context. As Irit Rogoff recalls, their fluidity disturbs our faith in official political and historical representations (Rogoff, 1996). Hence the necessity to review absent information to include these fragile and traditionally marginal data in academic research.

To deal with the total absence of traces that follows the archive's destruction or disappearance, Jalal Toufic proposes a levelling of historical and fictitious documentary sources on the ground that "fiction is a container of historical facts, economic facts and even aesthetic facts and an aesthetic fact is, ultimately, a fact like any other" (Toufic, 2017). Accordingly, objects and photographs in artist Noor Abu Arafah's work contribute to perform the archive in an open speculative reading. The road is opened by Michel de Certeau, who expands on the notion of evidence: "Even objects have memory. The handle remembers who turned it, the phone remembers who answered. [...] It is up to the investigator to learn the language of things, so that he can listen to them when they have something to say" (de Certeau, 1988). Hence, Noor Abu Arafah's investigation follows the hypothesis that a photograph can record information or forget it and therefore hide it. In 2015, her

research into the absence of institutional archives for Palestinian contemporary art led her to explore the work of key artists such as Suliman Mansour, Nabil Anani and Tayseer Barakat. During her research, Abu Arafah met Khalil Rabah's painting *Fourteen Men* from the series *Art Exhibition: Ready-made Representations* (2011) based on 54 photographic documents chosen by the artist and transformed into oil paintings in China. The referent of the painting is the group photo of the artists participating in the collective First Spring Exhibition organized in 1985 at the Al Hakawati Art Center in Jerusalem by the League of Palestinian Artists. Noor Abu Arafah researches information about the thirteen artists, the exhibition and photography. In particular, one artist emerges in the research, Sager Al-Qatel, who died in 2004 in Holland, and on whom information appears inaccessible. To his vision of history, between 2014 and 2015 Noor Abu Arafah consecrates a first video, *Observational Desire on a Memory that Remains* (2015). In the video's two voices, the past of Sager's memory is synchronized with the present of Noor Abu Arafah's research. What speaks for Sager is his black and white photography, which completes in a speculative and sometimes fictitious way the account of the discoveries and memory lapses of the documents interrogated by Noor Abu Arafah to reconstruct the details of the experience.



Noor Abu Arafah,  
*The Magic of  
the Photo that  
Remembers How  
to Forget. Homage  
to Vera Tamari,*  
2018, video still,  
Courtesy of the  
artist

In 2018, Abu Arafah returns to the group photo of the First Spring Exhibition after identifying another absence. The new research phase gives rise to the video *The Magic of the Photo That Remembers How to Forget* (2018). The video explores the portrait of the fourteen male artists participating in the First Spring Exhibition and attempts to identify a fifteenth artist who would have participated in the show although is absent in the snapshot. This absence points at a historical fact that has escaped the meshes of official exhibition history. Or, suggests Noor Abu Arafah's voice, the lack of record results from the voluntary withdraw of history from the image and the exhibition reports. The group photograph of the Spring Exhibition flickers, appears and disappears at the sound of a photographic click. Then it recomposes itself in a sequence of vertical coloured bands pointing at a transmission error and a form of archival negligence that may have caused a loss of photographic memory in the visual document.

Video and photographic memory losses may also depend on the intertwine between the material degradation of documents and the opacity generated by the apparatuses in charge of their preservation. At the centre of Maria Iorio and Raphaël Cuomo's works there is an archival practice that questions ways of reading and accessing documents along with the narration and words attached to them. The time spans that identify their videos' working dates imply lapses, intervals and duration. *Chronicles of that time*, their last video, is no exception, as its production proceeds between 2004 to 2020. Through the montage, the temporal gap between the living moment when their camera recorded the voices and images interplay with the material degradation of the tape and memory reactivation. "How do you tell a story with little that was preserved? With the parts that were left behind, the minute traces left in the margins of events? Or with what was not recorded?", asks the voice off.

If the image cannot produce a complete vision, it can equally function as a suspicion, a clue to past material completeness, offering a pixelated mnemonic view, like an archeological fragment. Or again, missing images and lacunae may otherwise refer to imperceptible historical events. Just like the migrants who land on Italian shores and are made illegal by a law of the 1990s, images can also be clandestine, invisible and undetectable. Parallel to the hushed melodies and fragments of interviews with expelled migrants goes the story of the second, third and fourth century mosaics in the archaeological museum in Sousse, Tunisia. Incomplete, in the process of restoration,



Maria Iorio,  
Raphaël Cuomo,  
*Chronicles of that  
time*, 2014–20  
Video still  
Courtesy of the  
artists



they too take the form of a pixelated image that returns like a visual aftertaste or a song parasitising the memory. History writing here relies on a non-linear channel for storing and transmitting information, including personal memories, archaeological museums and media supports – videotapes or films.

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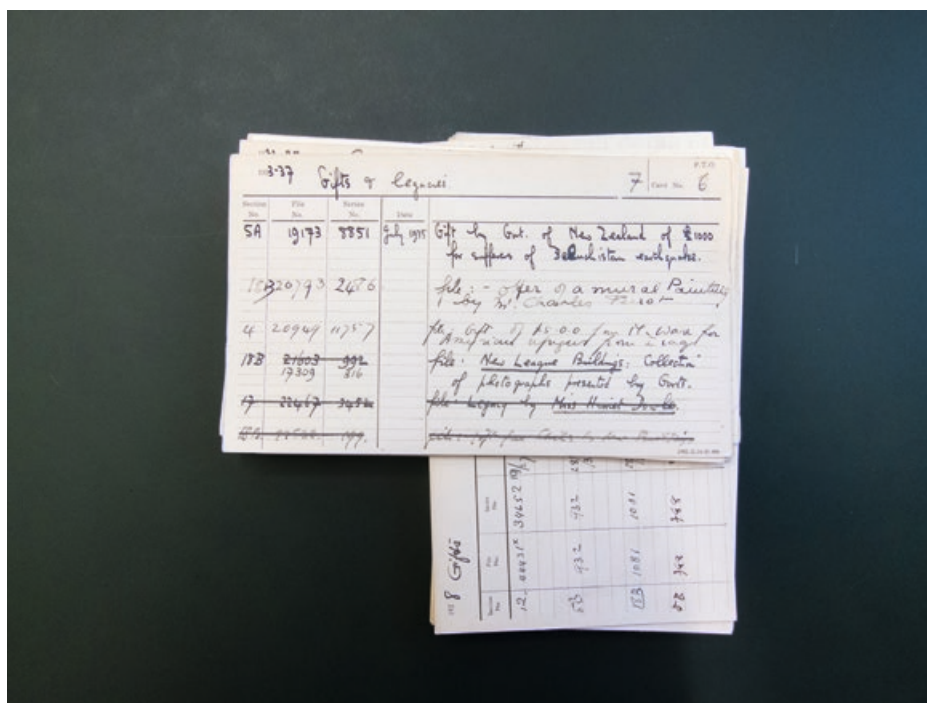
Along corridors and stairways, he presented his wife with the splendour of his beloved palace. Important and co-owner, his noble sinecura kidnapped, eager to emphasize the exciting official character, he proudly mentioned the gifts of the different countries: Persian carpets, Norwegian woods, tapestries from France, Italian marbles, paintings from Spain and all the other offers, explaining each time the exceptional quality.

– Albert Cohen, *Belle du Seigneur*, 1968

If the micro-stories of the visual document are absent or unintelligible due to their precarious nature, it is, however, their ephemeral character that predisposes them to be told and recounted. With each change in context and format, they constitute an archive of parallel oral and material stories that detail the occurrences of the initial macro-history. The issue is central when, in the fall of 2019, I started collaborating with artists Petra Koehle and Nicolas Vermot-Petit-Outhenin on the research “Institutional memory: political aesthetics of the gift to the Palace of Nations”. The project began with the consultation of the archives relating to the work of the League of Nations between 1919 and 1946, and then



The Hall of the Palace of Nations and archive files from the Institutional Memory Section, Palace of Nations, Geneva.  
 Photo: Koehle&Vermot, 2014



focuses on the Geneva Palace of Nations and the idea that this building, in its pharaonic materiality, is itself a document.

Situated in the heart of the Parc de l’Ariana in Geneva, where it was built

between 1929 and 1937, the legendary and monumental dimension of the Palace of Nations is poetically portrayed in the quantitative catalogue of Albert Cohen's novel *Belle du Seigneur*: "And then one thousand and nine hundred radiators, twenty-three thousand square meters of linoleum, two hundred and twelve kilometres of electrical wires, one thousand and five hundred taps, fifty-seven hydrants, one hundred and seventy-five fire extinguishers!" (Cohen, 2013). Like other photographic documents discussed in this essay, the reading of the Palace and its archives requires overall views as well as out-of-the picture details. Alongside the official stories and archives of events, the daily practice of the spaces of the Palace of Nations and the spirit of international solidarity implied by the UN project has generated tacit knowledge and informal stories that function as "mediators between a succession of local events and an institutional strategy" (Greenblatt, 1992).

In 2014, on a visit to the Palace of Nations with UN archivist Jacques Oberson, Koehle&Vermot identify in the archives the records of a series of gifts from member countries that were solicited in 1932 to finance the construction of the building's interior furnishings. Through the letters and administrative records, our project is now reconstructing the creation and design of the rooms, the financial, aesthetic and political negotiations that accompanied their construction, and the national and international competition that animated them. We speculate on the unfinished rooms, on the rejected gifts. Between the lines of diplomatic rhetoric, the correspondence

shows us how aesthetic disagreement over a wooden decoration can be translated into political dispute, and vice versa. This is how the floors, curtains, chairs, wall decorations and entire rooms of the Palace of Nations reached a form of architectural consensus epochs and heterogeneous styles. This consensus is often overshadowed the geopolitical debates and the weightings underlying the aesthetic choices, that we attempt to bring into light.

There are therefore many ways to “disappear” from an archive. For this to happen, one must silence the stages that preside over the production of the document; erase the material and cultural history of its support; dim the individual and systemic circumstances that determine its creation and context of its reception. Alternatively, one can sever the link between the document and its real referent, reducing its credibility. The disappearance will be all the more effective if accompanied by a significant historical upheaval that suspends, diverts or modifies the forms of conservation and cataloguing. In other words, proposes Siegfried Kracauer, the completeness of the historical view depends on the angle of the shot and the ability, through camera movements, to link macro-events with the specificity of details, to create an overall view. However, Kracauer continues, the reverse movement is also true, and what the macro-historical viewer does not (can not) see is obscured mainly by what s/he sees.

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# Biographies

**Noor Abu Arafah** is a visual artist based in Jerusalem. She graduated from EDHEA and the Bezalel Academy for Arts and Design in Jerusalem. Her work questions the complexity of history through video, installations, performances and text. She has participated in numerous contemporary art biennials, including Off Biennial, Gaudiopolis, Budapest, curated by Eszter Szakacs and Lara Khaldi (2017), Off – Site Sharjah Biennial 13, Act 2, Beirut, curated by Christine Tohme (2017), Off – Site Sharjah Biennial 13, Shifting Ground, Ramallah, curated by Lara Khaldi (2017), Sharjah Biennial 13, Tamawoj, Sharjah, curated by Christine Tohme (2017), Berlin Biennale, curated by Maria Berrios (September to November 2020) and the Mediterranean Biennale, curated by Simone Frangi (upcoming, May 2021). She is the recipient of international prizes such as the Emerging Voices Award, Financial Times, New York (shortlisted, 2016), the YAYA (Young Artist of the Year Award), Palestine (2014), the Honer Degree, Bezalel Academy (BA), Jerusalem, Palestine (2011) and the YAYA (2010)

**Benoît Antille** is a researcher, curator and teacher. He studied classical archaeology and art history at the University of Fribourg (MA, 2001) and Curatorial practice at the California College of the Arts, San Francisco (MA, 2011). Besides coordinating the artist-in-residence program at the Villa Ruffieux in Sierre (CH), he is an assistant professor at the EDHEA and a lecturer at the HEAD, Geneva. His research at the EDHEA focuses on site-specific practices and the development of project-economy in the artistic field. He currently conducts doctoral research at the University of Amsterdam.

**Leslie Fernández Barrera** is an artist, teacher and researcher in the field of contemporary artistic production. She has participated in various individual and collective art projects, including MOBILE (2009-2017) and the Mesa8 art collective (2008-2015). From 2010 to 2017, she co-directed the exhibition of the Casa del Arte José Clemente Orozco.

She is currently working with an interdisciplinary team on the research *Concepción te devuelvo tu imagen, Artes visuales 1972-1991*. The project reactivates forms of artistic production that emerged during the dictatorship in the city of Concepción. Since 2017, she is part of the Art and Deindustrialization team and has contributed to their international meetings and publications. She teaches in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Concepción (2007-ongoing), where she also serves as a member of the editorial team for the magazine *Alzaprima*.

Professor **Paul Goodwin** is a curator, writer and researcher based in London. He is Director of the Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation (TrAIN) at University of the Arts London where he holds the UAL Chair in Contemporary Art and Urbanism. Goodwin's research and curatorial practices centre around the relation between aesthetics and politics in transnational contexts with a special focus on African diaspora visual and urban cultures. He is currently developing a new international research consortium with Prof Ming Tiampo (Carleton University, Canada) and colleagues – Transnational Arts and Culture Exchange (TrACE) – to develop a major collaborative research project around strengthening resilience and exploring social innovation in cultural institutions in the face of the challenges

of nationalist populism, migration and political instability: *Worlding Public Cultures: the Arts and Social Innovation* with university and museum partners in Canada, Germany, Netherlands, and the UK.

**Mary Ellyn Johnson** is Head of Exhibitions at swissnex San Francisco. She previously worked at the San Francisco Art Institute as a curator and at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis as a research librarian. She holds a master's degrees in both Art History (Richmond University, London) and Cultural Studies (University of London, Birkbeck College, London Consortium). Her main interests are contemporary art at the nexus of research and education, Film and all things Scandinavian.

**Federica Martini**, PhD, is a contemporary art historian and curator. Since 2018 she is Professor and Head of Fine Arts at EDHEA. Previously, she was Head of the MAPS Master of Arts in Public Spheres, and a member of the curatorial departments of the Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Musée Jenisch Vevey and Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts/Lausanne. Together with Patrick de Rham and Elise Lammer she initiated the Museum of Post-Digital Cultures (2012). In 2012, with Julie Harboe she started the editorial series SARN Minutes, focusing on art-based research. Her research, exhibitions and publications address the geopolitics of exhibition histories, the crossover between aesthetic gestures and industrial narratives, feminist readings of art histories and the production of (in)visibility around/in contemporary artistic practices.

**Lucia Masu** is a visual artist, a teacher and a social worker based in Lausanne (CH). She obtained a bachelor's degree in Painting (Academy of Fine Arts –

Sassari), a diploma in Painting restoration (Florence) and a Post Graduate Diploma in Art-therapy (HETSL – Lausanne). She is currently studying at the MAPS – Master of Arts in Public Spheres. Her artistic research reflects on memory and preservation of human marks. It explores subjectivity in an inclusive other than human reality through the care approach.

**Amanda Nudelman** is the Curator of Video and North America Programs & Exhibitions Manager, KADIST, San Francisco. Her practice includes curating, writing, and research, with a focus on international contemporary video art. Her curatorial projects have been presented at the Wattis Institute (San Francisco), swissnex (San Francisco), and KADIST (San Francisco). She holds a Master of Arts in Curatorial Practice from California College of the Arts.

**Isaline Pfefferlé** is an art historian and freelance cultural manager. She holds a bachelor's degree in Art History, History of Religions and Gender Studies from the University of Geneva and a master's degree in Cultural Management from the Université Libre de Bruxelles. Since 2019, she serves as a scientific collaborator in the Fine Arts department of the EDHEA. Parallel to that, she is the curator of the 2022 Manor Art Award Valais, and since 2018 she is a member of the AMAV (Amis du Musée d'art du Valais) Committee. In 2020 she curated the retrospective on Albert Chavaz in Savièse. Her research interests focus on modern and contemporary forms of regional arts related to the environment, the ecology and critical notions of ultra-local in Switzerland and Valais.

**Rosa Tyhurst** (b. Carmarthen, Wales) is a curator based in South West England. Her curatorial projects have been staged at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo

(Turin), the Wattis Institute (San Francisco), Cloaca (San Francisco), DREI (Cologne), and Limoncello (London). She graduated from the Curatorial Practice MA Program at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco in 2018 and is currently Assistant Curator: Exhibitions and Artist Development at Spike Island, Bristol. In 2020 she established Partula Farba, a project space focusing on extinct, abandoned and unrealised activities.

**Marie Velardi** is an artist and researcher whose work takes multiple forms – installations, videos, drawings, texts, printed images and sound – in which there is always a common element: the link to time, and particularly to the future. She primarily aims to construct a memory of the future (a long-term perspective), which she understands as equal to a memory of the past. Her work has been exhibited in Switzerland, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, the USA, the UK, India and Thailand. In 2014-2015, she was one of the three artists representing Switzerland at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale of India, with a specific mention by the jury for her scenography. Since 2017 she has been a teacher on the Bachelor programme at the EDHEA, where she is currently Head of MELA – Multiples, editions, and artist's books.

## **Blackout Magazine**

### **Issue No.3: T/Here**

A collaboration between EDHEA – The Valais School of Art, HES-SO and swissnex San Francisco.

**Editors:** Mary Ellyn Johnson, Federica Martini, Isaline Pfefferlé

**Essays and texts:** Noor Abu Arafah, Benoît Antille, Ursula Biemann, Leslie Fernández Barrera, Paul Goodwin, Mary Ellyn Johnson, Federica Martini, Lucia Masu, Rachel Nisbet, Amanda Nudelman, Janis Osolin, Rosa Tyhurst

**Image Credits:** Noor Abu Arafah (pp. 104–5; 116–17; 133), Ursula Biemann (p. 49), J. Astra Brinkmann (pp. 28–29), Manuel Fuentes Archive / Ivan Cardenas/ Pilar Hernandez (p. 77), Deborah Ligorio (p. 37), Maria Iorio & Raphaël Cuomo (p. 135), Petra Koehle & Nicolas Vermot-Petit-Outhenin (pp. 122; 124; 137), François Lauginie (pp. 34–35), Uriel Orlow (pp. 128–30), Janis Osolin (p. 19), Aurélie Strumans (p. 45), Rosa Tyhurst (p. 30), Marie Velardi (pp. 40–44)

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## **EDHEA – The Valais School of Art / HES-SO – University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland**

Jean-Paul Felley, Director  
Federica Martini, Head of Fine Arts  
Daniel Schmid, Head of Graphic Design  
Alain Antille, Head of Research

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EDHEA  
Route de la Bonne-Eau, 16  
3960 Sierre  
Switzerland  
[www.edhea.ch](http://www.edhea.ch)





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