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# FUSE

STATES  
OF POST-  
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FALL 2012

35-4

FUSE MAGAZINE



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# STATES OF POSTCOLONIALITY/ BALTICS

So much more than a bounded geography, a region is a historically contingent amalgamation of territory, politics and culture. In this issue of *FUSE*, we focus on the post-socialist Baltic region, placing particular emphasis on Lithuanian examples. Our use of the name Baltics most directly applies to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – commonly referred to as the Baltic states. Within the context of *FUSE's* States of Postcoloniality series, the twentieth century history of Soviet occupation is particularly important in shaping our attention to the region.

Despite having distinctive cultural and political traditions and infrastructures, prior to the twentieth century the populations of the present-day Baltic states were frequently subjected to the influence of the Prussian and Russian empires, [1] with much of their combined territory falling under Russian rule from the late eighteenth century up until the First World War. After WWI, Lithuania, then Estonia and Latvia declared independent statehood, but their autonomy was short lived. In contravention of peace treaties, all three were annexed by the USSR in 1940, initiating a period of Soviet rule interrupted only by a brief period of Nazi occupation. By the 1980s, allied indepen-

dence movements had gained momentum in the Baltic states—Lithuania's Sajūdis, the Popular Front of Latvia and the Estonian Rahvarinne. Perhaps the most sensational of their collaborative efforts was the Baltic Way demonstration in 1989, when millions of people formed a human chain stretching across the three states. The Baltic independence movements argued for the illegality of Soviet rule, leveraging the fiftieth anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact—the non-aggression treaty signed in 1939 between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which by assigning spheres of influence to each paved the way for Soviet occupation of the Baltics. In 1990, The Act of the Re-establishment of the State of Lithuania became the first formal assertion of independence on the part of a Soviet republic. The USSR was forced to concede Lithuanian and Latvian independence in 1991, which set the stage for other Soviet republics to proclaim independence.

This issue of *FUSE* considers the withdrawal of Soviet occupation, the renewed independence of the Baltic states, and subsequent, ongoing privatization as the context for contemporary cultures of resistance. Responding to the absence of critical English-language histories of privatization in the Baltic states, we turn to the performative politics of contemporary artists. In "Revising a Strategically Demonized Past," Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė narrates a particular collective response to privatization through the post-Soviet history of the Žeimiai manor house. In Alise Uptis's interview with artist team Nomedas and Gediminas Urbonas, public culture, language and archival practice are identified as key elements of

[1] We could not have assembled the historical facts in this section without the material published by *Lituanus: Lithuanian Quarterly Journal Of Arts And Science*, whose archives are available online. Thanks to Nomedas Urbonas and Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė for fact-checking.

[2] Lorenzo Veracini, "Introducing Settler Colonial Studies," *Settler Colonial Studies* 1 (2011), 1-12.

a revitalized leftist politic in Lithuania. Johanna Sophie Santos Bassetti's centerfold offers a devastating subjective translation of Lithuania's recent social reality.

For this issue's theoretical tonic, we can look to Marc Andre Léger's dialogue with Barbara Clausen and Michael Blum regarding Alexandre Kluge's film *News From Ideological Antiquity. Marx - Eisenstein - Das Kapital*. The Short Fuse section offers flash points of resistance that resound through the rest of the issue: feminism and public speech, toponymy and memory, and leftist political theory informed by regional histories. While this collection of work doesn't quite amount to a people's history of the Baltics, it makes a compelling case for critical regionalism as an international dialogue.

At the outset of this series, we settled on the title "States of Postcoloniality" because of its evocation of shifting historical conditions and its prefigurative description of decolonized realities. We took this approach for its flexibility, even while recognizing the inaccuracy and violence of claiming that current settler colonial states such as Canada are postcolonial. The emerging discipline of settler colonial studies has defined distinctive forms of colonialism with precision, showing how the notion of postcoloniality serves to naturalize the violence of settler colonial states. [2] As such, the title of our series threatens to work against us as we highlight cultural

practices of decolonization, affirm the collective rights of Indigenous populations in Canada and abroad, and critique the policies and practices that restrict these rights. With our upcoming issue on Palestine, our vocabulary will certainly continue to kick up an uncomfortable dust—all we can hope is that its residue settles in a way that helps outline the changing contours of power with a greater degree of lucidity.

In forthcoming issues of *FUSE*, you can expect welcome shakeups from a host of talented guest editors: the next issue provides much reflection and critical context on the student-led anti-austerity movement in Montreal courtesy of the Artivistic Collective, followed by *States of Postcoloniality/Palestine*, co-edited by Nasrin Himada and Reena Katz, and our summer 2013 issue will be co-produced with York University Art History graduate students as a follow-up to their conference, *Fallout: Visions of Apocalypse*.

Gina Badger  
with the *FUSE* Editorial Committee

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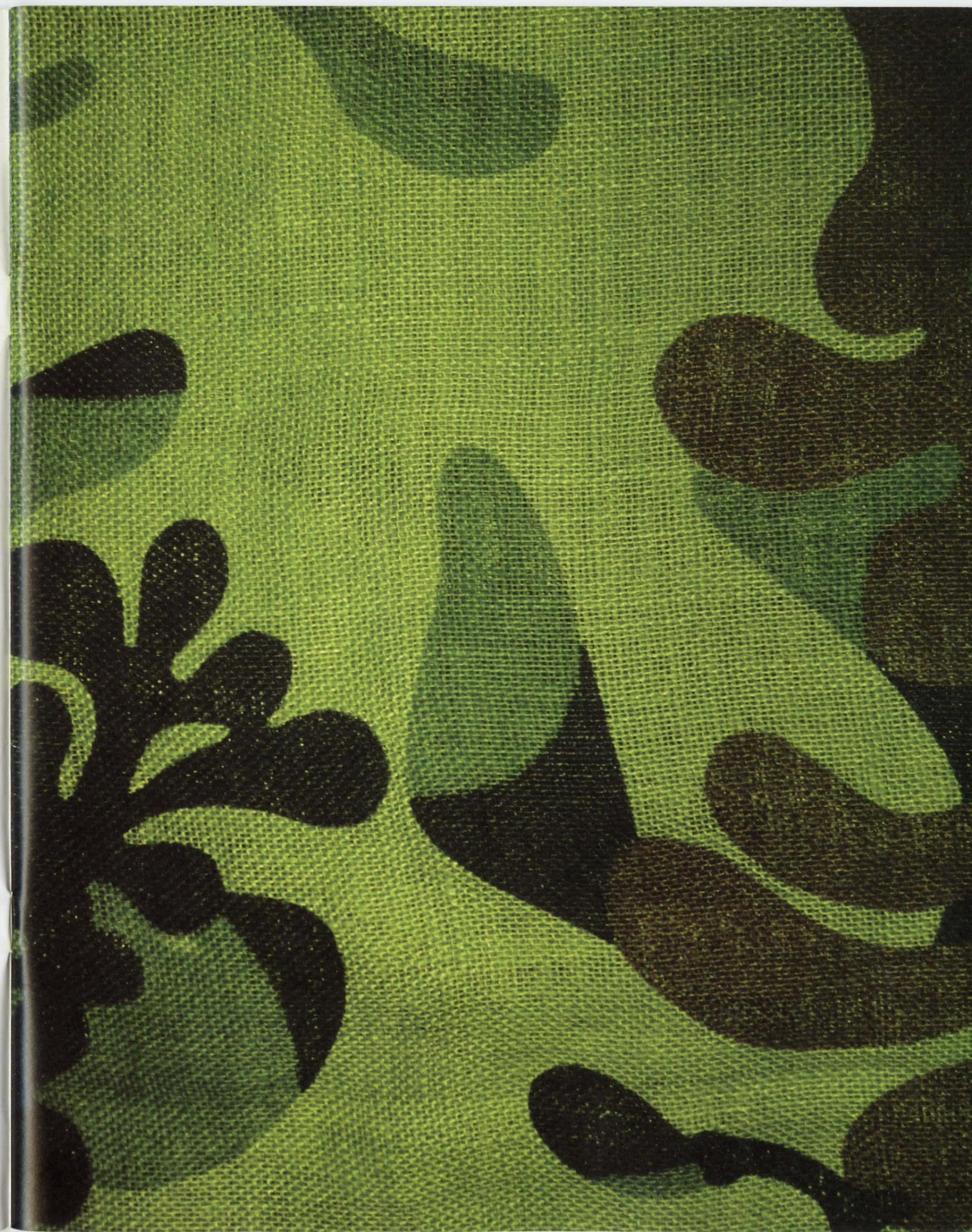
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# PATTERN LAN- GUAGE

– Ruta Remake

Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas were both born in Lithuania and completed their masters degrees at the Vilnius Art Academy in 1994. They have worked in joint artistic practice since 1997. They currently live and work in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

*Perhaps the difference is between your interior voice – the one that is solely yours, which is only heard by you – and the one that is heard by others and that only then do you start hearing. That second voice becomes an expression of human socialization, the distance that you have to manage. Of course, you lose your inner voice to a certain extent, as you no longer hear its strangeness. And in recorded voices, especially. If you listen to some old records, you can hear the socialization, as some kind of time-buzz or noise, because after all, voices of different epochs and voices of different people are marked by time.*

– Rasa Kalinauskaite, journalist [1]

## Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas

In the Lithuanian patriarchal tradition, women's voices have been muted from many forms of public speech. Because of this, weaving has been an acceptable stand-in for writing and singing has been a way of story-telling. Historically, the performative aspect of women's voices

was useful in the construction of ideologies – women's voices were patriotically taken to represent the motherland, and later, consumer society. Today, it could be said that there is renewed attention on women's voices, looking to oral forms to reclaim meanings occupied by patriarchal society and liberal ideologies. Names, textures, sounds – what new patterns does the contemporary voicelandscape develop?

Provoked by the absence of women's voices in Soviet and post-Soviet society, *Ruta Remake* (2000 – 2005) maps out a politics of identity in contemporary Lithuania. Believing that the feminine voices and characters in media representations are nothing more than nationalist types, *Ruta Remake* seeks out new possibilities for representation, expression and identification. New identities take form in the dynamic play between types, dancing between the extremes of the "Homo Sovieticus" and the modern capitalist model. Through shared re-collections of cinematic and musical media, *Ruta Remake* builds a pathway to navigate from the past to the present. The resulting voice archive reflects social construction and metaphysical qualities, featuring sets of samples ranging from speech and narrative to chanting and song.

In *Ruta Remake*, women's voices take a shape, exceeding sound alone. Through weaving and pattern, Ruta Baculyte (psychologist) and Ruta Gostautienė (musicologist/semiotician), transform the feminine voicelandscape – its timbre, words and content – into an abstract garden of language. Seeking a visual correlate for women's voices, the Rutas design a weaving pattern named "ruta." The pattern refers to a perennial plant having a strong, heavy odour and a bitter taste – ruta or rue, also known as the "herb of grace." In Lithuania, this pattern is imbued with particular meanings – rooted through herb gardens and common language as an icon representing femininity and virginity, despite (or because of?) its reputed efficiency in inducing abortions.

Ruta also recalls certain political types – found footage of a Lithuanian weaving factory reveals a ruta-patterned headscarf worn by female workers, and there exists a Russian media phantasm called the "White Ruta," supposedly a female sniper battalion from the Baltic playing a subversive role in the aftermath of the guerrilla war in Chechnya.

Ruta – the name for a specific plant and for a loose grouping of ritually and symbolically loaded plants. Ruta – a common and beloved name for Lithuanian women. Ruta – a sound-word whose meaning emerges as much from its purely aural qualities as from its lexical definition. Thus, the pattern weaves together plant and human subjectivities by virtue of its name and associations. This reclaimed, remixed ruta becomes a camouflage pattern, referencing and subverting gendered histories of voice, labour and nationalism through the transition to post-Soviet Lithuania.

# SOME NOTES FOR READING CHTO DELAT? AND REARTIKU- LACIJA

Alison Cooley

*Chto Delat/What Is To Be Done?* is a collaborative art project founded in 2003 that produces a semi-regular newspaper publication. Headed by Dmitri Vilensky, the collective includes contributors from across Russia. *Reartikulacija* is a journal and online platform founded in 2007 and based in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Steered by Marina Gržinić, Staš Kleindienst, Sebastjan Leban and Tanja Passoni, this project is grounded in interventionist politics, focusing on queer (specifically lesbian) and de-colonial perspectives in the Balkans. Both *Chto Delat?* and *Reartikulacija* represent knowledge production as a strategy for resistance against neoliberal capitalism and necropolitics. Both collectives form a visible part

of a small but tangled network of leftist post-socialist theory projects, participating in dialogue both among and within publications, and exploring issues arising from shared experiences, academic conferences and collaborative actions. [1] Each publication articulates nuanced positions on shared struggles across the post-socialist states, but *Reartikulacija* and *Chto Delat?* are also regionally based and particularized, rooting themselves firmly in language (Slovenian and Russian, respectively), as well as local writing and issues of art and representation.

*Chto Delat?* and *Reartikulacija* differ in mandate, but are united by principles of solidarity, self-organization, collectivism and internationalism. *Chto Delat?* is grounded in Marxist ideals, responding to an increasingly capitalist thrust in Russian society and politics. Their mandate unabashedly asserts: "We have to move away from the frustrations occasioned by the historical failures to advance leftist ideas and discover anew their emancipatory potential." *Reartikulacija* stresses the importance of intervention – of art and theory as disruptive mechanisms – and shares *Chto Delat?*'s insistence on emancipatory knowledge production. [2] Both organizations, however, also commit to being in flux, with the realization that their particularized positions and changing responses to the current cultural and political climate will call for different methods. While the two projects produce print and web material prolifically, neither defines itself strictly as a publication. Rather, they are platforms for the diffusion of knowledge by whatever means suit best: *Chto Delat?*'s continuing engagements with film and performance reach across Europe and find further outlets in seminars and learning plays, and *Reartikulacija*'s exhaustive schedule of academic conferences and workshops entwine the project with the work of other theorists and collectives internationally. [3]

The published material from these groups works by sections and thematics. Some editions of *Chto Delat?* (such as issue 11, "Why Brecht?") function like a public reading group, while others take on regionally specific narratives, such as an examination of the largely working-class St. Petersburg neighborhood of Narvskaya Zastava. Within *Reartikulacija*, recurring sections with titles like "Queer," "Deep Throat," "(Hard) Core," and "De-Coloniality" establish running themes and insist that queer, punk and de-colonial politics always be in dialogue with the rest of the content.

And while each project centres on artistic discourse, their relationship to the institution is understandably problematic. *Reartikulacija*'s Marina Gržinić articulates a profound mistrust of art, affirming that "contemporary art and culture is a very oppressive system of rules and codes, trends and representational forms that are not at all invisible, but on the contrary clearly visible and experienced." [4] *Reartikulacija* is not

Alison Cooley is a Toronto-based writer and curator. She is currently pursuing an MA in Art History and Curatorial Practice at York University.

[1] Marina Gržinić, "What Is to Be Done? – A Conversation with Dmitry Vilensky," in *Reartikulacija* 3 (2008) (online; accessed 11 September 2012); and "Marina Gržinić's Answers on Open Questionnaire," *Chto Delat?* website, (accessed 11 September 2012).

[2] "A Declaration on Politics, Knowledge, and Art," *Chto Delat?* website (accessed 11 September 2012); and "About," *Reartikulacija* website (online; accessed 11 September 2012).

[3] Marina Gržinić's three-part interview with Walter Mignolo exemplifies solidarity and dialogue between de-colonial collectives in the Balkans and South America. Gržinić, "De-linking Epistemology from Capital and Pluri-versality: A Conversation with Walter Mignolo," *Reartikulacija* 4–6 (online; accessed 11 September 2012).

[4] *Chto Delat*, "Marina Gržinić's Answers on Open Questionnaire," *Chto Delat?* website.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Gržinić, "What is to be Done?"

a straightforward journal, but “a force of contamination in between art and politics,” which acknowledges and examines the relationship between art and neoliberal capitalist power, meanwhile suggesting that de-linking from ideas of artistic genius can rearticulate artistic theory as a powerful mechanism for social change. [5] Vilensky argues that questions of knowledge production and artistic representation are connected, and that these emerge in the struggle to publish a radical newspaper: “It is not enough to simply instrumentalize the institutions of power and push them to do our shows, publish our texts, support our films &c, but the question is how we can change the structures of domination and subaltern through the production of common knowledge.” [6]

Like many leftist cultural producers in post-socialist Eastern Europe, Reartikulacija and Chto Delat? struggle with the precarious position of funding for artistic projects, and the problem of operating as oppositional bodies within established government granting structures. For Chto Delat?, publishing a newspaper is an accessible, low-budget way to circumvent more mainstream fund-raising and questionable capital. They publish bilingually, in Russian and English, and distribute their newspaper free of charge.

Publishing online and in English is neither clean nor easy. While both collectives outline internationalism as a central principle to their organizations, Gržinić argues that the theoretical implications of the texts are often lost in translation, and suggests that while *Reartikulacija* is at once a platform for the diffusion of political thought in and on the Balkans, it is also a resistance to the hegemony of the English language and its capitalist associations. *Reartikulacija's* first two issues were published exclusively in Slovenian (with texts translated from other languages within the Balkans), to interrogate this linguistic territory. Subsequent issues have been translated and given free to contributors for re-publication in English, with the full-text articles available online.

*Chto Delat?* and *Reartikulacija* are both undoubtedly exceptional publications, representing powerful and well-articulated models for public engagement with Marxism, visual culture and anti-oppression activism in the post-socialist states. But as a young Canadian scholar with only limited knowledge of these particularized struggles, my belief that these publications are unique is mired in my privilege, their ease of access and their translation into English. And I cannot know the English versions until they are published online. This is key to each collective's functioning in its own time and place—every one of their texts keeps some reserve of power and knowledge in its original form.

# #RIOTACT

Jessica MacCormack currently lives in Montreal and teaches at Concordia University. From animation, video, painting and drawing to installation and intervention, her interdisciplinary practice examines the complex position of culture within neoliberal capitalism, critiquing modes of social control while exploring the potential for art to function as a site of resistance.

Sarah Mangle is from the Maritimes and currently lives in Toronto. She is currently working on a zine project with Tara-Michelle Ziniuk called “Our Date with Alison Bechdel,” and a documentary about her relationship with her lesbian home-steading aunts and the history of their life together. Sarah's work has appeared in *Make/Shift*, *Broken Pencil*, *Lickety Split*, *Herizons*, *Lip*, and her zines are distroed by Doris Distro, Distro Le Pick Up, Twelveohtwo, the Anchor Archive Regional Zine Project and The Toronto Zine Library.

“We all take part in a political performance, not in a trial.”

— Violetta Volkova [1]

## Jessica MacCormack and Sarah Mangle

Pussy Riot is a feminist/punk performance art group based in Russia. They've played politicized punk sets in bus stops and grocery stores, and are now widely known for their performance of a “punk prayer” on 21 February 2012, in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior. They performed “Mother of God, Drive Putin Out” in protest of the Russian government's relationship with the Orthodox Church. Russia's problematic electoral process and the Putin government's policies have inspired much recent social criticism and mobilization, with large-scale protests held in Moscow on 10 December 2011 and 6 May 2012.

Pussy Riot's Cathedral performance, consisting of an unamplified one-song set combining a punk show and prayer, and performed by a small group of brightly dressed and masked women at the altar, lasted less than a minute. A week later, an edited video of their piece appeared on the Internet. Shortly thereafter, police arrested three of Pussy Riot's known members, Maria Alekhina, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Ekaterina Samutsevich, who remained in pre-trial detention for six months. On 17 August 2012 they were found guilty of hooliganism [2] and sentenced to two years at a Siberian prison colony. Reflecting on what has now become an international issue, *Telegraph* journalist John Lough wrote:

Pussy Riot has laid bare a structural weakness of a highly personalized political system that operates without institutional checks and balances, supported by a judiciary whose function is to turn the desires of its political masters into legal decisions. The regime's self-protection mechanism lost control because it was unable to calibrate the consequences of its actions. [3]

Observers of this case have identified two distinct political groups within Russia who have been watching this case closely: a conservative, state-supporting group, and a radical left, pushing against Putin's state control. [4] In North America and Europe, public outcry against the arrest of Pussy Riot has manifested throughout social media campaigns to free the band and in public demonstrations.

The law enforces both the people in power and the modes of power itself. This flawed idea of justice (as manifest in the Western prison system, oppressive across geographical boundaries) affects all our lives, although some people are more directly affected / oppressed by it than others. In many ways the criminal justice system maintains the illusion of effectiveness because it absolves us of our responsibilities to our communities. The trial of Pussy Riot highlights some of these dynamics, but at the same time, public support for these three individuals highlights another power dynamic centred around fame and popularity.

The unequal distribution of wealth and power has rendered famous people more worthy of attention and therefore, more frequently than not, their charitable or political actions do not truly call into question their own participation in this inequality. What does it mean when we prioritize people in conflict with the law for intentionally subversive, chosen and symbolic actions (often called political prisoners) rather than people who are imprisoned due to, for example, racism and the criminalization of poverty? How do we define political engagement? Who does this definition benefit?

In August 2012, Peaches announced she was working on a music video in support of Pussy Riot. Madonna spoke out in support of Pussy Riot and performed with the band's name scrawled on her back. The list of famous supporters of Pussy Riot continues: Patti Smith, Kathleen Hanna, Björk, Sting, Pete Townshend, Jarvis Cocker, Neil Tennent, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, Franz Ferdinand, Ad Rock, Alice Bag, Faith No More, Anti-Flag, Plastic People of the Universe, Nina Hagen, Billy Bragg, Peter Gabriel and Stephen Fry. In addition,

politicians, lawyers, Amnesty International and activists have also been vocal in their support. And Tumblr, Facebook and Twitter were buzzing with critiques of the state of Russia, as well as arguments that the harsh treatment of Pussy Riot highlights the current situation of censorship and repression in Russia.

How does a human act become an icon? What underlying modes of power highlight these young women's bravery and outspokenness over another's lifetime of suffering? In our observation of the coverage of this case through Facebook, as well as mainstream American and European media, we became angry with and weary of the shocked descriptions of the prison treatment, as if no one had heard of such harsh conditions before.

And still, Pussy Riot's act is necessary. Public support is desperately needed. The spaces—online or otherwise—where we share these pieces of news are spaces of recognition. If one has no first-hand experience of the injustice system, then how do you even begin to learn? That is the function of prisons: so we cannot see what silence looks like.

What would happen if Madonna and Pussy Riot's other celebrity supporters called for the abolition of prisons? It is difficult to conceive what the specific demands would be and what would need to shift within us internally, and what it would mean to untangle ourselves from giving more attention to briefly politicized celebrities, especially when we have grown up within capitalism. Are people really more critical now of capitalism and oppression? Will we be inspired to apply a more complex analysis to the ways injustice plays out every day in our intersecting communities?

When the verdict came through that the women would each receive a two-year sentence to be served in Siberian work camps, the world/online community continued its outrage against the Russian government and church. Pussy Riot's performances and criminalization have created a highly visible situation connected to feminist and anti-authoritarian struggles in the Occupy movement, the student-led anti-austerity movement/Loi 78 in Quebec, the decriminalization of HIV and sex-work in Canada, Ugandan pride and many other movements from the past year—all of which have taken new forms and been revitalized through the Internet. There is so much potential to articulate dissent within these online communities, and yet we must also follow through with this dissent and collectivity in our streets and in the communities we live in so as to denaturalize the isolating consequences of capitalism.

[1] Violetta Volkova, the lawyer defending Pussy Riot, in an interview by Kirill Martynov, “Pussy Riot Would Have Been Acquitted by the Jury,” *Red Pepper* (online; 3 August 2012).

[2] “On defining hooliganism itself, judge Syrova said this: ‘An act of hooliganism can be understood as being driven by acts of hatred or degradation of any given social or national or religious group. Therefore the charge of hooliganism can be sustained when a defendant has expressed open disrespect and defiance against the communally expected norms and the tastes of others.’” Shiv Malik, “Pussy Riot Jailed for Two Years,” *The Guardian* (online; 17 August 2012).

[3] John Lough, “Pussy Riot's Stunning Victory Over Putin Bureaucrats,” *The Telegraph* (online; 14 August 2012).

[4] According to Miriam Elder's “Pussy Riot Trial Worse than Soviet Era,” *The Guardian* (online; 3 August 2012).

# WE CLAIM TO OWN THEM

*Beware of saying to them that sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves*

*It is known that names of places change as many times as there are foreign languages*

– Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

## Jurij Dobriakov

In Western Lithuania, referring to a Russian border town near the Nemunas river as either Tilžė (the historical Lithuanian name), Tilsit (the historical German name) or Sovietsk (the current Russian name, associated with Soviet occupation) demonstrates an affiliation with a particular ethno-political group and a preference for a particular version of history. I was born in this town, and I am still not sure which of its faces I know.

The situation is familiar across Lithuania. One can choose between Trakai and Troki; Vilnius, Vilna and Wilno; Kaunas and Kovno; Paneriai and Ponary, &c – and the choice is viewed as gravely important. It is not simply

a word that is being chosen (because of familiarity or the way it sounds), but a particular meta-narrative. In a country like Lithuania, a historical crossroads of cultures and ambitions, referring to a place in a particular way is a manifestation of belonging to a certain group, a certain collective memory, a certain tradition of interpreting reality, and most often at the expense of some other group, some other memory, some other tradition. “It is known that names of places change as many times as there are foreign languages,” writes Italo Calvino in his novel *Invisible Cities*. [1] Yet perhaps the phrase is not complete; as the names change, the very histories of places and the places themselves change as well. Wilno and Vilnius cannot be the same place, and Vilnius and Vilna do not coincide. A site can hold numerous places with numerous unrelated pasts, presents and even futures.

The act of naming or renaming a place is not merely an aesthetic, practical, or social gesture – it is also deeply political, especially when a place already has a name with an associated ethnic or political mythology. Renaming a place is essentially violent (even while this violence can also be liberating, as in the independence declared though the restoration of a historical name). It is not just the name that changes, but the very quality of the place, its metaphysical character, its history. By giving names to places, we claim to own them.

The present Kaliningrad area and former East Prussia (or Lithuania Minor, depending on the historical perspective) is notable in its complex layering of names and histories. Practically each location has had a Lithuanian, a German, a Polish, and often an ancient Prussian name. Meanwhile, the current Russian names of these locations strike the eye as incredibly artificial and generic, completely out of touch with any of the historical ones. This latest colonial process of naming must have looked rather like erasure, or perhaps forgery. Today, when the Soviet Union is no more, and the Kaliningrad area formally belongs to Russia while physically being an enclave surrounded by (and isolated from) European Union states, the place names still testify the supposed glory of the extinct communist superpower and its political and military heroes. Still, the old names and the associated histories have not completely vanished: in many cases, they can literally be seen through the façade paint.

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[1] Italo Calvino, Chapter 9, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver. (First English edition Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974.)

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# UNSETTLE AND REDISTRIBUTE



Alise Uptis in conversation with  
Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas

↑  
Participants rolling out a banner reading  
PARDUOTA (SOLD OUT) across the Vilnius  
Three Crosses public monument as part of a citizens' action.  
Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas, *Pro-Test Lab*, 2005.  
Image courtesy of the artists.

*Disidentification [is] a removal from the naturalness of a place, the opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted, where a connection is made between having a part and having no part.*

– Jacques Rancière

Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas' work examines the contested field of economic, social, and political conditions in the post-socialist countries of the Former East, as well as more recently the Former West—the West that during the Cold War defined itself as other than communist—and both regions' transformations after 1989. To affect this, the artists have, among several other actions, staged pigeon races, fashioned floriated camouflage, employed Transactional Analysis, interviewed literary theorists, produced TV shows, conducted workshops and gone to court.

But their art practice does not enlighten. It does not obliterate blindness or impart greater knowledge to those who lack it. To enlighten, it would have to perpetuate the binary between those who possess knowledge and those who do not, those alert to their conditions and those unaware of the ideological apparatus in which their life is held, those who have freedom and those for whom "if only freedom is granted, enlightenment is almost sure to follow." [1] Their proliferating artistic tactics simultaneously interrupt and produce a series of archives that split open the representational hierarchies of specific forms (media, disciplines) and subjects (viewers, participants). It is because their practice does not enlighten that it is able to unsettle and redistribute how divisions and identifications of realities—between public and private, Soviet and post-Soviet, communism and capitalism, the seeable and the sayable—are produced and dispatched.

On 17 July 2012, I spoke with Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas about the public sphere, the Lithuanian language, Socialist Realism, the geographical motivations of their work, and the politics of the archive.

I would like to begin with how your work investigates the process by which the public can be constituted within both local and international economies marked by increasing privatization. Your project *Pro-Test Lab* (2005–present) claimed the site of Cinema Lietuva, the last cinema in Vilnius to be privatized, as a public locus for exploring heterogeneous possibilities of sustained protest by various groups—architects, designers, anti-global activists, artists and those simply seeking a space for public discussion and action. The vast project's goals were achieved through various modes: the Internet, fashion, public access television, workshops and physical space itself. However, more recently I see a movement in your practice towards less tangible and more complex spaces of public/private contestation, spaces that challenge the notion of property itself. I am thinking of *Villa Lithuania* (2007), your project for the 52nd Venice Biennale, which takes as its starting point the politics of reconstituting the still Russian-occupied Lithuanian Consulate in Rome. One aspect of the work invokes the geo-political role of air through your staging of a pigeon race across national borders. Your current project at Modern Art Oxford, *River Runs* (2012), also seems relevant. For this you create a river laboratory/playground to explore how water as a public good operates in defining our sense of belonging, on both an individual and a collective scale. Can you speak more about these recent works and how they ask where and how a public sphere, or perhaps more accurately "publicness," can be constituted today, and the role of artistic interventions in its production?

GU: *River Runs*, consisting of a suite of "jellyfish lilies" and a floating dock to facilitate river swimming, is in development as we speak. During our residency at Modern Art Oxford we researched river cultures—cultures that situate either life or research at, with, for and on the river—and this research has informed our designs. In part, this project draws its inspiration from the *Charles River Project* (1972) conceived by György Kepes at MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies, which invoked environmental citizenship in the context of the inhumane scale of industrial and urban damage wrought in Boston and other American cities during 1950s and 60s. Kepes saw the potential of art to mitigate that damage. Today, we are exposed to ecological catastrophe and the collapse of ecosystems, so for the *River Runs* project it is essential to model situations for survival in the hypothetical Water Age.

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**Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas** were both born in Lithuania and completed their masters degrees at the Vilnius Art Academy in 1994. They have worked in joint artistic practice since 1997. They currently live and work in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[1] Immanuel Kant, "Was ist Aufklärung?" in Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth* (Semiotext(e), 1997), 9.

→ Installation shot. Nomedas and Gediminas Urbonas, *Villa Lituania: Flying in the Face of History*, 2007. Lithuanian Pavilion 52nd Biennale di Venezia. Image courtesy of the artists.



↑ Poster advertising the 1st International Pigeon Race Nomedas and Gediminas Urbonas, *Villa Lituania: Flying in the Face of History*, 2007. Lithuanian Pavilion 52nd Biennale di Venezia. Image courtesy of the artists.

↓ Homing pigeons being released for a flight between Venice and Villa Lituania (the Lithuanian Embassy in Rome and property of Russia). Nomedas and Gediminas Urbonas, *Villa Lituania: Flying in the Face of History*, 2007. Lithuanian Pavilion 52nd Biennale di Venezia. Image courtesy of the artists.



When articulating our relationship to citizenship (and audience) though our work, we often deploy the notion of the model. Models help us to situate projects in the territory between the virtual and the real. As reality (and virtuality) are both under continuous colonization from representations of politics, model-thinking can provide a kind of temporary publicness, as you say. *Pro-Test Lab* as a model of protest also helped us think about the aspects of public space you are trying to grasp. Through the project, we insisted not only on the reclamation of public space, but on the vocabulary that defines public space. We pursued this from 2005 to 2012, in appeals and petitions – to UNESCO, the British Embassy, the shareholders of the company that was developing the site, as well as the municipality, national government and parliament – aiming at the inclusion of the term “public space” in various legislative and normative documents that define our surroundings. Through this process we became involved in several lawsuits; you might say that we appropriated the court process as a form. As part of one case linked to *Pro-Test Lab*, we spearheaded the re-translation of a crucial public policy document known as the Aarhus Convention, which defines public participation in decision-making regarding heritage sites and conservation. In the post-Soviet context, with a fairly recent history of extensive public participation, such documents and international conventions defining public participation are extremely important.

NU: In its original form, the Aarhus Convention calls for public participation in all territorial planning decisions. But because of the limited way “environment” was translated in the Lithuanian version, the Vilnius municipal administration was able to bypass public participation in many important planning decisions (including the site of *Pro-Test Lab*, the Cinema Lietuva). As part of the court proceedings, we lobbied for and then commissioned a new, more accurate translation.

GU: With the new translation, we were able to argue that public participation concerns the environment, not only in cities but in all aspects of ecology, culture and

so on. These court cases made it clear that *Pro-Test Lab* is not just about public space, but about language and translation as well.

Another thing that came about during the *Pro-Test Lab* campaign was a cluster of communities coexisting in free disagreement, each of them making a claim on the public interest. It was a process of learning how to self-organize and self-educate. This is also an interesting point from a Lefebvrian perspective, when he speaks about those who are professional and those who are amateurs. [2] When we went to court against the Ministry of Culture we had no lawyer to represent us, and none of us had the juridical literacy to be able to proceed in a proficient way and defend ourselves. Knowing how long court cases take, one of the members, a psychologist and music teacher, decided to start a law degree. He managed to graduate in the meantime, and we won the case. In this sense, the process itself made the person transform. For him, art had a very direct effect. It was a very empowering experience. There is one level of discussion you can engage in using performative artistic forms, speaking, or using the media as a public intellectual, but there is a totally different level of articulation being practiced and exercised at the juridical level, where legislative and normative documents are constructed and issued.

An aspect of your practice I find very interesting is the use of verbal expression. I am thinking of your work *Transaction* (2000–2005), which uses the psychoanalytic/therapeutic form Transactional Analysis to explore relationships between media, memory, politics and trauma within current Lithuanian culture. *Ruta-Remake* (2002–2005) also comes to mind, for which you interviewed women in post-Soviet Lithuania as a means of accessing connections between sound, voice and the politics of identity. These projects seem to have important linkages to the unique status of Lithuanian as a language and the relation it has to Lithuanian identity. That is, Lithuanian is considered the oldest living Indo-European language and was purely oral until the sixteenth century. As I understand it, language, not ethnicity, today forms the most important principle for the classification of nationality in the Baltic Republics – in other words, Lithuanians are people who speak Lithuanian. Moreover, during

the Soviet occupation and still today, knowing but not speaking Russian is a political act. Is there a relationship between your work and how Lithuanian as a spoken language functions? Perhaps even an attempt in your work to create a new aesthetic language?

NU: You make a rather obvious and important observation, but I have to say we haven't thought about this relationship before!

GU: Lithuanian as forbidden during Russian imperial colonization during the nineteenth century, which motivated various forms of resistance. Lithuanian at that time was spoken mostly in the countryside. The intellectuals of the Romantic period, who standardized the Lithuanian that people speak today, found this language only spoken there, in the singing tradition. It was very archaic. It did not survive in the cities. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Lithuanian books were published in Cyrillic, and Lithuanian as a written language was forbidden. And of course the idea of language being tied to victory and struggle also remained throughout the twentieth century during all the occupations – the German occupation, the Soviet occupation. Relationship to the Lithuanian language is also part of the post-colonial discourse. *Transaction's* starting point was the voice, the sound of which is constructed in relation to a certain regime of governmentality; it is something that is socially constructed. At the same time, it is something that is your own, an expression of your inner voice. In that respect we were interested in women's voices, and we were working with the methodologies of anthropology, collecting oral histories. In a way, we can say it is similar to constructing a very subjective type of language, one of memories and histories.

This is then oppositional to the normative...

GU: Yes. Working with a voice archive, we were involved with people who did not necessarily understand the language. First of all, we were working with different language groups, and then in concert with different generations – for example, a young generation of Lithuanian women, some of whom

[2] In Henri Lefebvre's words: “The quasi-logical presupposition of an identity between mental space (the space of the [professional] philosophers and epistemologists) and real space [of the subject or amateur] creates an abyss between the mental sphere on one side and the physical and social spheres on the other. ... If they still see the abyss at all, the professional philosophers avert their gaze. No matter how relevant, the problem of knowledge and the ‘theory of knowledge’ have been abandoned in favor of a reductionistic return to an absolute – or supposedly absolute – knowledge, namely the knowledge of the history of philosophy and the history of science. Such a knowledge can only be conceived of as separate from both ideology and non-knowledge (i.e. from lived experience). Although any separation of that kind is in fact impossible, to evoke one poses no threat to – and indeed tends to reinforce – a banal ‘consensus’.” Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Blackwell, 1991), 6.

had never heard or listened to the samples and materials we collected. They had very little experience or exposure, only through their mothers or grandmothers. In *Ruta-Remake*, we spent months working with these language sounds and remixing them. We conducted a series of workshops in Germany with sound artists, designers and DJs who had no understanding of the language being spoken. Even if, as in the first case, you have a group of people who understand the language, it was a different generation, so many meanings and contexts were not familiar. The choices they made in filtering, editing and mixing the sounds were based primarily on the sounds' formal qualities. Working with the German group in particular, we explored how sound creates meaning through repetitions and recitations, and we came to call this phenomenon "sound-words."

NU: This worked as a kind of conceptual platform, these sound words that are very archaic—sound words that are specific to the Lithuanian singing tradition.

GU: In Latvia and Lithuania, and also, I think, some islands in Polynesia, you find very archaic songs, where the sound-words resonate with each other to produce meaning. The sounds are from people standing in front of each other, singing to each other, their voices meeting. This creates not only interesting sounds but new meanings, comparable with avant-garde poetry or even musique concrète. For us it was an important moment in searching for a new kind of aesthetic of language. We were thinking about how this archive would be interpreted, based not on the semantics of language or the message, but on the quality of the sound. We were trying to go very deep into the sound of the female voice, this territory in between social construction and inner subjectivity. There was a process of filtering, cutting and stripping the language and literal meaning from the voice. With *Ruta-Remake*, there is a distribution of sound through speakers, and different voices distributed through different channels. Based on one's position in the space, one can construct new meaning through the process of listening.

Many artists working in a post-Soviet context engage with what can be characterized as nostalgia through the appropriation of symbols of Socialist Realism. You, however, avoid this sort of appropriation. Do you see a problem with nostalgia? Both trauma and nostalgia can be considered expressions of memory whose key characteristic is the experience of repetition, one of a wound and one of longing.

GU: This is an interesting question. Many artists from Eastern Europe make special projections according to requests that come from the Western market, and they are becoming victims of those projections. Let me explain. There is a certain desire in the West...

NU: In the former West!

GU: ...and in the art market to see this reproduction of nostalgia as a form of coping with the past. These artists respond to this expectation as a condition of inclusion in the global art market. But it is the West itself that is nostalgic. The nostalgia of these artists is performed very cynically. But what is interesting is something you are suggesting in your question: even if you are a cynical performer, if you perform and repeat this performance, you make the nostalgia, you produce it as such. A simple example: consider art that is meant to offer ways of coping with the past, tapping into nostalgia as a territory. In one way or another, this shapes the relationship to the past, and to trauma. Nostalgia as such is not operative outside of the context where people need to find a form to cope with that past.

You asked why we are not tapping into this territory. It is because for us it is more vital to investigate what production could be interesting for people who lived through trauma and who live through nostalgia. Instead of lamenting nostalgia, we are more interested in creating work that is informed in terms of the narrative of this history of trauma, and the experience of transformation: how one can cope with historical trauma. If you look at the work of *Transaction* or *Pro-Test Lab*, both deal with the past and history, but at the same time I would not say they are lamenting the past, they are searching for a free experiment that manages to transform the past.

My next question is: why the archive?

That is, at each new site you reconfigure the space, you utilize particular material that is created at the site or related to the particular history of that site. This certainly seems to be the case in *Transaction*. More recently it was manifest in your involvement with bringing *Disobedience Archive* to MIT, a continually changing video archive that elucidates historical and contemporary linkages between art practices and acts of political resistance. Why do you recreate and proliferate the archive, and how might that relate to the way you situate your work historically and culturally?

GU: Not only individuals but sometimes entire nations' histories are strongly dependent on who has control over the archives. For us it is interesting to create separate archives free from the possession of any regime of governmentality, from any institution, from history that is administrated and reproduced by certain regimes. In the projects you refer to, we recompose, reinterpret, retranslate a subjective reading of this situation and build our own archive. In *Transaction*, our goal was not only to tap into this question of how the images, histories and lives of Lithuanian women were constructed, reproduced and manipulated. We wanted to investigate how we could take possession of that authority, that institution, and in its place develop various subjective interpretations. With *Disobedience Archive*—and also in *Pro-Test Lab*—there is the recognition of translation and the acknowledgement that archives are not fixed. Also, looking at our work with MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies archive and the work that came out of that, it becomes evident that these archival documents come into the light only through interpretation. As the archive is re-performed and re-animated, it takes on new meaning. That re-performance and re-animation also produces a new layer in the archive. It creates this new epistemological field around that specific notion, that specific concept.

Would you say that this re-activation requires heterogeneous media and the participation of diverse audiences? Looking towards the history of art itself, one can discuss an idea of audience as well as an idea of medium: one could say there have been two dominant modes of thinking about art, one more of an activated, socially engaged practice, and the other a history of art concerned with formal media delineations. Does the re-activation of the archive demand, as a condition, the reactivation of both this subject/audience, and object/medium?

GU: Certainly. Probably a good example is *Transaction* and the drama triangle—borrowed from Transactional Analysis—between female experts that come from different fields. This was not a homogeneous group, but from literature, musicology, semiotics, philosophy, gender theory, psychiatry, psychology, &c. There are three roles in the drama triangle, as well as the orientation of different disciplines. [3] I think without these diverse participants our archival practice is not possible, and I would also say it is part of how we deal with the past. It is for us a way of decolonization. That is why it requires so many actors. We cannot rely on one field of knowledge or discipline. There are different forms of culture, as well as different fields that influence that culture.

I have one last question that deals with how your practice has changed over time. A lot of your work has dealt with the context of Lithuania, and Vilnius in particular. Do you see a change of content or method itself, since more recently you've spent much of the year in North America teaching at MIT? I am thinking in particular of your relationship to an institution with extensive Cold War involvement, a beneficiary of enormous military funds to fuel its research.

NU: We have always been interested in how ideology shapes culture, and if we look at the Cold War games it is clear how advanced forms of culture, specifically new media, were used to inform and camouflage technological and military advancements. Understanding how modernization was shaped by technological research and the Cold War games on this side of the former Iron Curtain gives us a new perspective from which to evaluate cultural development in the post-Soviet context. In Cambridge we are exposed to an entirely different experience, shaped by dislocation and detachment. We are situated in a research university that has infrastructure and tools allowing us to sense and investigate from a distance, which after years of being in the center of action provides a necessary balance. So for us dislocation has a positive meaning.

GU: I think our practice retains continuity, continuing to investigate modernization and its relations to avant-garde. MIT in particular, not just the United States, is where the technologies of the Cold War made the biggest impact on modernization, for the culture, and those were military developments. So we speak about cybernetics and game theory but also about systems theory and other aspects—all of these are Cold War concepts. It is very important for us to see the other side, after the Soviet experience, and to experience this place physically. And also to be much closer to its own archives, as well as the people who are still alive, to see works that were not widely published and not familiar in Eastern Europe that are examples of the era. We are interested in how certain ideologies and certain military research fueled the avant-garde and certain forms of emerging, alternative and experimental culture. So in that sense we are exploring the connection between the avant-garde and commissioned forms of culture, or culture that is representative of a certain state ideology. It is very interesting for us to be on both sides.

[3] In Transactional Analysis, the three roles in a drama triangle are the victim, the persecutor, and the rescuer. Stephen Karpman, "Fairy Tales and Script Drama Analysis," *Transactional Analysis Bulletin* 7 no. 26 (1968): 39–43. In *Transaction*, these roles were held alternately by "women," "film," and "psychiatrists."



← Structures for unusual swimming methods: Jellyfish Lilies and Floatable Platform Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas with Tracey Warr and Giacomo Costagnola. *River Runs*, 2012. Image courtesy of the artists.

Alexander Kluge's

# NEWS FROM IDEOLOGICAL ANTIQUITY

Marx – Eisenstein – Das Kapital



← Alexander Kluge,  
*News From  
Ideological Antiquity:  
Marx—Eisenstein—  
Das Kapital*, 2008.  
Film still.  
Image courtesy of  
dctp Info & Archiv.

Marc James Léger in conversation with  
Michael Blum and Barbara Clausen

In his 1927 “Notes for a Film on *Capital*,” Sergei Eisenstein describes some of the ideas that would constitute a dialectical approach to film form. The scenes that are depicted in his films *Strike*, *Battleship Potemkin* and *October*, he says, are not events, but the “conclusions of a series of theses.” [1] These works, as they depict the “nearsightedness of Menshevism,” were considered by Eisenstein to be both judgments on history and “fragment(s) of tomorrow.” [2]

This idea of historical time as an interstice is aptly associated to Alexander Kluge’s realization of Eisenstein’s plans to film Marx’s *Capital* via the stream-of-consciousness, day-in-the-life strategy used by James Joyce in *Ulysses*. Kluge’s nine-hour-long production, *News From Ideological Antiquity: Marx—Eisenstein—Das Kapital*, was released in 2008, a few months before the banking crisis in the United States sounded the death knell for the neoliberal view that history has come to an end. Shortly afterwards, Marx’s *Capital* appeared on the German bestseller list.

The moment was propitious, as it anticipated the revolutionary upheavals of the coming years: the Arab Spring; the uprisings in Greece, Spain, Chile and the United Kingdom; the Occupy Wall Street movement; and the student-led Printemps Érable in Quebec. Yet

whenever socialism and communism are mentioned, a series of objections are raised—not *that* kind of communism, not the continued domination of labour by state regimes, not the party politics of the emancipatory working class. A reformed capitalism appears to most people as the least worst of political options. This leads us to the question that was asked by Oskar Negt, the German sociologist and Kluge collaborator, just one year before the collapse of the Soviet Union: What is a revival of Marxism and why do we need one today? [3] His answer then was that to find a new way of understanding the role of the proletariat one needed to adopt the way of seeing that Marx himself used, which emphasizes the contradictions of the commodity as the basis of all reification. If the power of capital lies in the ability of the object to subjectify itself, then the response of the proletariat is to objectify itself in new social formations that are able to abolish the old relationships. Marx’s *Capital* is important because it points not to the existing reality, nor the traumatic past, but beyond them. The key to Marxism is that it promises the subjectivation of reality and the abolition of class society.

So what’s the news? For one, Kluge does not offer a meditation on *Capital* itself but lets a series of interlocutors do most of the talking. Among those interviewed in the film are the writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger, famous for an important essay on media theory, actress Sophie Rois, philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, Oskar Negt, Eisenstein biographer Oksana Bulgakova, Galina Antoschewskaja—the great-niece of Lenin’s translator, novelist Dietmar Dath, art historian Boris Groys, scholar Joseph Vogl, poet Durs Grünbein, political activist Lucy Redler, comedian and musician Helge Schneider, and about twenty more. Many of the interviews are focused exclusively on the interviewee and without the usual shot, counter-shot structure. [4] Each interview uses a static frame but changes in terms of background and setting. An intriguing phenomenon is the frequent alteration of the lighting device used to illuminate the scene. This fussing with lightbulbs and lamps brings to mind Eisenstein’s

notes, which discuss the writings of Joyce and which state: “Questions are asked and answers are given. The subject of the question is how to light a Bunsen burner. The answers, however, are metaphysical.” [5] With this in mind, I thought that perhaps the best way to assess *News From Ideological Antiquity* would be to have a conversation with Barbara Clausen and Michael Blum, who introduced the film during its Canadian premiere at the Cinémathèque Québécoise in Montreal on 27–29 April, 2011. Our discussion took place the following month.

**Barbara Clausen:** When we spoke at the screening, Marc, you said that you envisioned our interview in terms of a casual conversation between three people who have just seen Alexander Kluge’s *Nachrichten aus der ideologischen Antike*. I like the idea that the experience of seeing a film together in the cinema can lead to the continuation of the infinite stream of conversations that Kluge strikes up. It keeps with the spirit. Kluge refers to the film as *NadiA*, its German acronym, and we will do the same here.

**Marc James Léger:** Right, and the film is rather elusive, like André Breton’s *Nadja*. Do you think the film is accessible? You know, Kluge is so concerned with the masses, the proletarian public sphere, working people, and so on.

**BC:** Well, for people who watch reality television shows, probably not.

**MJL:** Do you know the context for the reception of his television work in Germany? Have you ever seen his work on television?

**BC:** Oh yes. He actually produces very mundane shows, as well as cultural programs, with his production company dctp, such as his erotic TV show called *Wa(h)re Liebe*.

**Michael Blum:** It means both real love and commodity love. I would say *NadiA* is completely accessible to whoever wants to see it. That is its beauty. It’s theory

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**Barbara Clausen** is a curator and art historian. She received her PhD in Art History (on the historiography of performance art and the work of Babette Mangolte) from the University of Vienna, Austria, in 2010 and is currently a guest professor in the department of art history at the Université du Québec à Montréal. Since 2004 she has curated the screening programs, exhibitions and performance series i.e. at the MUMOK Stiftung Ludwig in Vienna, TATE Modern, as well as, most recently, *Down Low Up High—Performing the Vernacular*, at Argos in Brussels (2011). She is currently organizing an exhibition on the work of Babette Mangolte for VOX Centre de l’image contemporaine, in Montreal (2013).

**Michael Blum** is an artist based in Montreal. Since the early 1990s, he has developed a body of work—videos, installations, books—that offers a critical re-reading of the production of culture and history. His work has been shown extensively at venues such as the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), De Appel (Amsterdam), Kunsthalle Wien, the New Museum (New York), as well as the Baltic, Istanbul and Tirana biennials. He is currently a professor at UQAM’s École des arts visuels et médiatiques. [www.blumology.net](http://www.blumology.net)

popularized, in the best sense, expressed in very simple terms. He obviously asked his interviewees to not use specialized language.

MJL: I think Kluge might reject the idea that his work is somehow illustrating theory, though he says that his models for film language are Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg.

MB: The film doesn't express theory, but is theory. I read in Kluge's interview with Stuart Liebman that for him, film and theory are combined. [6] His film is informed by theory because he works with language.

BC: Kluge does not illustrate, but rather grants us access to theory and philosophy. It's not an easy view. When we first watched it we would watch one hour at a time.

MJL: Was this on television?

MB: No, you can buy it on DVD. It's published by Suhrkamp, one of the major German book publishers. This mode of distribution I find highly interesting. Kluge went from being a writer to being a lawyer and then a filmmaker. And then he moved from film to television. But he has his own logical way—a very coherent trajectory.

BC: Kluge uses the book publishing distribution system to resist the passivity of the TV format. This is a move that is somehow reminiscent of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's call for an active TV viewer.

MB: The beauty of a DVD is that you can watch it at your own rhythm, and that's how we "consumed" it.

MJL: The film is very fragmentary. I don't imagine you would lose anything by watching it in parts. It's not Wagner's *Bayreuth* or Christo's unveiling of the Reichstag.

MB: It's really like a book. The fragmentation increases the accessibility and there are many vantage points, which become apparent when seeing it with others on

the big screen. The screening at the Cinémathèque brought a lot of people together. It wasn't just the usual five cinephiles or Marx scholars. It was a variety of people, many of them unfamiliar with Marxist debates, who were really hungry for this kind of knowledge.

MJL: What was your motivation for bringing *NadiA* to Montreal?

MB: On the one hand, it's a love of mediation—specifically a German-Québécois mediation—translating a cultural object that belongs to and is deeply rooted in German culture for a Québécois audience, which we knew would be receptive. And on the other hand, there is a personal obsession I have with Eisenstein's failure to film *Das Kapital*. I made a work based on this called *Wandering Marxwards*. It was the first work I made in Canada, in Banff in 1998, which happened to be the 150th anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto*.

MJL: Is it a failure or did he simply never get around to it?

MB: Maybe I shouldn't call it a failure, but I like the idea of failure being a productive factor. There was no footage shot, but there are about twenty pages of notes that Eisenstein took during the editing of *October* in the winter of 1927-28. As far as I know it was less related to James Joyce than everyone says. It was the idea of representing a life in one day that likely appealed to him. Eisenstein was looking for ways to translate *Das Kapital* into simple film language and *Ulysses* provided a great model.

MJL: Joyce's work is of course a challenge to the usual narrative form for the novel.

MB: True, and of course Eisenstein didn't succeed. Why? On the one hand, because representing *Das Kapital* is a huge challenge—too great even for him. And on the other hand, there were political reasons for which the Soviet regime—at this point, it was Stalin's decision—simply didn't want him to carry on with it. So the project remained unrealized, and this unrealized film became an obsession of mine, I admit a slightly

romantic one, but nonetheless it's been fuelling my work.

MJL: So are Eisenstein's notes the starting point for your work?

MB: The notes contain the possibility of making a film of *Capital*, but they also contain this aspect of impossibility.

MJL: Is your work then about impossibility?

MB: I was basically looking for a more human vision of Marx and Marxism.

MJL: More human than what, Stalinism or something?

MB: No, more human than the common view on Marx, which is cold. You know, political knowledge is not warm... Let's say I was trying to emphasize the human aspects of Marx's writings, something rather unexpected—like the tips he wrote for his friends' wives on how to read *Capital*. He wrote these in the form of recipes, a form he thought would make the text more accessible to women! This gives us a completely different insight into Marx.

BC: Do you think Kluge was aware of this?

MB: Very likely, but he didn't include it in the film, even though he is after these little stories that encapsulate history, like the Robinsons of 1942, or the real grave of Marx. You think that the film contains everything, and you become sensitive to what's actually missing.

MJL: Does *NadiA* include clips that were previously presented on television?

BC: Yes, like the footage of the two GDR scouts discussing water, electricity and Soviet power.

MB: It's an extension of existing material. He didn't use everything because of course he had interviews with Heiner Müller shot sometime in the late 1980s and he didn't include them. Why not? We can only speculate. Brecht aside, Müller was one of the most important

[1] Sergei Eisenstein, "Notes for a film of *Capital*," October 2 (Summer 1976), 4.

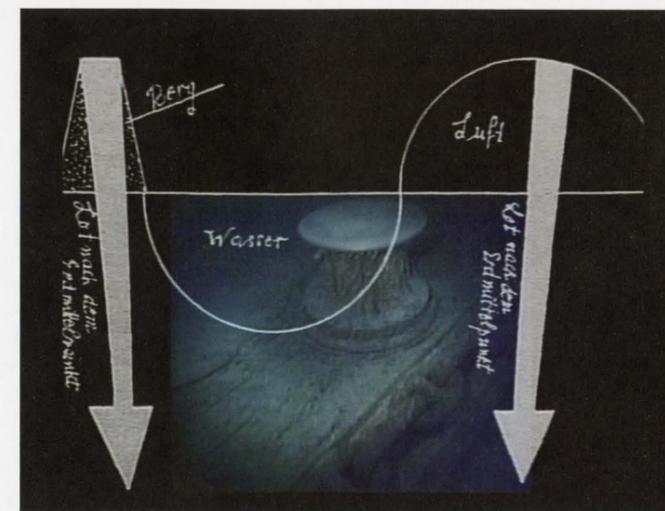
[2] Ibid., 4-5.

[3] See Oskar Negt, "What Is a Revival of Marxism and Why Do We Need One Today?: Centennial Lecture Commemorating the Death of Karl Marx," in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 222.

[4] For some useful essays on Kluge's film work, see Miriam Hansen, "Cooperative Auteur Cinema and Oppositional Public Sphere: Alexander Kluge's *Germany in Autumn*," *New German Critique* 24/25 (Fall/Winter 1981-82): 36-56; Stuart Liebman, "Why Kluge?" *October* 46 (Fall 1988): 4-22; Edgar Reitz, Alexander Kluge and Wilfried Reinke, "Word and Film," *October* 46 (Fall 1988): 83-95; Miriam Hansen, "Introduction (On Kluge)," *New German Critique* 49 (Winter 1990): 3-10.

[5] Eisenstein, "Notes," 7.

[6] Stuart Liebman, "On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere: An Interview with Alexander Kluge," *October* 46 (Fall 1988): 23-59.



↑  
Alexander Kluge,  
*News From Ideological Antiquity:  
Marx—Eisenstein—Das Kapital*,  
2008. Film still.  
Image courtesy of  
dctp Info & Archiv.

German literary and theatre figures of the twentieth century. He's at the core of all of these issues in the film and he's not in it. So his absence is quite palpable. In any case, Kluge used a lot of material that existed beforehand but much of it was also shot for this production.

BC: There were several interviews with Oskar Negt, you might have noticed, and each one was a little different in style from the others.

MJL: It's in one of the interviews with Negt that we see Kluge for the first time.

MB: In this scene you really become aware of the way *NadiA* is constructed. For example, in the interview with Durs Grünbein, Kluge is on the phone and you see him frontally. That's the only time you see him alone in the picture, moreover in such a frontal shot.

MJL: I've thought about this question of the occasional presence of Kluge in the film and I can't say that I see any obvious rationale for it except maybe as an exception to the formalism

of shooting interviewees in some fairly standardized ways.

BC: I think it's about transparency. In the Grünbein interview it's interesting that Grünbein is perfectly lit with makeup and everything, but that Kluge is shot in his office with dim lighting. It's ironic that this major filmmaker from the postwar period is practically sitting in the dark whereas this other person, in the U.S., has perfect hair. Kluge has a generosity and is sovereign enough to include material others would edit out.

MJL: Perhaps he's trying to deal with the paradox of being both the author and the work—conducting interviews and talking to the audience at the same time. It's an interesting means for him to move away from the usual strategies of cinema, like sho/counter-shot. As much as I like his television work, I really like his film work. It's sad that now that he's in this television mode he'll never make another quote-unquote film.

MB: What really seduced me in the first place is the playfulness

of the film. Kluge is old enough to not care about his style and he's completely free to just play with the form of the interview and with his interviewees. He has nothing to prove anymore. I'm always in awe of cultural producers in their seventies who still experiment with form. We live in a system that encourages us to make a formula out of everything that works, and Kluge certainly doesn't do that. As for his films, if you think of *Yesterday Girl* (1966), which is minimal, beautiful, with very little dialogue and very simple camera work... It's over now though, and Kluge is not interested in the economic machine that film is caught in. He can be supportive of people who make commercial films today, but he's just not interested in making them himself anymore.

MJL: He's always been critical of the sort of author's cinema that becomes signature work with production in the interest of profits rather than audiences.

MB: Yes, and that for him simply becomes an extension of nineteenth-century bourgeois aesthetics.

MJL: Yeah, but it's easy to see his television work as an extension of his film politics.

MB: An extension, or a receptacle for his film work. He translates the language of film within the format of television rather than vice versa.

BC: And now, with *NadiA*, he brings it into the book format by making the film available on DVD for an affordable price.

MB: I wonder how Kluge works with the Internet. I think he would be sympathetic to the idea because it's open, decentralized, democratic, it reaches everyone, and it's free. Also, the Internet is global. But then there is the issue of language. For *NadiA*, I think he used DVD because a nine-hour film just can't be properly presented on the Internet.

MJL: This is another criticism of the strategy of *cinéma d'auteur* in which signature acts as a vehicle for global distribution. The idea of production politics is instead to change the local conditions that make author's cinema the only way to survive. For this, cinema has to collaborate with the public sphere.

BC: This brings us back to what motivated us to show the film. In hindsight it was an incredible experience to see this film with others. This gave me a completely different outlook on what was being said. The timing with the Canadian elections was incidental, but it fit with a political consciousness we found in Quebec, because of the leftist tradition.

MJL: One of the questions that the film raises is the relevance of Marx, much more so than that of Eisenstein. He uses Eisenstein as a way to talk about *Capital*, but of course he's programmatically against Eisenstein's theories of montage. You know he made *Artists Under the Big Top: Perplexed* (1968), which is a film about a woman who wants to start a circus but who wants to show animals in their natural state and not ridiculously alter their nature. This for him — not only in

subject matter, but in film form — was a critique of Eisenstein's idea of intellectual cinema as a cinema that elicits a specific response and a cinema which already knows what the audience response should be. So we have the relevance not only of Marxist political economy but what this has meant for the development of culture and aesthetics. What do you think of Marxist politics within the field of culture today? I would say that since the postmodern 80s there hasn't been a great deal of acceptance of Marx until only recently, in the last five years or so.

BC: In recent years, artists such as Rainer Ganahl, Alfredo Jaar or critic David Riff have called out for people to re-read Marx. I think there have been momentary desires to go back to Marx, to read Marx, but I wonder how genuine this is and where it leads.

MB: There is a real need for reading Marx, especially after the sub-prime crisis and the recession. It's clear that capitalism has failed and lives on only thanks to the billions that were injected by states as artificial life support. As for the cultural sphere, there has always been a liberal trend in it. If we, artists and cultural producers, want to be relevant, we have to know what is important to society at large. But beyond that, I agree with Barbara that it's a bit too sudden for the art world to be so interested in leftist politics. This said, what is crucial about *NadiA* is that the film was released just *before* the crisis. We were interested in seeing if Kluge had written a postscript to the film subsequent to the crisis, but he hadn't.

MJL: Wouldn't the postscript be whatever people make of the film, or maybe even reading *Capital* if they haven't attempted it yet? Shouldn't the film's postscript be its critical reception, or the uses people make of it?

MB: You're right, but I still wanted to hear from Kluge on this! The daily use of the Internet has changed our minds. Now we want everything updated by the minute — a quasi-live transmission of Marx — to be always in sync with the *Zeitgeist*.

When I re-read the *Communist Manifesto* in 1998, before making *Wandering Marxwards*, I was stunned by what Marx described in 1848. His account is so close to what we see 150 years later, namely, the deregulation of the labour market and the globalization of trade. As for Helge Schneider, he helped with an issue of translation, which is how to translate Marx into music. What images do we have for *Das Kapital*? What images do we need? I think that's exactly where the relevance of the film lies for cultural producers.

MJL: I had very contradictory feelings about the ending, because obviously it functions as a sort of happy ending. It's one of the most ludic moments in the film, and Schneider even puts on a fake Marx beard and says in a high-pitched emasculated voice: "Workers of the world, unite!" I think it acts as a moment of confession because it's talking about the contradiction of cultural production in terms of the difference between productive and nonproductive labour. The artist, as a producer, exists within a division of labour, which brings up the entire problem of who the audience is for the work. Kluge has a very privileged position — as do we — within that division, so his film as a whole is a kind of measure of the state of capitalist production. As he's waving goodbye he's saying to us that his film is itself an objectification of capitalist productivity.

MB: That's right, film and television are industries. I recently read an interview with Michel Gondry where he states that contemporary art is like the stock market, while film is an industry. I believe this is relevant since film is a big system, heavy and predictable, which is what Gondry likes about it. With contemporary art values change overnight based on what appears volatile and irrational.

BC: But as an art historian, I understand this irrationality as part of a greater structure and ontology that goes back to the creation in the nineteenth century of myths about the nature of the artist.

↓  
Alexander Kluge,  
*News From Ideological Antiquity:  
Marx—Eisenstein—Das Kapital*,  
2008. Film still.  
Image courtesy of  
dctp Info & Archiv.



MJL: My critique though would not be of artists but of the social system in which they live. There's a compulsion in the system for constant change and that's the competitive aspect that motivates productivity.

BC: The paradox of the capitalist market is also that it has created so many different kinds of art practices. There is actually quite a lot of diversity in the art world; therefore it might be more appropriate to speak of art worlds, in the plural.

MJL: They nevertheless have to confront the facts of capitalist relations. Even the more communal versions or alternative practices, permaculture or micro-financing or whatever, have to function within a capitalist system. Small utopian communities are no different in this regard than socialist states like China or North Korea.

MB: Well, you can't operate outside of capitalism, can you?

MJL: I would say that there is definitely a utopian streak in much of today's activist art and this is very apropos in relation to a film that's based on *Capital*, you know, which is defined as scientific socialism. What

I appreciate about an art collective like Chto Delat?, for example, is that they are very knowledgeable about these kinds of issues.

BC: This historical awareness and its application to the present is part of their practice.

MJL: Yes and look at how minoritarian that discourse has become in Russia and how much censorship there is of radical politics. There's brutal repression of any kind of protest and any critique of capitalism.

BC: Yes, which they document on their website. Their blog is like an archive of all of these human rights abuses.

MB: This is where Kluge's strategy becomes relevant. He didn't want to work outside the system, but completely from within. In the 1980s he decided to work within the realm of private as opposed to state television. With all the private channels that appeared in the 1980s in Germany it became evident that there would be little programming dedicated to culture and education, and this lack actually allowed a space of freedom.

BC: Kluge claimed a space for educational programming within the private TV sector and actually managed to get great time slots. [7] His story of resistance became a story of success. Kluge is not a romantic—he's a pragmatist.

MJL: It's romantic in the sense of the early bourgeois entrepreneurialism that Kluge talks about. This is an avant-garde idea of art, which is not a popular concept today. Most people will say that art is not a matter of class politics. With Kluge, though, you have the language of class, especially in his and Negt's idea of the proletarian public sphere. He said somewhere, I think in the *October* interview with Stuart Liebman: "We are not postmodernists. I believe in the avant-garde." [8] A good deal of art today is actually more comfortable with what he and Negt refer to as the production public spheres. It's more of a cool counter-cultural space—relativistic and pluralist.

BC: Today, to become an artist is a lifestyle decision. The number of people who apply to art school has mushroomed. Some art programs, like the one at Columbia University in New York or the Royal College of Art in London, promise

[7] See Liebman's interview with Kluge in Stuart Liebman, ed., Alexander Kluge: *Theoretical Writings, Stories and an Interview* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 31.

[8] Liebman, "On New German Cinema," 57.



←  
Alexander Kluge,  
*News From  
Ideological Antiquity:  
Marx—Eisenstein—  
Das Kapital*, 2008.  
Film still.  
Image courtesy of  
dctp Info & Archiv.

students a commercially successful career by the time they graduate.

MJL: Yes, and in that sense class analysis is replaced with lifestyle ambitions and whatever suits your personal profile. So you end up with a cultural politics of representation.

MB: Actually, art education carries a lot of these contradictions. Some level of authority is necessary to guarantee others total freedom within a given framework. But clearly, I don't believe people who claim they work outside the system.

MJL: I agree with you and I've written about this question in relation to fantasy. One of the things that interests me about Negt and Kluge is the way they acknowledge fantasy as something produced by social relations and which bourgeois ideology rejects as being unrealistic. Fantasy reproduces reality but in a distorted form, as a reaction and as a defense. When you come out of school, you're often confronted with a situation in which you have become marginalized but you have the dream of being an artist or an art theorist or whatever. You think this way while you are working on your art or your writing, but you soon discover that for various reasons you are alienated from what you make. It's a matter of opting into a system that is going to exploit you.

There's a Kluge film that was made in 1976 called *Strongman Ferdinand*, which is about a security expert who is hired by a large manufacturer on a probationary contract. He trains security staff and wants to demonstrate his competence, much like an independent, avant-garde artist who is proud of the work that they do, without compromise. So he has to prove that he can do the job and he's very gung-ho about it, extremely professional and systematic. He gradually discovers that some of the unionized workers are planning a strike and then that some of the white-collar scientists are sharing research secrets with other companies. After he reports this, an executive tells him that he should ease off and maybe not do his job so well. He then discovers that the

board and executive are actually looking into selling off company assets, undermining its viability—something like that.

BC: So it's corruption across the board.

MB: Many Kluge films are about people crushed by the brutality and corruption of the system. Take *Yesterday Girl*, for example—it's the whole country that's corrupt. Anita G. moves from East to West Germany to seek a better life and every human she meets or institution that deals with her causes her situation to deteriorate. She's criminalized, abused and ends up in a women's prison. With *NadiA* there is a less dramatic ending—quite the opposite in fact. I wouldn't call it a happy ending though.

MJL: But you know the feeling in the room, right? Everyone got up with a smile on their faces that had almost nothing to do with 99 per cent of the film.

MB: In Germany, Helge Schneider is a well-known comedian for intellectuals, so to speak. He's also a musician and a filmmaker. He makes really goofy films and musical performances, like a piano duo/contest with Chilly Gonzales. He's both high and low, goofy and smart. The concluding scenes with him as Eisenstein's composer are great because he's someone who really works on translating concepts.

MJL: That's part of the Kluge language: the variety show format, or the "revue film" that Horkheimer and Adorno thought had more progressive potential than the standard Hollywood method of nailing you to the cross. This is cinema that's not about aesthetic autonomy, like Tarkovsky or Antonioni, but that's more designed to stimulate a response, like burlesque with its prurient material.

MB: Yes, but only there, at the end.

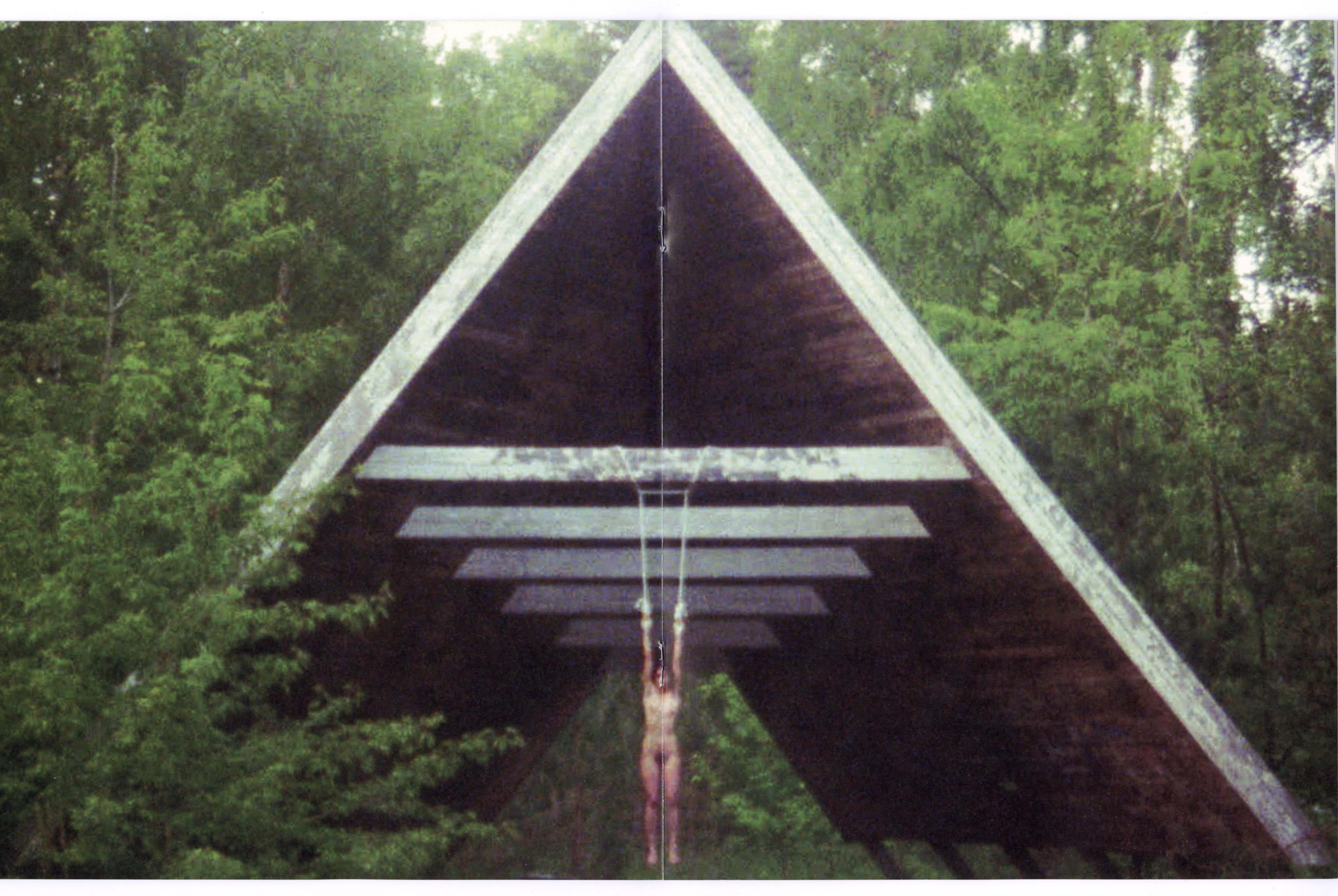
MJL: Well, there's a bit of burlesque throughout, like when he's berating Negt about the fact that little can be achieved with written

theory, that images can better create situations. He pushes Negt to the point where he just can't take it anymore and then says that's the problem, that the images overtake you and become the situation.

BC: But I think there are also very emotional moments—like with Dietmar Dath when they talk about love and extremely personal stories, or with Sophie Rois, when she's thinking about love and intimacy.

MJL: To me, both those interviews were such put-ons, especially the one with Dath. They're jumping from topic to topic.

MB: Yes, and what's great is that Kluge can be with someone for a minute or an hour and either way he creates intimacy, which we as viewers are allowed to share.



# REVISING A STRATEGICALLY DEMONIZED PAST



Sydney Hart in Conversation with  
Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė

In late December 2011, I was invited to visit the Žeimiai manor house, a space for cultural events, exhibitions and residencies in the town of Žeimiai in the central Lithuanian district of Jonava. The same year, during an artist-in-residence program in the Lithuanian town of Nida, I had researched the country's history of association with supra-national entities – from being the first former Soviet Republic to declare independence in 1990 to joining the European Union in 2004. There, the backdrop of shifting political affiliations informed my consideration of the viability of sites of cultural production. I was specifically interested in how the curators, residents and operators of the Žeimiai manor house, an estate sanctified by the state as a site of national cultural heritage, navigated through the strictures of institutional politics and the effects of intensifying privatization to stake out an autonomous space with a unique program.

Formerly part of the village kolkhoz [1], the Žeimiai manor house has been operated since 2006 by Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė and Domas Noreika, curators of ŽemAt. An acronym for the Žeimiai Technical College of Esthetic Thought and Anonymity, ŽemAt holds a variety of events and exhibitions at the manor house estate through a program that examines local histories and politics, revisits Lithuania's communist past and addresses the influences of arts funding policies in the country. The forms of ŽemAt events range widely to echo

managerial strategies of cultural tourism, the politics of national and supra-national institutions, and the institutions that have historically supported the site.

The manor house grounds and surrounding park include 13.3 hectares of land, on which seven buildings are privately owned but are paradoxically also registered on the list of the national Department of Cultural Heritage. Because of this, the architecture of these buildings is the site of contentious debates around the responsibility of conservation, as well as an opportunity for ŽemAt's programs and interventions to engage in dialogue with the nationally endorsed structures of the estate.

Lithuania has witnessed several phases of accelerated land privatization since the restoration of its independence in 1990, a trend that contrasts with ŽemAt's program of communization that must navigate through the constraints of national funding policies. The aesthetic and political versatility of ŽemAt projects critically evoke the neoliberal economic imperatives of national and European Union politics. The manor house estate offers a setting for the subversive (re)staging of the collective uses of the site in the Soviet era, often covertly bringing into light aspects of the everyday from the communist past.

What political agency can be found in the reinvestigation of this past? How does an autonomous space such as the manor house react to the effects of globalization and the enclosures of privatization? ŽemAt addresses the urgency of these questions in its navigation through the politics of conservation and national funding policies, as well as in its unearthing of the site's obscured history. One of the strategies crucial to understanding the program of ŽemAt is "subversive affirmation": a form of excessive, explicit consent that appropriates, identifies with or imitates the language of power. By feigning subsumption into this language, subversive affirmation questions the manifestations of hegemonic discourse as the status quo through a staging of its blind embrace, so that "there is always a surplus that destabilizes affirmation and turns it

into its opposite." [2] This strategy reveals, through an excess tending towards the absurd, the performative nature of hegemonic discourses and how they can be undermined from a performed position of interiority, using imitation and pastiche. Subversive affirmation thus acts as a kind of parasitical strategy using the acceptance of subjection and the reiteration of forms of power to highlight the absurdity of the underlying ideologies. Its various forms are linked by an apparent collusion with hegemonic ideology through the appearance of depersonalization, mimicry and invisibility. [3] It is a strategy notably associated with dissident artistic and activist practices from the 1960s onwards in various parts of the Eastern European bloc (with groups such as Orange Alternative in Poland or Laibach in Slovenia). From the necessity of being covert when critiquing institutions during the Soviet era, subversive affirmation has taken on a new relevance in an era of globalized capital, where overt critique and irony are easily recuperated by and subsumed into the prevalent ideology. Subversive affirmation, with its appearance of normativity, speaks to the impossibility of taking a critical position exterior to empire and encourages immanence in the maneuvers and logic of capital.

Through strategies such as this, the program of ŽemAt provides a prism through which to examine the effects of land privatization, state funding in relation to cultural production, and the ways in which artistic and activist projects can operate through or against the economic imperatives of the state.

This interview with Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė was conducted via email, following our conversation at the Žeimiai manor house on 27 December 2011.

Sydney Hart is an artist, writer and editor of *livedspace*, a research and publishing organization investigating the social production of space in relation to contemporary cultural production ([www.livedspace.org](http://www.livedspace.org)).

Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė is an artist who lives and works in New York, USA and Žeimiai, Lithuania. She studied painting at the Vilnius Art Academy and completed her Master of Fine Arts at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm.

←  
ŽemAt Collective,  
*The Grand Scene of an Unknown Painting*,  
2012.  
Domas Noreika  
Gallery Archive.  
Image courtesy  
of the collective.

[1] The term kolkhoz designates a collective farming unit in the Soviet Union.

[2] Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse, "Subversive Affirmation: On Mimesis as a Strategy of Resistance," in *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ed. IRWIN (London: Afterall, 2006), 445.

[3] *Ibid.*, 447.

[4] Alain Badiou, "Does the Notion of Activist Art Still Have a Meaning?" (Online; video of lecture given at Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York NY, 13 October 2010. [www.lacan.com/thevideos](http://www.lacan.com/thevideos)). (Note that this is the exact phrasing from Badiou's English language lecture.)

Sydney Hart: How did you come to be involved with the Žeimiai manor house and the organization running it, ŽemAt? How would you situate the manor house and the cultural projects sited there in relation to the history of post-communist privatization and the restitution of private property in Lithuania?

Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė: ŽemAt is a fictitious and simulated institution, engaged in developing art and cultural projects related to the critical analysis of anonymity, with significant attention given to issues of de-personalization and non-authorship. ŽemAt is the result of creative activity models that develop ideas of collaboration, collectivism, appropriation and communication.

To start its transition to sovereignty, the Lithuanian nation first refuted the central power of the USSR and its command economy. As a result, property was defined first and foremost as national property belonging to the Republic of Lithuania. The transition to a market economy was controlled by the national government with help from the World Bank and specialists from the International Monetary Fund. But we did not have the specialists to make the transition more transparent: public and private relations were highly corrupt, and there were lots of juridical problems with the lack of regulations for the privatization process.

Usually the privatization process is divided into three historical periods. First,

from 1991 to 1995, privatization was carried out in an illegal way using investment cheques, because the monetary system was not quite established yet. At this time, the manor house estate went into national hands; that was the period when it depended directly on the surrounding community and everyone could use the space for their own needs. In other words, they felt the right to dismantle the estate in the same way they were dismantling any other kolkhoz building which no longer functioned as such, but only represented the repressed past. The Žeimiai manor house had been part of the village kolkhoz unit and the property was used for agricultural education. Everything in the estate was subordinated for the sake of agriculture to an extreme degree: half of

the park territory was demolished, the representative house was roughly restructured so it could serve as a dormitory, the old building elements were replaced by technologically "advanced" materials like asbestos, cement, &c.

Secondly, 1996 to 2001 was a period when market prices were established for the expansion of the private sector according to macroeconomics. During this period, everything was seen in the blinding light of profit making (from 1994 to 2002, the litas was pegged to the United States dollar at the rate of four to one). I remember my dad going to Chechnya to buy soap in order to sell it in Lithuania. At the same moment, the manor house's value was being speculated on in a similar way, as a good place for a bar, a club or even a casino. Its first owner, and many others (my dad included), were in deep debt from banks, which were giving away loans with unimaginably high interest rates.

The criminal aspect shouldn't be forgotten when speaking about the history of banks in Lithuania. The black market also had a big influence in forming the juridical basis for the new free-market economy. There is economic legislation in Lithuania supporting and legalizing the extent of imaginable trade in private property in order to make it seem like a functional and natural process. I would speculate that the first banks were based on money used from the sale of previously occupied property, with buyers taking loans from the bank to get the occupied property, which then became privatized through the bank.

A more subtle form of speculation began after 2001, when everything became regulated by the market economy, including, of course, social structure, labour relations and social security institutions. During this last period of privatization, a so-called golden age of the economy, the manor house was registered on the Cultural Heritage list, but the government was incapable of handling properties like this, as the cultural funds didn't exist. Basically, money for the cultural sector came only after joining the European Union in 2004. Until then, exoticized cultural objects travelled through different hands, and it happened that the Žeimiai estate was sold to the ex-chairman/leader of the Žeimiai kolkhoz – the grandfather of Domas Noreika – a man who participated in the land reformation process officially in government during the privatization period and was an amazingly bright person, a socialist until the end.

I remember us talking about the manor house's refusal to engage in conservation efforts, maintaining the walls for instance, and the friction this created between your ownership of the property and Žeimiai residents, who seem to sanctify the site through the moral imperatives of the so-called common good. The neglected walls became a sign manifesting passive resistance to these nostalgic imperatives, ironically bringing into question the extent of ownership of private property. Extending this seemingly unwitting gesture of refusal through inaction, how do you feel that autonomous spaces in Lithuania have the potential to circumvent and question state narratives about property?

First, I have to mention that the original owners of the estate had to sign a contract with the Department of Cultural Heritage, thereby obliging all future inhabitants of the manor house to cooperate with the department. Presently, ŽemAt, acting as owner/operators, don't have as many problems with the heritage department as we do with the society surrounding the estate, who point out our seeming inability to sustain the property in a proper Euro-standardized way. We are able to continue with our project so long as we're faithful to the government and it supports our approach to conservation, but we have to understand that without their support we're going to be eaten alive by locals in Žeimiai who are actually acting according to a liberal ideology provided by the same state apparatus. This economic ideology is culturally intertwined with a strong romantic and aristocratic nationalism, which has its roots in the first decades of the twentieth century during the time of Lithuanian independence.

The double bind of the state and society is reflected in the entire agenda of ŽemAt, and explains the use of irony, which we see as inevitable to the project of living in Žeimiai. In order to open up a space for community and to defend everyone's right to the property (secretly trying to support the ideas of communization), we have to smile at the system of European funding for community projects, and at the same time accept the rules of private property in an Eastern European way. In other words, we're sleeping with a gun under the pillow. This double bind is certainly not a form of relying on the community as a comrade in order to fight the brutal politics of the state. The only gap in the totally destructive and apologetic forms of governance we have is the milieu of art, which becomes not something transcendental, but the only way of surviving not just in terms of *wellbeing*, but of *actually being*.

How do you imagine this gap in relation to supporting ideas of communization, either through the identification of a community or through strategies of anonymity?

The Technical School of Esthetic Thought and Anonymity has its origins in the mid-1970s. The technical school for agriculture was established in the Žeimiai manor house at that time. When it was transformed into a public facility, this changed the structural function of its architecture, losing its private characteristics. Its aesthetic transformations were radical, or dialectical. The author of these changes was literally the state; who else would have built the additional walls in the bathroom with three toilets in a row, in a way standard for public urban buildings? At that time, form/aesthetics and function merged in an economic and political sense. During the transition, the fusion suddenly disappeared, and in order to recapture that great synthesis we put these two terms together in the name of the school. Function doesn't emerge directly but in the name of anonymity or the unknown, to represent the imagination of the masses. Even in this age of private and supposedly independent property, we can observe how collective memory has its own mode of solving the problem of private property. ŽemAt is constructed on the basis of the collective imagination; we let everyone decide for themselves what the Žeimiai estate and ŽemAt stand for.

This tension between a singular source of cultural experience and the imagining of an impersonal, anonymous stream from which culture originates is expressed through another project related to ŽemAt: DNG, or Domas Noreika Gallery (DNG is also an acronym for the Lithuanian National Art Gallery in Vilnius). For the Domas Noreika Gallery, the whole estate becomes one man's art installation. It's an ironic way of seeing the process of appropriation, in which suddenly you become the owner of a wall on which someone has written anonymously: "I love Vika." (During the 1990s the estate was more or less totally abandoned and the young villagers went to play various adult games there, leaving their love/hate notes on the walls inside the building.) Everyone who enters the territory through the gates becomes a participant in this art installation. They are even given a contract through which they have to give contact information and decide if they want to participate in the installation publicly or privately, after which Domas poses for a photo with each participant. In this way, more and more participants are included in the installation by visiting the manor house.



←  
One of ŽemAt's members on the manor property, ŽemAt Archive, 2010. Image courtesy of Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė.

Do you see the theatricality of active audience participation in the DNG installation as a reflection of, or comment on, institutional politics of inclusivity? ŽemAt's *RESIDENCYo-Yo* for instance, functions with the sanctification of national funding bodies through subversive affirmation, a strategy that seems to be another hinge around which different frames of support can turn.

For our project *RESIDENCYo-Yo*, the Žeimiai estate is itself presented as a DNG art installation that operates according to the rhythms of an exhibition/post-modern art museum. Here, the estate acts as a professional centre for building systems of critical thought, and systematically realizing and reflecting different cultural influences. Also fundamental is the designation of the park surrounding the manor house as an incubator for growth and development, where the development of cultural tourism, information and ecology-related programs takes place.

The *RESIDENCYo-Yo* imports its meaning from an understanding of the archaic game of yo-yo. We try to make the residency a floating island, one that is neither private nor public. Its belonging to the Technical School of Esthetic Thought and Anonymity becomes very abstract. Identified with the old nomenclatura and new bureaucracy, we use the same vocabulary and rhetoric to describe *RESIDENCYo-Yo* in our promotional text and in our proposals for European money for creative industries; this language is mandatory if we want to benefit from European Union funding. Our project ends up appearing compatible with the narrative that "nothing ever happened in the Eastern Bloc, and even if something *did* happen, we've totally fixed it."

At the same time, we are colonized by the idea that we have the great future of the free market economy. The thing is that in Lithuania, an art market that could provide a livelihood for artists as independent figures does not exist. This means that anyone who wants to benefit from being in the circle of state support has to run around in that circle like a lab rat, otherwise there is no support, and a perceived autonomy melts into a void that forces you into the realm of survival. This circle is so small in scale that just one person is capable of managing the local art world – the yo-yo metaphor works here as one string making the whole circle move. The circle and string represent the functioning of the support apparatus for art in Lithuania. Who pulls the string? One string, one direction, one opportunity: the double

bind here dictates a very restricted autonomy for artists. On one hand, one should be happy not having to participate in the pure business of commercial galleries since one gets support from the state, but on the other hand, unfortunately the state has a clear program that is in fact directed by the same economic path.

Yes, all of this may sound very local and too internal or enclosed, but according to Badiou: "In the absence of the strong ideology we must be really near the local experiences in the field of politics." [4] We suffer from this absence in a specific region of the former East, and for the absence to be replaced with a refined knowledge of the local political scene – which is full of different diseases, and where any critical reflection is condemned by the socio-economic traumatization of the serf community – we need a new semantics. I sometimes wonder if we in the Eastern Bloc perceive the current system as a regime that is suppressing us and leaving us speechless, as if nothing changed and the transition did not happen. All that's happened is the replacement of one form of denial with another: one denial is dedicated to the past and the other to the present. The role of language looks like a horizon without any trees, and what ŽemAt is trying to emphasize is the "earth of language." So to expand on Badiou's quote, the challenge for the former East would be to create ideology on a semantic level, to articulate this strong ideology.

How do you imagine the future of the paradigm proposed by the manor house, as one on which contemporary forms of institutional politics can hinge? What is ŽemAt planning now?

The future is hard to imagine. I imagine Lithuania as one big private estate, so we are not trying to create a paradigm but more or less to break one. I am not sure when we are going to collapse the paradigm. ŽemAt is now struggling with a couple of projects, through *RESIDENCYo-Yo*. With the first we will try to make a counter-commemoration of the Titanic event, together with residents from two countries, Sweden and Russia. The project is related to the subject of historical markers and nationalism, as Lithuanians have so many national celebrations and dates for reconstructing the national social strata over and over again. The Žeimiai estate could host readings to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the famous nationalist poet Maironis, but aren't failures outside a country much more evocative of thoughts on the mother land? The Swedes and

Russians are famous for drowning most of their ships in the Baltic Sea. The act of drowning is interesting for us as both tragedy and farce. History says that Lithuanians should be very grateful to Sweden for always provoking Russia to make war, so that Lithuania could have some rest from Russian interference in its politics. This politics of distraction is playing a very important role in Lithuania right now, with the act of celebrating as one of the main distractions.

The other project is a shop called Fut(o)urism (which in Lithuanian literally means "tourism sucks," but in a soft way), which is about the relics and random things from the manor house collected to remember the past. People are invited to have conversations about the bad old times, and many of the items in the assortment deal with the Soviet period in Lithuanian history. This was the epoch we inherited as the youth of the transition. We understand that our generation's mission is to revise this strategically demonized past – exhibiting the kernels of truth within the historical imperatives of communism. We stake this mission in opposition to the neoliberal market's mystic language and artificial denial of the past.



→ Individually-priced items from Fut(o)urism Shop: donkey doll, donkey stuffed toy, donkey tractor, donkey tin, donkey wrigley's spearmint. ŽemAt Collective, Fut(o)urism, ongoing. Image courtesy of Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė



## Rearview Mirror

considerable, common point of reference the artists share. As a curator, my interest gravitated toward Eamon's framing of the show. What follows is an adaptation of a text I used to guide a public presentation I led at the gallery (Sunday Scene, 28 August 2011), which focused on Eamon's introductory wall text (excerpted of which are in *italic*).

*For most of the artists included in this exhibition, the East is a Western fabrication based on an outmoded Western imaginary.*

This is a ripe introductory sentence. Eamon is using the Western imaginary as synonymous with hegemonic narratives in the art world that originate from Europe and North America, though the idea of East that Eamon cites is located specifically in Europe. Part of his point is that the concept of the East erases the distinct political, economic and cultural histories of the countries subsumed under the term. It is this homogenous idea of the East that he pronounces impotent. This exhibition is not really an overview of a region; it is more an antidote to the sameness promulgated by the mythology of the East. Instead of the term referencing a geographical location, Eamon uses it as a description of "experimental approaches in non-traditional media."

I wonder: does the experience of a cultural paradigm shift breed experimental thinking? Does the experience of living through fundamental social transformations correlate to means or methods of creative expression at the fringe? And, is the idea of a cross-border kinship among

Eastern nations truly a Western invention? Did a previous sense of communion evaporate along with the Thaw, or did it ever even exist at all?

*Culturally speaking, there was another reality beyond the monolithic socialist culture one imagines, one that several generations thought unalterable (at least in their lifetimes) until the events of November 1989.*

I am confused by this sentence. Cold War mentality assumed the possibility of change, either by force or persuasion, in either direction: be it the further spread of communism or capitalism. I am not sure who Eamon is suggesting thought change improbable, because as I remember it (granted, I was very young), the Cold War was characterized by a sense of inevitable change. The stakes were high—the nuclear clock was near striking midnight. The only question was of which change? And when? And change did come.

1989 is, of course, the year that the Berlin Wall fell, and it was a harbinger of the end of the Cold War. Eamon is here arguing for the end of one way of historical thinking (the idea

of former communist states as a undifferentiated mass), thereby making room for a contemporary mode of thought that listens carefully instead of speaking dictatorially. This is manifest in Eamon's attempt to maintain a sense of the cultural differences between these artists despite similar histories and a confluence of artistic strategies. This is his major project: To maintain cultural difference despite things in common—but also not to revivify the idea of "the East."

*Rather than attempt to classify "Easternness" in some way, this exhibition focuses on a new generation of artists and their practices.*

Eamon works to allow a sense of identity to emerge out of the projects themselves, rather than trying to orchestrate or name a zeitgeist. He suggests that this is not a thematic exhibition, though it does function as an explanation machine, albeit a humble one. For instance, though this show features a number of artists from Poland, Eamon avoids grandiose statements about what it means to be a Polish artist outside of the display of certain

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works that engage notions of heritage and homeland. The point of this exhibition is to take assumptions elsewhere, not to re-confirm them. The measure of success must be that it does something to our understandings.

As an example, I had imagined that the work in the show would be more overtly political, that the spectre of communism and transformation would be on the lips and tongues of these artists. Instead, I see a range of media that reflect familiar artistic tropes where the ghosts of a former era are buried so deep as to be almost undetectable. This show is not a eulogy or requiem for a disappearing world, and that has checked my assumptions of what I thought I would find.

*Culturally, there is not a lot in common between Poland and Kosovo, or even between Poland and a closer neighbour such as Romania. Indeed, borders drawn after World War I and redrawn after 1945 outline specific political and cultural histories.*

There seems to be an artificial differentiation of scale here. Surely the experience of living in any one country is different from living in another, but within any country, experiences vary widely as well. If we are to take Eamon's injunction against monolithic thinking seriously, then simply reducing the size of the monolith does nothing to moderate its insidious effects.

If we refer back to Eamon's introductory sentence—"For most of the artists included in this exhibition, the East is a Western fabrication based

on an outmoded Western imaginary"—here he seems to commit the very act he is arguing against. There are any number of discourses taken up in "the West" that aim to counter the type of thinking that would see post-Communist states as a mess of sameness. I know what Eamon is pointing toward, and you probably do too, but using conjugations of "the West" to do so is not self-serving.

*In each case all of the artists think and work outside "the Bloc."*

Which is to say that these artists are having particular conversations with the context within which their works were produced. Another tactic that Eamon employs in the service of his imperative to maintain a sense of the cultural differences despite commonalities is to amend and expand the descriptor of Eastern Europe to become Central-Eastern Europe. By adding the "Central-" qualifier, Eamon challenges basic notions of where and what "the East" is. What new ways of understanding the world rise up in the aftermath? What if we were to give up the distinction of being "Western"?

Following from this, what if we could cultivate a way of listening that makes room for incommunicability? Is there a satisfying way of looking at these works that acknowledges a fundamental lack of understanding, instead of a polite deferral of engagement because the work is outside our intellectual comfort zone?

## Indigenous Aesthetics &amp; The Remaking of Art History

Symposium organized by Candice Hopkins and The Art Gallery of Alberta 24 / 06 2012

Review by Amy Fung

I thought this was going to be about Alex Janvier. You know, the "modernist" within The Indian Group of Seven. I don't know if it's okay to still call him that either. But there's a major retrospective of Janvier's work three floors above, here in Edmonton at The Art Gallery of Alberta. The man himself is sitting one row down listening to the panellists speak about Indigenous aesthetics. He is wearing a cowboy hat. He is sitting not too far from the young women who have been exhibiting as part of The Indigeneity Arts Collective Society. They are also here attending this symposium on Indigenous aesthetics. I remember one of their photos: In it, on the soles of their feet, the question, "Now What?" is spelled out.

I remember talking to Janvier a number of years ago in his studio. He was then working on rice paper, which was a relatively new medium to him. He said

he was exploring Chinese techniques because Native people and Chinese people were not that different. There was a twinkle in his eyes and a smile on his lips. He told me about his visit to China in 1985 as part of an official Chinese / Canadian exchange. He said it's possible that Native people came from China. He was talking about the Bering Strait. He made a series of calligraphy paintings on small rice paper mandalas that maybe only ever existed as studio exercises. Not surprisingly, they are not part of his retrospective.

A retrospective is a sanitized version of art history, and if art history has been an exclusive club, what's the point of trying to fit in? As beloved as he is by those who know him, Janvier has not been canonized into Canadian art history. He can represent Canada on foreign soil, but he is not represented on native soil. This has its pluses and minuses. His work has been claimed by various groups over the decades. LeeAnn Martin was the only one talking about Janvier that day. Martin is the curator of Contemporary Canadian Aboriginal Art at the Museum of Civilization. Her presentation was called "Alex Janvier: Canada's First Indian Modernist." Language contains history. She is praising Janvier for his contribution to Canadian Modernism, and for his dedication to his Aboriginal culture, which is of Dene Suline and Sauiteaux descent. Janvier signed his early paintings only with the signature "287," the treaty number Canada assigned to him. Simultaneously, he has been critiqued for being, and not being, Aboriginal enough.

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← Anna Ostoya, *Work by an Artist Inspired by a Theory About Modernity*, 2007. Installation view of *Rearview Mirror: New Art from Central and Eastern Europe*, 1 July – 5 September 2011 at The Power Plant, Toronto. Photo by Steve Payne.

The panellists assembled have created various entry points to consider this position, and there was a tension among these perspectives. This was good to see. What becomes clear is that reclaiming territory usually doesn't work. Territories shift, like language. Like language, territories determine power. Deterritorializing would be far more interesting. Deterritorializing would be less reinforcing.

I have no idea what that audience question about healing the earth through art was all about, but Jolene Rickard answers it with great generosity. Rickard is the Director for the American Indian Program at Cornell and she is also the keynote speaker. She sets the tone, asking rather than asserting the proposition, "Making Aesthetics Indigeneous?" The response so far also ends with a question mark.

If we look at Canadian art history alone, the notion of identity representation begins from the point of negation. Rickard is going full steam ahead with the decolonization process. She is working from the inside out rather than from the outside in. She refers to the UN a lot. The UN adopted the Declaration on The Rights of Indigenous People in 2007. Indigenous rights are an international issue, but they are governed nationally. Indigenous aesthetics appears inherently essentializing of Indigenousness, but also moves forward with the strategy to break free of the essential. This tension was not addressed. Perhaps it's already implied. Rickard navigates an Indigenous space by subsuming the colonial intellect.

She has overridden the totalizing construct by taking charge of the language, but I am with Richard William Hill, who holds that language is precarious. Privileging power in language means we are further indebted to the loop of language, which is arguably the most colonizing form of all. Hill teaches at York. His presentation is less a presentation and more a line of thinking and speaking, reframing Indigenous ontologies and the concept of "aesthetics."

Hill speaks about Jimmie Durham. Hill is not convinced of an Indigenous aesthetic. Not a singular one, anyways. He is trying to be problematic. He succeeds. Only reluctantly and provisionally will he use the terms "Indigenous" and "aesthetic," but as a writer and curator in contemporary art, reluctance happens. How do we account for the influence of transcultural lineages as Indigenous or not? Janvier is again a good example: Hill puts forward the possibility that we may be inheritors of modernist ontology in only being able to discuss art through our formal encounters with it. A shiver runs through me as I sit here in Edmonton. Now what?

Well, here's what I think: the gallery is inherently a colonizing space. To colonize is to contain. Is there a need to press for an Indigenous aesthetic outside of the gallery? Objects from the streets, reconsidered for the gallery, like what Durham is known for, offer an experience, a memory to infringe upon and change our relationship to the world. We are released from language, the most colonizing form of all, and its ontological hold on us.

There are 400 million Indigenous individuals globally. Terminology has been shifting in the last ten years, but are we shifting further apart? Commodifying Indigenous aesthetics is today's problem, but, as Marcia Crosby notes, the lack of commercial interest in Indigenous artists was once a rampant problem. Two sides of the same coin. Crosby is presenting from her PhD dissertation, *Aboriginal Cultural Production in Unlikely Urban Spaces*. She sets out to create a lineage of an Indigenous art history by connecting Skeena Reece to Rebecca Belmore to James Luna, and Luna to Erica Lord to Belmore to KC Adams. Indigenous aesthetics move across borderlands. This is important.

But back to Janvier. What does it mean to still refer to him as part of The Indian Group of Seven? A *Winnipeg Free Press* journalist coined that phrase in 1973. The ongoing colonizer mentality is a hurdle, an invisible and reinforced hurdle. Language is a hurdle to self-determination, enabling the epistemes of intellectual domination, making language too careful, too limited, and wholly complicit in the construct of an Indigenous aesthetic in art history.

## In Theory: The Role of Failure in the promise of making

Julian Higuerey Núñez, *the promise of making*. Katherine Mulherin Contemporary Art Projects, Toronto, 23/04 to 06/05 2012.

Review by Amber Landgraff

For the promise of making, Julian Higuerey Núñez attempted to make a pair of jeans from scratch using only open source instructions. Over the course of a year, he followed every step: from growing cotton, spinning thread, weaving and dying fabric, to making a pattern and sewing the jeans. Núñez's Sisyphean undertaking was met with failure at each step. Early on in the process Núñez experienced a setback when the amount of cotton that his plants yielded was significantly less than was needed to make a pair of jeans. Rather than giving up, Núñez embraced failure and used this setback to highlight the fact that an theoretical understanding of how something is done is quite different from a mastery of the skills required to complete it successfully. As such, Núñez's failures became a significant part of his undertaking. With each step, Núñez resorted to purchasing the materials required in order to continue on with his task. In the end, Núñez had a pair of jeans made to his

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exact specifications—from an India-based make-your-own-jeans company whose website claims, "The jeans couldn't have been made without your input." Humorously, Núñez presents the jeans he had made as being a pair of jeans that he "made from scratch," playfully bringing consumption into a dialogue about Do-It-Yourself (DIY) processes.

The exhibition offers an exploration of the labour that goes into the making of a single object, engaging in a criticism of craft as it relates to the inherent problem of DIY as an idealistic move towards self-sufficiency in post-fordist systems of production. This idealism often positions the DIY enthusiast making their own clothes as disrupting larger patterns of labour and production through a politically conscious refusal to participate in the consumption of products that were made unethically or through the exploitation of other workers. Núñez highlights the façade of this idealism by drawing attention to how consistently he had to rely on raw materials that came from the labour of others (most significantly the workers in India who made the finished pair of jeans). At the same time, Núñez's own labour in making the jeans occupies a position where an artistic undertaking is easily dismissed as not being "real" labour. He attempts to problematize this fetishization of an artist's work by undertaking each step despite his failures, making his exploration about a lack of mastery rather than a devaluing of his own labour in the process.

The exhibition includes made-to-order display cases laser-cut

out of MDF and Plexiglas displaying a museological collection of all the materials needed to make a pair of jeans from scratch, with his own attempts paired next to the more refined materials he purchased. In one display case a video documents the monotonous process of ginning cotton by hand (removing seeds, seed hulls and other small objects from the cotton fibre). In one corner of the exhibition space, a small shelf hosts a collection of books—including theoretical discussions on craft and books that explore post-fordist forms of labour—that Núñez read throughout the process, next to an uncomfortable-looking chair made in a similar style as the display cases. Along one wall there is a series of framed photographs of the raw materials Núñez purchased in order to make his jeans. The pattern that Núñez designed hangs next to a hand-printed list of all the steps that were followed in order to make the jeans—including everything from ordering supplies online to applying for a job listing found on Craigslist asking for male models to model jeans. Numbered pins match the numbers on the steps to items found in the exhibition, and there's even a ridiculous how-to that explains where to look for numbered pins. On the back wall of the gallery two pairs of jeans hang side by side: the first is the pair that Núñez sewed himself, and the second the pair he ordered to his specifications, next to the framed letter from the company that made the jeans. There are a few differences between the pairs: the purchased pair is cleaner and more refined, while the pair he

sewed himself has messy detailing like a handmade "label" for the jeans, and rivets (illegally) made out of pennies.

There are two implications about labour emphasized by Núñez's failure to make a pair of jeans from scratch. First, DIY processes often include idealistic rhetoric claiming that learning how to do something by hand or from scratch somehow bypasses consumption and therefore participation in the capitalist economy. However, what Núñez's failure so charmingly points out is that DIY often requires leisure time and access to materials, both of which implicate the maker as a participant in consumption and therefore capitalism. DIY as a lifestyle actually does very little to disrupt larger patterns of labour and production, and moreover often requires being in a privileged position in order to participate in the first place. The second implication is that, in craft, a nostalgia for the handmade object—as opposed to something made using mechanical processes—often involves an unrealistic understanding of the labour required to make something by hand. While being handmade confers

a certain kind of value, it is a contentious value, particularly when compared to the much cheaper costs of mass-produced objects. Núñez's video demonstrating cotton ginning is over an hour in length; however, he points out that what he managed to do in this time could have been done much more quickly, efficiently and better by a machine. The value of the time Núñez had to spend in order to accomplish very little calls into question an overemphasis on the presence of the hand over a mastery of skills in the making of an object. For Núñez, the pair of jeans that he ordered to his specifications stand in for a pair he made from scratch, despite the fact that, in the end, he had no hand in their actual manufacture.

*the promise of making* offers a glimpse into the processes required to make a pair of jeans from scratch, and in doing so, maintains an examination of making characterized by failure. By focusing on the humour of his failures, Núñez manages to avoid a heavy-handed discussion of labour politics, and makes raising heavy questions about consumption and ethics more palatable.



← Julian Higuerey Núñez, *the promise of making* (detail), 2012. Image courtesy of the artist.

**Constellation & Correspondances: Transmission entre artistes/Networking Between Artists 1970–1980**

Curated by  
Felicity Tayler.  
Artex, Montreal,  
16/03 to 26/05 2012.

Review by  
Pablo Rodriguez

Two years ago, Felicity Tayler published an illuminating essay on the state of artists' publishing in Canada in the late 1960s and early 1970s titled "Publishing as Alternative Space." The essay, which was published in Vincent Bonin's *Documentary Protocols (1967-1975)* exhibition catalogue, makes a simple but compelling argument. Citing important changes in Canada's technological, political and artistic environment – from the popularization of communications systems, to the valorization of an "aesthetics of information" in the art world – Tayler points out how artists at this time embraced independent publishing as a new medium and did so with a desire for collaboration, decentralization and self-representation that fuelled the formation of a vibrant network of artist-run exhibition and production spaces – a network that has, in spite of major transformations, lasted to this day.

*Constellation & Correspondances: Networking Between Artists 1970-1980*, Felicity Tayler's scrupulously curated documentary exhibition, was based on many of the same materials as her earlier essay, but approached them from a different angle: instead of underlining the function of artists' publishing as "an extension of [artist-run] spaces and their mandates of self-determination," Tayler allowed these documents to speak for themselves as complicated, multi-faceted objects. With these documents she created an exhibition that interrogated their use and significance in the present.

*Constellation & Correspondances* was first presented at the National Gallery of Canada Library in 2010. At Artex, the exhibition was organized around a central documentary display of more than forty items, each carefully selected from the archives of the National Gallery of Canada as well as (on this occasion) from Artex's collection. These items were displayed in a u-shaped array of free-standing sunken display cases and open tables. The layout fit snugly in Artex's windowless, single-room gallery. New additions to the show included a cluster of small drawings that Tayler made using a black pen and tracing paper, a string construction that formed a network across the ceiling, and a collection of letters and ephemera (loaned by California artist Lowell Darling) related to the 1974 DeccaDance event in Los Angeles. There was also an evening of readings by four accomplished Montreal writers – Melissa Bull, Marc-Antoine Phaneuf, Alan Reed and Jacob Wren

– during which the 1975 video *Art's Stars in Hollywood: The DeccaDance* was screened.

The main focus of *Constellation & Correspondances* was independent publishing activity between the Halifax, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver art scenes. One cabinet, for instance, included a copy of Marshall McLuhan's self-published long poem *Counterblast* (1954), an Intermedia Society newsletter and a package of printed matter distributed by Image Bank (*Image Bank Annual Report, 1972*). A nearby spread from *Strange Faeces no. 17: An All Canadian Issue of Experimental Fiction and Graphics* – edited by Opal L. Nations out of New York – helped to introduce the importance of artists' exchanges across national borders, and of broader exchanges among artists and writers at the time.

One of the most striking documents of the show was a 1980 typewritten letter signed by Marina Stewart (then director at Halifax's Eyelevel Gallery) and addressed to Angela Grauerholz and Anne Ramsden at Artex. This letter begins: "We were most interested to hear of the establishment of Artex as a center for the collection and the diffusion of information about contemporary art." By presenting this document, Tayler raised the spectre not so much (or not only) of artists' publishing in the 1970s, but of this activity's institutionalization in the early 1980s. She repeatedly drew attention to this condition: without the preservation of these materials, there could hardly be an exhibition about the cultural network that they helped to create. Stewart's

letter allowed Tayler to cast her exhibition in a critical light, reconnecting the past of artists' publishing with its present institutional context.

Tayler took a significant risk by not including any didactic text panels in the exhibition. Visitors less familiar with the main figures, places and narratives of this period may have therefore found Tayler's pamphlet and notation system especially helpful. Published on the occasion of the show's 2010 presentation, and distributed for free at the gallery entrance, this pamphlet features a brief curatorial essay by Tayler and a bibliographic checklist of the items in the exhibition. A single numbering system connected the essay's endnotes to the checklist and the exhibited materials, meaning that visitors could use the essay and the pamphlet as a guide during their visit.

*Constellation & Correspondances*, however, provided much more than substantive proof for Tayler's sound historical argument, and the experience was occasionally jarring. Consider, for example, Tayler's use of the display cases and tables on which she displayed the documentary materials. All of the items from the NGC were placed inside the display cases; sealed beneath a plane of clear perspex, these objects could be looked at but they could not be touched. By contrast, at the open tables where Tayler placed the books and magazines borrowed from Artex's collection, visitors were encouraged to handle and read the documentary materials. Because the tables and cabinets were interspersed and formed

Pablo Rodriguez is a writer and researcher based in Montreal. In the fall of 2012 he will begin a PhD in art history at Concordia University, where his dissertation will focus on the photographic culture of Canadian art magazines.

a continuous ensemble, they seemed to activate the functions of the reading room and the functions of the exhibition at the same time, and this was somewhat troubling, but also revealing and fruitful.

The strange juxtaposition of reading room and exhibition had two salient ramifications. On an experiential level, it forced visitors to struggle with the documents' twofold function in the gallery: first, as objects of presentation and vehicles of the curator's intentions; and secondly, as objects of consultation whose meaning is contingent on visitors' own narrative desires and intentions. On another level, Tayler's juxtaposition also drew attention to the diverging mandates and "documentary protocols" (to use Vincent Bonin's term) of the organizations where these documents are currently held, effectively materializing their implication in diverging economies of information: one linked to a museum (the NGC), the other to the practices of a not-for-profit, artist-initiated organization (Artex). Through her handling of the exhibition's supports, Tayler proposed an analysis of artists' publishing that was based on the different sensuous effects that archiving and collecting institutions produce whenever they allow their holdings to be seen by the public.

*Constellation & Correspondances* inaugurated Artex's first ever exhibition space, which opened this past winter when the documentation centre moved into its new facilities at the 2-22 building on Ste-Catherine Street. Initially, I wanted to consider *Constellation &*

*Correspondances* in light of Artex's move to this building, which is one of the keystone properties of Montreal's controversial new Quartier des Spectacles. Though this topic is far too complex to be shoehorned into a brief review, one conclusion that can be drawn from *Constellation & Correspondances* is that it invited visitors to cultivate and exercise a mode of attention – a set of critical and conceptual skills – that might be brought to bear not just on other documentary exhibitions, but on other cultural situations, including Artex's. At a moment when the visual and textual traces of this period are the subject of increased public attention (e.g. the upcoming "Institutions by Artists" conference in Vancouver), and when Canada's archives are entering a period of increased precarity (e.g. the recent funding cuts at Library and Archives Canada), Tayler managed to renew the capacity of 1970s artists' publishing to critically address current institutional practices.

**PROJECT STATEMENT**

Johanna Sophie Santos Bassetti  
1992, 2011.  
16mm film (4'58"), silent.  
Film still  
(pages 24–25)

The centerfold for this issue of *FUSE* is a film still from 1992, a 16mm short produced in late May 2011 in Nida, Lithuania. In 1992, just two years after Lithuania's declaration of independence from Soviet rule, the suicide rate in the country skyrocketed. Beginning that year, the highest rates of suicide are amongst middle-aged men living in rural areas, and the most common method is hanging. In 1992, a young woman hangs from the peaked architecture of a Soviet-era stage once used for folk dance festivals, each of her wrists bound by a noose. The film's qualities of weight, stillness and tension translate and make public a ubiquitous and private agony.

The film has been exhibited at the Fondazione Antonio Ratti (2011) as a looped digital projection. The film can be viewed at [vimeo.com/28416512](http://vimeo.com/28416512). Thanks to Tamara Henderson (camera) and Hanna Husberg (technical assistance).

Johanna Sophie Santos Bassetti lives and works in Berlin. Working in performance, installation, film and video, her work is notable for its lush, poetic visuals and trenchant commentary. Born in Madrid, she grew up between there and Seattle, completing her Bachelor's degree at Stanford University.

# FUSE MAGAZINE 2012 READER SURVEY RESULTS

A Note from our  
Managing Director,  
Christal Pshyk

On behalf of the *FUSE* team, I would like to extend a very big thank-you to everyone who completed our recent reader survey. I am thrilled by the overwhelming number of responses and excellent feedback received. Your many invaluable insights will inform our work on issues to come – thank you for affirming your enthusiasm for and loyalty to *FUSE*.

Here are some of the general comments we received:

*"Continue the informative writing on the arts. With the exception of the Walrus there is nothing else out there. Canada is an empty void when it comes to writing about culture especially here in rural areas. Keep up the intelligent and provocative work."*

*"I love FUSE because there is no other magazine like it in Canada. It is great to have a socially and politically active arts magazine, and I shudder to think what would happen without this forum."*

Most *FUSE* readers are long-term supporters who have been reading the magazine for more than five years. In fact, 54% of you never get rid of *FUSE* once you've read it! You also really love that *FUSE* is Canadian—90.3% of you

indicated this is a big part of why you read the magazine. The quality of other magazines you read on a regular basis—*The New Yorker*, *The Walrus*, *Border Crossings*, *C Magazine*, *Adbusters*, *Fillip* and *Harper's*—is a testament to the quality of our content. You also think *FUSE* is best when shared, as many of you told us that you discovered *FUSE* through a friend or family member, and shared it between three or more people.

Like us, you put content first; most survey respondents identified the magazine's critical and progressive perspective as being the number one reason you read *FUSE*. Some of the great things you had to say about our content:

*"FUSE's recent focus on colonialism/anti-colonial work is really important and I would like to see this maintained."*

*"I am very impressed by FUSE's enthusiasm for taking on issues of political economy and the political economies of art and culture."*

We also learned a few things about you. Survey respondents were predominantly female (over 60%), young (25–44), urban and educated (62% have advanced degrees). The survey confirmed that for these readers, the arts are an important part of daily life, with the majority indicating that you have visited an art gallery, artist-run centre or museum on more than four occasions over a six-month period. Our readers also really love books (40% of *FUSE* magazine

readers purchased more than 10 books in a month!). We're also happy to know that *FUSE* motivates its readers to learn, as most of you indicated that after reading *FUSE* you did further research on featured artists, exhibitions or topics.

In the spirit of experimentation, *FUSE*'s production team will continue our redesign process, aiming to perfect our bold, content-driven aesthetic, and your responses will help guide this process. On the subject of our cover, we weren't surprised to find that you have opposing views and visceral reactions:

*"I love that the cover is also the table of contents."*

*"It's fresh and interesting, more democratic."*

*"Worst design idea ever."*

*"The aesthetics have been sacrificed, it's very confusing."*

In upcoming issues, our cover will continue to evolve, we will reintroduce perfect-binding and add some extra pages, all the while remaining compelling, readable and edgy.

Our reader survey has provided us with much insightful information that will enlighten our decisions on content, format, delivery, advertising, sponsorship and programming. Thanks again for engaging with us! Feel free to send any further comments you have to [christal@fusemagazine.org](mailto:christal@fusemagazine.org).

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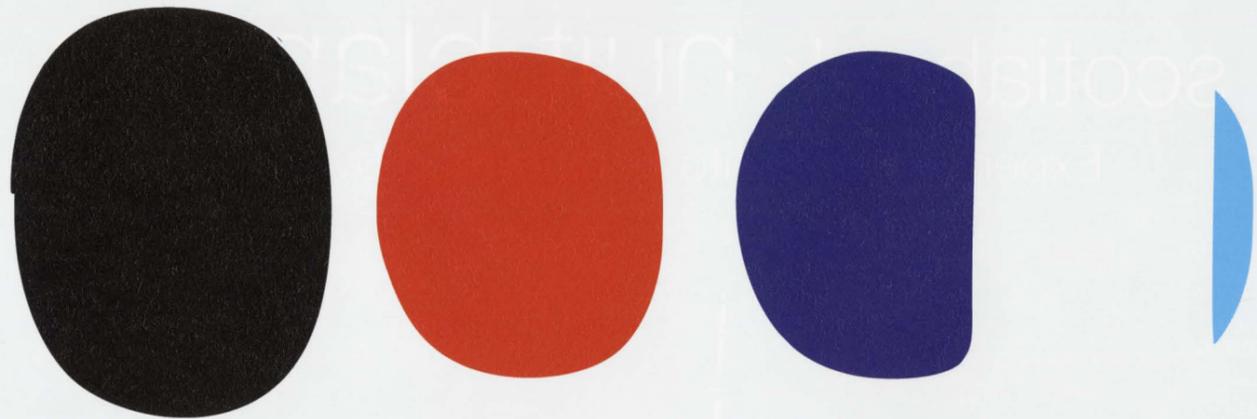
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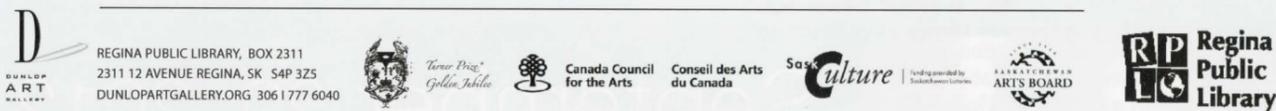




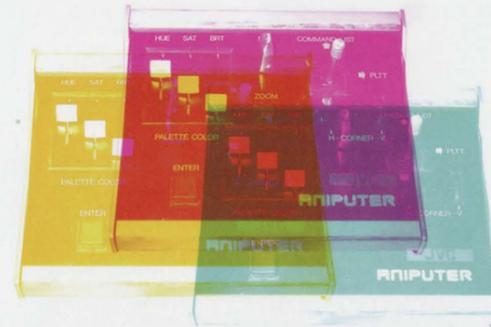
# Golden Jubilee

November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 - January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Turner Prize\* presents the Dunlop Art Gallery's fiftieth anniversary retrospective exhibition  
Featuring covers of works by Douglas Morton, Douglas Bentham, Tomiyo Sasaki, Leesa Streifler, Charles Rea, and Terrance Houle. Curated by Dr. Curtis Collins



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## UNIT/PITT Projects Fall 2012



**Shannon Oksanen and Valerie Sonnier:**  
**In Search of Lost Time**  
Curated by Myfanwy MacLeod  
September 7 - October 6  
Opening and book launch, Friday September 14, 8 pm  
Supported by the Consulate General of France in Vancouver

**Red76: This Is An (A) Front - A Covert Education**  
October 11 to November 3, 2012  
Opening Wednesday October 11, 8pm  
**Wrong Wave 2012**  
A four-day festival of art bands and music by artists, curated by Amanda Jehring and Steffanie Ling  
November 7 - 14 at the Waldorf Hotel, Vancouver



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Suzy Lake, Peonies and the Lido #7 2000-2002

### Suzy Lake: Political Poetics

Organized by University of Toronto Art Centre and the Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival.  
Matthew Brower and Carla Garnet, Curators  
25 August through 7 October 2012

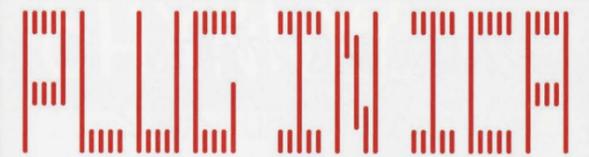
### Prospect 15: Anne Macmillan

Organized by MSVU Art Gallery  
Ingrid Jenkner, Curator  
20 October 2012 through 6 January 2013

Financial support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the province of Nova Scotia is gratefully acknowledged.

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October 27 - November 25, 2012

**CHAPTER THREE: WINTER KEPT US WARM**  
December 15, 2012 - January 20, 2013

**CHAPTER FOUR: THE ARTISTS' CHOICE**  
February 9 - March 13, 2013

MY WINNIPEG PROJECT organized by  
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# JASON MCLEAN: IF YOU COULD READ MY MIND

Curated by  
James Patten

# RAYMOND PETIBON THE PUNK YEARS, 1978-86

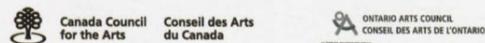
Organized by Independent Curators International  
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Gwen MacGregor and Sandra Rechico, *Rejoinders*, 2012, detail

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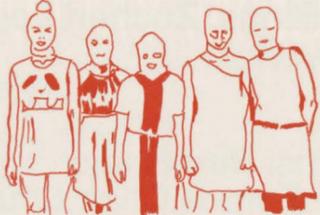
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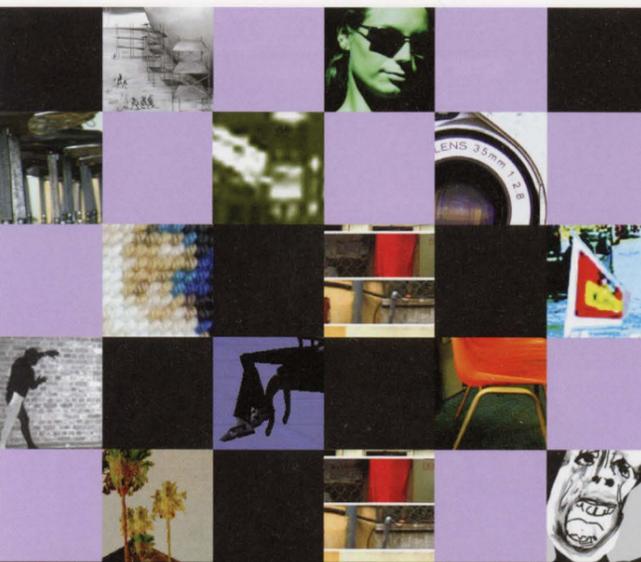
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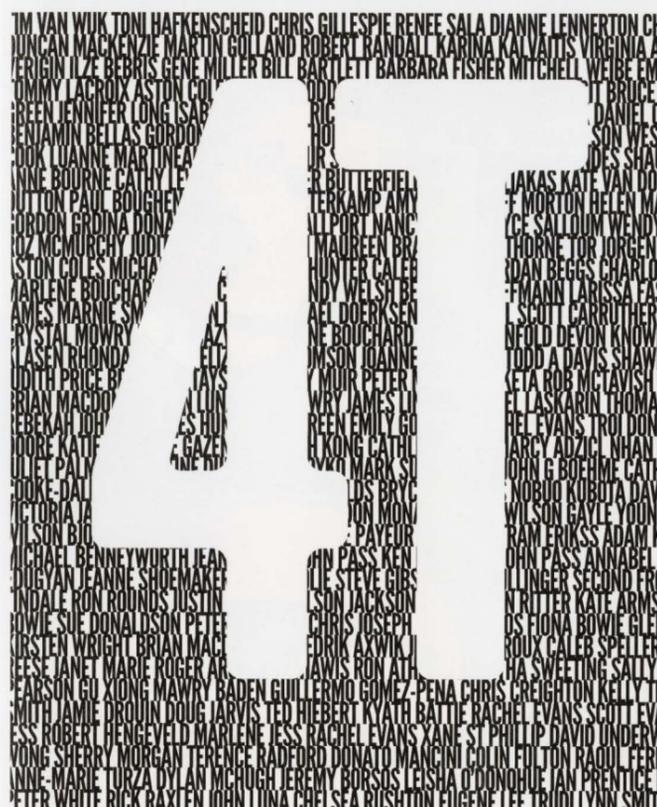
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For information on our annual call for submissions visit [www.aspacegallery.org](http://www.aspacegallery.org)

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A Space Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of our members and project partners as well as the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council.



# 15/10

# 27/10

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Southern Alberta

[www.mstfestival.org](http://www.mstfestival.org)

## M:ST 6




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With a major catalogue and a live performance by the artist Sept 14 at 8:30

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Curator / Commissaire: Julie René de Cotret

Erika and Peter Reisenberger  
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Peter Reisenberger Readings:  
Sept 6 8 pm, Sept 15 8 pm



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# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

## WHITE WATER GALLERY BLACK WATER ART

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: *White Water Gallery / Black Water Art*

Exhibition: January 18th – February 16th, 2013. Opening Reception: January 18th @ 7pm

Postmarked Deadline: December 31st, 2011

**(Artwork must be received by January 14th, 2012)**

**Black Water Art** is a metaphor for the conceptual transition from one space to another. This event transforms the White Water Gallery Artist-Run Centre into a commercial venue for a period of four weeks each winter. During this time artwork will be installed in a salon-style exhibition and sold on site. 100% of each sale goes directly to the artist making this a unique commercial opportunity for participants.

**Submission details:** One piece per artist will be accepted in any medium (spatial and technical restrictions may apply). Works are restricted to a maximum of 36 x 36 inches (or 36 x 36 x 36 inches for 3-dimensional pieces). Shipping costs are the responsibility of the artist and all works must be submitted ready to install along with the completed submission form and any applicable fees. Sales will be facilitated by the White Water Gallery based upon the prices set by the artists themselves. Monies received by the Gallery from the sale of artwork will be sent to the artist by cheque (please specify payee if different from the name on the submission form).

**Submission Fee:** Members of the White Water Gallery submit their piece for FREE. Non-members must pay a \$30 submission fee.  
NOTE: A membership to the White Water Gallery costs \$25 yearly. Anyone can join, and there are additional benefits and opportunities available for members. For more information visit White Water Gallery's website.

WHITE  
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ARTIST-RUN CENTRE



www.whitewatergallery.com

## Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives



The Art Gallery debuts  
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Henri Beau, *Le Pique-nique*, 1904-1905, Oil on canvas. Collection Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. Photo : MNBAQ, Patrick Altman (1986.43)

# Impressionism?

*Selected Works from the Collection of the  
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Organized and toured by Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec

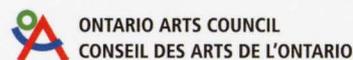
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