

» SOUS LES PAVÉS «

Summer 2011

Number 4

sous les pavés, la plage

»beneath the paving stones, the beach«

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... while reactions to SOUS LES PAVÉS have been strong (we receive your kind letters, gifts of books and other printed matter, and—in some cases—monetary/material donations, which is to mention nothing of the fine manuscripts that continue to arrive in number too great to include in any single issue), we remain insolvent. Producing and shipping SOUS LES PAVÉS costs money, and we simply don't have adequate funds, including the donations that some of you have so generously sent over the last ten months, to keep this publication going. Unless we reimagine how SOUS LES PAVÉS is funded, we must face the very real possibility that this will be the final FREE issue.

Yet possibilities remain! & I want to propose here a series of steps that we (editors/contributors/readers) can take in order to ensure that SOUS LES PAVÉS continues to circulate throughout the coming year. But I cannot stress enough: if adequate funding is not secured, SOUS LES PAVÉS will be forced to shift to a subscription-only format or cease publication altogether. So please, if you value this publication, consider acting on one of the attached proposals.

I

Every reader should pay his own postage and cost of production. This works out to be just under \$2. If every one of you who receives this publication continuously forwards this small fund to the address below, we will continue the effort *en perpetuity*.

II

Because—and I say this with full cognizance of the likelihood that some of you will find this statement pessimistic and even offensive—most of you will not send \$2 in exchange for the continued life of this publication (indeed most of you won't even take the time or muster the generosity to send a single dollar), we must rely on a smaller core of sustainers who will agree to collectively fund SOUS LES PAVÉS with larger annual or quarterly donations. If 20 people will agree to donate \$100 per year (or \$25 on a quarterly basis), we will be able to produce and distribute four issues of SOUS LES PAVÉS to 300 individuals over the course of the year. If additional sustainers emerge, we will be liberated to expand our list of recipients (we currently have a mailing list of approx. 1,000 individuals, 300 of whom receive SLP in the mail and 200+ international readers who receive the publication in a digital format).

III

Asking 20 individuals to buck-up the cash for an entire year's publication/distribution budget is, in all honesty, asking quite a lot from such a small set, and there's no guarantee that 20 (or any) individuals will respond to this call. Therefore, we need those of you who have been donating smaller amounts to continue doing so, and we need those of you who have never donated to SOUS LES PAVÉS to consider joining the current list of donors by contributing \$5, \$10, \$25, or \$50 in order to maintain this particular aspect of our collective struggle to publish and distribute a politically efficacious poetry in a cultural milieu that consistently demonstrates disturbing tendencies toward the apathetic, the self-interested, and the vapid.

» «

As always, this issue was in part made possible by the generous donations of its readers. A great many thanks to the following donors, past and present:

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Yrs. in solidarity.

—MICAH ROBBINS

I've found a perhaps unintended benefit of SLP's format—at work I can read it openly and it looks like I'm reading an important report, which of course, I AM. The piece on poetry as a part of revolution was truly great. Thanks.

—WARREN CRAGHEAD

Re. Richard Owens's "Scrape the Ice"—

Problem: Many of those same students that Dorn "describes" (see *Gunslinger*) will grow up to be the same folks the French workers are opposing! Even in the time that Dorn speaks of, the workers and the students have different PLACES THEY WANT TO (will) GO.

—AMIRI BARAKA

If I call attention to Dorn's observation re-garding the distance between workers and students in Paris, 1968, it's in large part because his analysis resonated with me—I mean, my first impulse was to agree with it and even take delight in that agreement.

I'm talking about my own sins writ large—that is, any intellectual from a working class background will immediately recog-nize this agreement with Dorn comes a little too easy. But Dorn's position here, his tacit valorization of the working class at the expense of student efforts to align their interests with workers, performs in an incredibly destructive way. Dorn's view at once offers a weirdly romanticized image of workers that masks a fundamentally misguided political conservatism; at the same time this view dismisses the work of students and intellectuals attached to academia as naive child's play, running back to the "real world" versus "school" split which, even in 1968, was wholly untenable—as if life on a production line were any more "real" than life elsewhere. And i say this not as any sort of cloistered, bourgeois academic, but as someone who spent quite a few years working on production lines and in warehouses—and not by choice and never by chance.

If this isn't already too self-indulgent, there's an anecdote, a story, my father shared with me quite a few times when, at 18, I started working with the Socialist Workers Party and, later, the International Socialist Organization, peddling their papers at the occasional strike in Paterson, Clifton or NYC. The story was a warning offered in the interest of my safety. While working at the Reynold's can plant in Woodbridge, NJ—back in the early 70s—my father recalled how, when coming off the night shift, he watched a group of workers beat down and hospitalize two college students distributing socialist newspapers at the factory gates. The story comes back to me over and over again, especially when I encounter an analysis like Dorn's, a reading that gets off on the refusal of workers to enter into conversation with students or intellectuals. The question is, I suppose, one of alignment, how to articulate the interests of workers (a category that desperately needs to be reimagined and theorized anew) with the interests of students.

I mean, where do workers—specifically workers in the US—want to go? Can we any longer imagine workers—even given recent protests in Wisconsin, Ohio and elsewhere—as an internally coherent class with will, direction, or desire? I recognize full well that many of the students kicking up a racket today will land up being the mid-level functionaries, managers, executives and academics that workers typically (and often correctly) resent, but I also wonder to what extent this resentment itself effectively guarantees the enduring status of the working class as an internally fragmented community completely alienated from itself, utterly unable to identify with even its own most basic interests and wholly incapable of struggling for them.

—RICHARD OWENS

Always, the question remains, What Is To Be Done? That is, how to do what obviously presents itself to be done! The workers circulate in their own hopelessness. The students, &c in theirs, (with more presumed ease AND UNCONSCIOUSNESS). The working class and its allies, is the TARGET. The Work. That's the Gig!

—AMIRI BARAKA

Note: If you want to challenge an assertion made within these pages or correct an error, please do so. If you want to sound off on the state of contemporary poetics, publishing, academics, politics, etc., write Micah Robbins or one of the contributors and we'll try our best to include your message in this limited space.

» I DREAMED THAT I WAS DREAMING «

for Malachi Ritscher & Mohammed Bouazizi

Five years after Malachi Ritscher lit himself ablaze on a Chicago rush-hour median in protest against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mohammed Bouazizi was slapped in the face. He didn't have money to bribe a government official, so Bouazizi was slapped around and publicly shamed. His fruit stand, the sole means of income for himself and the large family he supported, was confiscated. Basboosa (as he was affectionately called by his local community) did not give fruit to the poor the next day, as was his usual custom. Within an hour of the scene of his humiliation, after an unsuccessful attempt to meet with the local governor about his grievances, Bouazizi doused himself with a can of gasoline and two bottles of paint thinner and lit a match. In the eighteen days between his immolation and his eventual death, word had spread about Bouzizi's martyrdom. Thousands came to his funeral, the procession of which marked the beginning of dramatically intensified mass protests against Tunisia's corrupt authoritarian government. Though this is no doubt an overly simplified account of the events leading into Tunisia's uprising, I wish to examine Bouazizi's and Ritscher's self-immolations as examples of the most extreme and grave form of civil disobedience. Or perhaps to be more accurate, Bouzizi's and Ritscher's existential disobedience constitutes a site of unstable energy dispersal whose haunting afterimage—the darkly haloed silhouette on the backs of our eyelids—manifests through absence. Though in some respects the circumstances and aftermaths of Bouzizi's and Ritscher's self-immolations are polar opposites, they nevertheless point us toward similar conclusions (if conclusions may be drawn at all) in regards to sovereignty, power, existential desperation, and the body as a site of the political.

On 3 November 2006, Chicago's morning commuters were inching along the same stretch of highway as they do every other morning. Perhaps they were wondering to themselves what was causing the traffic jam this time. Half-asleep, gazing at billboards, wired on energy cocktails, digesting anti-depressants and gas station donuts, glancing at their phones, fiddling with the radio, cursing under their breaths while lost in the mundane repetitive lull of the rush-hour funerary procession. This morning, however, the commuters witnessed something that they'd never seen before: on a small knoll rendered seemingly inaccessible by the Kennedy Expressway, in front of a particularly hideous piece of public sculpture called "The Flame of the Millennium," was a very real fire. I don't know which direction the wind was blowing that morning, but perhaps those with their windows opened were hit with the unmistakable smell of burning flesh. No doubt for most commuters passing by in the rush-hour traffic, this smell would be the closest sensory experience they would have to their nation's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some tuned their radios to a local traffic station to learn that there had been "a suicide next to the highway" and that "a man had set himself on fire." There was little or no further explanation. The charred husk of Malachi Ritscher was extinguished and put into a body bag. The video camera, empty gasoline can, and sign that read "thou shalt not kill" scattered near his body were collected as evidence. Being the obedient citizens that they are, the commuters continued on to work and no doubt forgot about the event in the hassle of their job.

In the Spectacle, as Guy Debord has it, "that which is good appears, that which appears is good." Ritscher's action was decidedly absent from the headlines and the make-upped voices of the twenty-four hour news networks in the days and weeks that followed. The handful of times that it was mentioned, it was framed simply as the suicide of a mentally disturbed man. And yet, this was an act of extreme protest against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and against a half-century of US Imperialism: outright murder in the name of "Democratic Ideals." Beyond that, however, Ritscher's act was a deep indictment of the very notions of sovereignty and power which underlie the Spectacle's sprawling sublimation of human vibrancy, one which makes notorious the rift between politics and the political, which is to say between policies and laws on the one hand and, on the other, *the Political*, wherein these policies and laws are but symptoms of a deeper

metaphysical subjugation. Ritscher's self-immolation was a manifestation of his complete and utter unwillingness to compromise with this sublimation of human vibrancy and dignity. In the two-page mission statement he released online just before giving his life in resistance to continued US Imperialism, Ritscher writes, "So judge me by my actions. Maybe some will be scared enough to wake from their walking dream state. Am I therefore a martyr or a terrorist? I would prefer to be thought of as a 'spiritual warrior.' Our so-called leaders are the real terrorists in the world today." [1] His tombstone reads: "I dreamed that I was dreaming."

I received news of the immolation from a friend who knew Malachi through the Chicago experimental music community. He was ubiquitous on the scene, making recordings of nearly every experimental show for about a decade. Meticulous and obsessive, he was a tireless and committed cultural worker. In fact, Ritscher reminds me of a character from a Borges story, collecting every moment into a kaleidoscopic library; or, if only by contrast, *Bartleby the Scrivener*, whose own unwillingness to compromise leads to his eventual death by starvation. Thanks to his channeling of the Borgesian/Melvillian spirit, thousands of hours of music remain in suitcases in the basement of a northside recording studio—a silent archive, pregnant with ineffable utopian spaces.

The day that I found out about Ritscher's self-immolation was a truly radicalizing moment for me personally. While in actuality very little had changed, the stakes seemed suddenly much higher, and the idea of resistance took on a new meaning. While I've found myself haunted by the issue of self-immolation over the years, I've only been able to come to a couple of tentative conclusions. Unfortunately, the first is that none of it completely adds up. Any questions one tries to think through—especially in the case of Ritscher's act—only lead to either more questions or to silence. It is the latter—that silence—which has come to characterize the aftermath of Ritscher's self-immolation wherein the deepest tragedy, and also the most telling truth of the whole thing, lies. An act of self-immolation itself doesn't actually *do* anything. However, the time and place in which it happens somehow seem to encapsulate the precise conditions of the politico-metaphysical. That is to say, it may be more fruitful to look at self-immolation as being deeply (often eerily) symptomatic and indicative of the conditions that surround the immolator. This is perhaps one way that we can look at Malachi Ritscher, Mohammed Bouzizi, the scores of women in Afghanistan who self-immolate in an attempt to escape horrifically abusive marriages, and Vietnamese Buddhist monks and American Catholic Workers refusing Western Imperialism in Indo-China. All of these instances are quite different—especially those of women in Afghanistan and elsewhere, which deserves a full treatment all its own. [2] Even so, these too share the quality of starkly amplifying questions of power in their specific contexts. One must also note that most acts of self-immolation share some sort of religious devotion or belief in martyrdom. This most extreme and troubling act is a tangled nexus of the deeply personal and the radically political. Self-immolation compels us to meditate on war, violence, tragedy, the ethics of choosing the time and manner of one's own death, and the body as a site of both political and spiritual energy. All of these concerns float in tension around the absence of the person who has chosen to obliterate his physical self. Any attempt to conceptualize or poeticize such an act comes up against an impassible wall: the fact that a precious human life has been lost in a horrific manner. There is real tragedy in self-immolation and unfathomable grief for those whom the dead have left behind. One more person with the passion to change the world for the better is forever lost.

It has been five years since that day in November and still the war continues, though its actuality is even more veiled and distanced from the public now than it was even during the Bush regime. And now, thanks in part to Mohammed Bouzizi's self-immolation, upheaval is everywhere in the Middle East. The Tunisian and Egyptian governments have fallen, and the people of Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen continue their struggle against oppressive and inhumane power structures. The protestors in Libya took up arms and became rebel guerillas following Qaddafi's immediate and violent response to their demands. Soon thereafter, the fascists from the Project for a New American Century were, strangely enough, the first to advocate the bombing of Qaddafi's fascist regime in Libya. As I write this, we are

more than a month into the American bombing campaign, Israel is re-intensifying its aggression in Gaza, and the first bombing in Jerusalem in over four years has been committed. A new, decidedly more confusing and deadly chapter of the Middle Eastern and North African revolts is underway. While it is clear that the Libyan rebels are locked in a mortal and potentially catastrophic struggle with Quadaffi's military apparatus, Western military intervention opens up the distinct possibility (even the likelihood) that the US and its allies will be in a position to exert their influence in the war's aftermath. This, of course, explains the Project for a New American Century's enthusiastic call for US military action against Quadaffi's forces. After losing Mubarak in Egypt, the US power elite is desperate for another puppet regime to carry out its dictates. One hopes that the Libyan people will be able to resist the ongoing Western Imperial coercion and to maintain their revolution on their own terms.

I certainly don't mean to imply that Bouzizi was a prime mover in the North African revolts. There are a litany of reasons why people in Tunisia were ready to rise up and overthrow Ben Ali. Beyond decades of growing contempt for the cartoonish (yet very real) corruption of the ruling family, Tunisia and other countries in North Africa are feeling the early effects of resource contraction caused by climate change and the malfeasances of global capital (which, it goes without saying, is the primary culprit for climate change as well). The conditions were already present for the Tunisian uprising when Bouzizi self-immolated. In fact, it seems that he was motivated more by his personal humiliation at the hands of a government that gave him no other option than to sell black market fruit to support himself and his family than a self-consciously political act meant to spark a revolution. Yet we must recognize the fact that Bouzizi's name was taken up as a rallying cry from Tunisia to Libya and that the line separating the self-consciously political from the desperation of a person that can't feed his family due to the corruption of the state is a very flimsy one indeed!

When looking at these two incidents of self-immolation and the political landscapes that followed in their wakes side by side, one is confronted with several difficult questions. Rich Owens raises one of these in SLP #3 when he asks, "How does one account for the striking ideological distance separating the US from the rest of the world?" Indeed, the fact that Ritscher's self-immolation was so egregiously ignored—even by the American Left and the anti-war movement—stands as the deepest tragedy of his action. It ought to have been a moment for people to reevaluate the failing strategies of quiet disgust and docile, ineffective marches on the Capital. We ought to have taken up the sort of 'illegalism' and radical civil disobedience being embraced in the streets of London, Athens, and Cairo. At the same time, at this moment when the Left seems to be moving forward toward more direct forms of action and resistance, we must constantly ask ourselves: what are the actual ramifications of extreme forms of protest (to the extent that one can in any way predict these things)? At what point does revolutionary violence—against one's self or against others (i.e., cops, bankers, politicians, and other guardians of capital)—become self-defeating and detrimental to the movement as a whole? On this question, Hakim Bey is quite helpful when talking about a Haymarket martyr who blew his own head off with a blasting cap while in prison:

What about Louis Lingg? Was he a precursor of Ontological Anarchism? "I despise you"—one can't help but admiring such sentiments. But the man dynamited himself aged 22 to cheat the gallows . . . this is not exactly our chosen path. /// The IDEA of the POLICE like hydra grows 100 new heads for each one cut off—and all these heads are *live cops*. Slicing off heads gains us nothing, but only enhances the beast's power till it swallows us. /// First murder the IDEA—blow up the monument *inside us*—& then perhaps . . . the balance of power will shift. When the last cop in our brain is gunned down by the last unfulfilled desire—perhaps even the landscape around us will begin to change . . . /// Poetic Terrorism proposes this *sabotage of archetypes* as the only practical insurrectionary tactic for the present. But as Shiite Extremists eager for the overthrow (by any means) of all police, ayatollahs, bankers, executioners, priests, etc., we reserve the option of venerating even the "failures" of radical excess. /// A few days unchained from the Empire of Lies might well be worth considerable sacrifice; a

moment of exalted realization may outweigh a lifetime of microphalic boredom & work. /// But this moment must *become ours*—and our ownership of it is seriously compromised if we must commit suicide to preserve its integrity. So we mix our veneration with irony—it's not martyrdom itself we propose, but the courage of the dynamiter, the self-possession of a Chaos-monster, the attainment of criminal & illegal pleasures.[3]

It's been five years since Ritscher set himself on fire and people around the world—from North Africa to Britain to Greece—are wide awake to the nature of the crisis to which global capitalism and its many violent trappings have brought us all, yet many of us in the US continue to toss in the sheets and shit the bed. Fortunately, there are some notable exceptions to this seemingly all-pervasive US tone-deafness, such as the UC student movement, the lively squatter communities in New Orleans, some cursory rumblings and alliances being made around the May Day bash in Chi-town, and the many workers in Wisconsin who are bravely organizing for a general strike. It's essential that we not make the same mistake that we did with Malichi Ritscher by ignoring the important actions of these dissident communities. The time has come for us to open our eyes as well and permanently shake what Ritscher lamented as our "walking dream state."

—BROOKS JOHNSON

[1] Ritscher's statement: www.savagesound.com/gallery99.htm

[2] See *New York Times* November 8th 2010

[3] Hakim Bey: <http://hermetic.com/bey/taz2a.html>

DAS WANDERN IST MEINE LUST

"Lucid dreaming" refers to a dream state in which one is aware that one is dreaming. In some instances, a person might try to, and actually achieve an influence on the "outcome" of such dreaming. Scenarios might be fashioned into desired results by the dreamer. Additionally, one might be able to "speak" to an entity that appears in the dream in the following manner: "You're not real, you don't exist." The entity's presence meanwhile (whether it acknowledges one's *definitions* or not) has the curious ability to persist in its own right. Paradoxically, the entity has simply "appeared" in the dream as from out of nowhere. So much for "lucidity," so much for "control" over an outcome stemming from one's "conscious will" to shape a <sub>"reality" / dream.

A more complex form of lucid dreaming is one in which one "awakes" from a dream onto another <sub>"reality." At this point in "wakefulness," one experiences a very brief moment of believing that one has "finally" awakened from dreaming altogether. The very room where one is sleeping might (again, as "out of nowhere") appear with no distortion or phantasmagoria of any kind. One says to oneself: "Phew! *That* was weird, what a journey *that* was! But here I am now—back." This sensation (or sensationist state of being), this "I'm back" feeling at first reassures, calms. But soon, one notices that nothing *else* "happens" in this familiar place; the *only* thing that "happens" is an endless echoing of "I'm back." A suspicion like a spark then flickers, then an infinitesimally short moment of silence in utter dark follows, afterwards—a *flood*—of doubt, disorientation, confusion, anxiety, and ultimately, paralysis sets in. One is drowning in "familiar settings."

At last, this thunderously dissonant torrent that's tearing up all elements of reality from their placements and sending them broken and crashing—fast—to nowhere, culminates in "awakening," or rather *collapsing* onto yet another <sub>"reality," one with its own "back at last" moment waiting in store. And so on, and so on.

This ... is what it feels like to (and the word is laughable) "co-exist" with Nationalistic American "consciousness." "Lucidities r us"—is what these consciousnessessessess might call themselves, that is, if they were themselves able to "awaken" long enough to do it.

"Erwach!" "Despierten!" "Éveiller!" "Wake up!"—all stock, standard, minimalist, rightist-nationalist slogans.

"I don't exist" ... can we calmly and coolly utter that ... before being *told* "we do"? What's the *opposite* of a lucid dream? What is the reverse direction, or wholly divergent pattern of movement from this I'm-back-ness? One: "I'm not coming back." Two: "I was never there." These two, combined, is sodium pentothal injected into the Hippocampus of Fascist Nationalism. "I'm not coming back, *besides*, I was never there."

And this "I don't exist" way of taking a stand, or rather moving (*same*, upon close inspection) is not a naïve embrace of civic nullity, nor is it an apologia for ignorance of political power.

This is to say that wandering among *symbolic accidents*—is essential to revolution. Or more elementally put: "Don't wake me up just yet, I'm dreaming!"

*

Rightist Reactivity = "lucidity", an obsession with control and "reality"

Centrist Paraplegia = somnolence, inability to be *ok* with restful dreaming

Oppositionalist Revolutionary Potential = dreaming, repeated revisiting of the symbolic orders of things—comprehension and projection

Right now, in the U.S., we've been swinging from "lucidity" to "somnolence" and back, over and over. Both entail a *disturbance* of dreaming. The former with an overestimation of the self's power, the latter tending towards no knowledge *at all* of one's power to shape reality.

Only through *dreaming* of transformative power does power of transformation come. The simple ability to un-"knowingly" (un-authoritatively) rearrange the room from an "as it is" state to a "what it's been" state, re-makes the house—the neighborhood—the *region*, achieve rest, revival. Dreaming, *relieves* us of an endless stream of "new <collapsing> realities." Only after deep dreaming can we more *accurately* (strategically, tactically) awaken into a non-dream state.

In a non-dream state, the nose, the eyes, the mouth, the hands gain the ability to ride the swiftness of new desires newly sensed, explored, plumbed, and, eventually, *elevated to story*.

—RODRIGO TOSCANO

NOTHING ABOUT LOVE

There is duck tape round
Everything It looks
Wack
It must be a memory
Of o/ r even inching for the rim
On good taste

The lead-in syllables, collectively,
The full measure Melismatic
Countenance
Of good tasting
Or locate your gills
You will be ever more & so
Where citadels coat wax &
We are burnt licking of that

I am very happy now: ever more
Back against the rack

Set yr alarum
To turn on charm like
Tungsten against the flame

Lick that
Dance around
Sleep on, ah sleep
All laden –
Out to a journey's zero hour
Up the walls of fort-
Itude or
No come on, spit it up

We know how it fucking hurts
You've just got to admit that it fucking hurts
If you just admit it fucking hurts we'll either let you
Go/ oose step

To a fire exit
Where the untouched stick of you
Slaps A baton round
Her skull
We'll send a rope down
To it Measures what thinking
You've had to expunge

The sight of
It Will shave
3 seconds off the Or
-dinary tincture The prelude
to wax

Or slap yr knuckles against the chrome
Of it The crackly walls
It rubs of it
Frwards Back the metronome
Yre that fish outside fluid
All in a happy torture soup

It wouldn't hurt you to be a little nice would it
Just into the camera while we pretend you're a little nice &

Sick it up out you
Into the bowl of dried
Plaster
Over
The hurt all you like
It's timed to self-descry
On exiting
Or any way you want to
Lick to the floor
You can never fall it Try all you like

—EMILY CRITCHLEY

DELAWARE

As I was dropping off to sleep a pair of peacocks stepped out of the book I was reading and poked cautiously through the room. At the same time I received notice that all thick words were to be sent to Delaware. The notice came by order of someone who needn't give a reason for his actions, and if asked for one would simply turn himself into a tree. Days grew longer and became more involved, twining around each other and starting to mount the stairs, while those for whom the days served as proxies found a lack of efficacy in all this. Still there was merit in letting the situation ride itself out, for its key elements were as furtive as peacocks and had shrewdly performed acts whose consequences would only be discovered weeks, months, decades later—and why not—if nothing else was to become of them—for beyond them lies nothing to be comprehended. Gradually a large idea began to divide itself into smaller sections or panels, which fell naturally into two broad groups—it was of great interest to note a rivalry developing between these groups as they both rose skyward. And the sky held them in tension. Who would want to modify this charged state, which hungered for its own undoing, perhaps leading the way at last to a distant, more sympathetic jurisdiction?

The words came back washed in gold.

—WILLIAM FULLER



I WAKE UP JUST TO GO BACK TO SLEEP

—LINH DINH

BRIDGE

fire awakens you – with your four limbs
in each corner of the room

*

there is one earth
and I stick it up your ass

*

I fill the hollows of your ears
with come and wind moving through
like clouds

*

water diminishes
your atrophies of urination

*

fire resumes the absence
of your mouth with this

*

air diminishes
your approach to the end

*

form the uncountable
lions
from which I remove

the path. Remain
set for light
to promise the warm surface

of your face
as I extend the vine link-
ing – tropical canopies

—ROBERTO HARRISON

UNITED STATES

After forty-five years of waiting, I came up
with a passable business endeavor, involving shoes
and folks who like wearing 'em. Prepare to die,
villains! Naptime slowly conquered
the extent of known space, the lawn curtained
by a shady bower, no date for perm boy.

"It's our time!" the rabble insisted,
with a mawkish, dish-gray glee. Would you please
watch my bike, my new Schwinn bike,
I didn't say wash, I said watch it,
would you please watch this splendid new bike,
I'll only be gone for a year.

"Children split open?" "The naughty ones, mostly,
as determined by the vote." It kept being
the same decade, no matter how badly
the bricks needed replacing, always another one
eager in the pile. Curtained by cloudburst.
Keep in mind I want to hear from you.
I just want to hear what you're thinking.

—JOHN BEER

» THE GIFT « GLOBALISM AND GLOBALIZATION

Whatever they may mean, in whatever contexts they may be deployed, globalism and globalization, related but distinct terms, remain inextricable from the concepts of circulation and mobility. The emphasis today on mobility and circularity, as regards commodities, knowledge, information, services and currency, allegedly renders that which is bound to the land or soil atavistic, if not yet anachronistic. Globalism and globalization, as state and process, appear to uproot "cultural commodities," however defined, from particular localities even if they circulate as geographical brands or nationalities (e.g., "made in China"). Globalism and globalization thus appear to represent the triumph of temporality over spatiality, of time over space; a cd made in an Indonesian factory on any given Tuesday can be playing in any given house in Jersey City by the following Tuesday. Globalization collapses space, turning every locality into a site where globalism might reign.

As terms of international interconnections, globalism and globalization are sometimes perceived as evidence of a post-glasnost/perestroika vindication of capitalism; they are also, sometimes, the indices of Western cultural and economic imperialism. At the same time, those whose origins lie outside the West have rejected the Occidental prejudice embedded in formulations like the aforementioned which, however supportive or disdainful of globalism and globalization, situate the Orient as the object of these processes even when those processes originate in the East. Others have argued that multinationals, for example, are not (yet) transnationals, that international corporations still retain important connections (economic, political, cultural, etc.) to their homelands even if their headquarters

have become more fluid in terms of their locations. To the extent, however, that corporate entities attempt to maximize profit and flexibility within a global economy, they must exploit those ties to their homelands in order to position themselves in favorable positions within the world market. Consequently, globalism and globalization, however glossed, refer less to the transplanting or grafting of corporations into or onto new lands than to the tendency to elevate corporate self-interest over and above national loyalties.

As noted above, multinational corporations are not the only symbols of globalism and globalization. The arts, the internet, accessible means of travel and sophisticated telecommunications developments have made internationalism in all its modes a potent rival to the parochialism that still dominates the production and consumption of, for example, music, literature and the plastic arts in the United States. In the physical sciences, globalism and globalization have facilitated the research and development of new directions in physics, chemistry, and biology, particularly as these relate to medical treatments and services. At the same time the most alarming, because "recent," negative mode of globalism and globalization has been the deterioration of the environment due to accelerated industrialization and its subsequent effects on the very sustainability of life, human, animal or vegetable, on earth.

Under the twin headings of globalism and globalization these various developments across the spectrum of human experience may be understood as manifestations of a gift economy, both in its anthropological and philosophical senses. That is, globalism and globalization, however judged or conceived, have the structure—that is, the effects—of the gift itself. It goes without saying that globalism and globalization are merely examples of what has been going on since the presence of humans on earth. Every mode of technical, cultural, political or moral "development" has been, simultaneously, the erasure or marginalization of other directions, other possibilities, of what we might call, for the sake of convenience, human existence per se. Yet, to the extent they provide humans with the unprecedented capability of mastering the destiny of the entire earth, globalism and globalization are not only examples of the human adventure on this planet. Globalism and globalization represent an enormous opportunity, and terrifying responsibility, it behooves us to take with the utmost seriousness.

One way to do so is to consider the relationship between that which underpins globalism and globalization: the market economies of various modes of capitalism and socialism. These economies co-exist with we might call gift economies, the so-called free exchange of ideas and goods of those implicated in market economies. To the extent gift economies can only exist within market economies, to the extent gift economies are dependent on market economies for their existence, we might wonder if there is, in fact, anything "free" about so-called gift economies. We might wonder if there is any difference between surplus value per se and the "gift" per se.

Jacques Derrida's work on the gift, *Given Time* and *The Gift of Death*, explores the intricate intersections, overlappings and tensions between giving, responsibility, temporality and mortality. These are pertinent issues for all modes of globalism and globalization. For at the centers of all definitions of these terms is an unavoidable ambiguity regarding its structure and effects. Whether viewed as an affirmative, developmental teleology extending back to the 16th century in Europe or a negative, corrosive eschatology of extermination and destruction in Asia and Africa, globalism and globalization embody the multiple effects and forms of the gift as read by Derrida against the anthropological tradition. In this tradition the gift depends on its recognition at the "moment" it is "given" and "received" insofar as the gift serves to reinforce obligation, responsibility and community relationships. To a certain extent, then, the anthropological tradition acknowledges the coercive function of gift-giving. Derrida begins his critique of this tradition at precisely this point, at the moment the gift is given and received, at the moment it begins to work its coercive effects (even if these effects are interpreted as "positive"). Given the intrinsic ambiguity implied in the gift (a form of obligation and responsibility to a community as well as a form of freedom and affirmation), it will never be possible to determine the gift as gift prior to the effects of its giving or receiving, effects unevenly delayed or "staggered" until some indeterminate future. For both the anthropological tradition and

Derrida, the gift as gift remains independent of its quality—whether it is a "good" or "bad" gift. For anthropology, however, one can only view the gift as gift under the interrogative light of obligation. Thus, no multinational entity, for example, transplanting itself in, or grafting itself onto, foreign soil can escape its imbrications in a local culture, politics and economics. No "foreign" poem read on the internet withdraws into oblivion after a website is shut down without leaving a trace of itself on its reader. For Derrida, no such obligation obtains; the gift as gift is ideally outside all modes of economy and responsibility. Otherwise a gift is merely another form of currency.

As Derrida points out throughout his writings on the gift, the advent of the gift cannot be separated from the suspension of time. The gift must be given and received "outside" temporality, that is, within a timeless now, an instant, a moment, which is to say, for all intents and purposes, eternity. This "outside" of time is not "located" at some spatialized end of history, some horizon falling, at last, apocalyptically, into the "here" and "now." Rather, this "outside" of time is already always here, always already now. The portal through which this outside may be glimpsed is precisely the gift which is not comprehended or experienced as a gift. One receives, if you will, the gift of globalism and globalization without knowing that one has received them, without knowing, to wit, that one "is," has "become," has been "made," global.

Derrida's emphasis on non-knowledge or non-recognition as an essential prerequisite of the gift is meant to disentangle the gift from economy in particular and from all forms of obligation in general. The gift is exorbitant, extracurricular, outside all currency, outside all circles of exchange, be they religious or secular, political or technical. In this respect, the gift is also allied to Derrida's notions of play, that extra-economic force that is paradoxically non-coercive, a force, if you will, of weakness, of slippage. Globalism and globalization would transform a geographical, rural or urban site under the guise of that which is inevitable, natural, like progress—or death.

Because it stands outside obligation, the gift is also a form of sacrifice, but a form at odds with, for example, Islamic, Christian or Jewish sacrifice. Religious sacrifice is always bound to an economy, a wager or bargain with the infinite. To die at the hands of the infidels (be they Christian Crusaders, New Testament Pharisees or Old Testament Philistines) is to simply exchange this vale of tears for a paradise of martyrs, and who would not be tempted to cut a deal like that? Of course, the obverse, with which we are all too familiar, also obtains: to slaughter the infidels at the going rate of exchange (as one Jewish settler put it in the wake of the slaughter of Palestinians praying, a Jewish fingernail is worth more than a thousand dead Arabs) is to literally purchase a place in paradise for the faithful warrior. As in all economic exchanges, the religious zealot—like the political partisan—functions within temporality for the sake of a future projected out of time. The pressure of the utopian upon the present can only be converted into an opening, into a glimpse through the portal, into what the early 20th century critic and intellectual Walter Benjamin dubbed messianic "chips of time." It is memory that, for those caught up in the circles of temporality, of economic exchange, separates the wheat from the chaff, that, in Christian eschatology, literally parcels out the righteous on the one hand and the unrighteous on the other hand. Remembering the promised words of the book—the Book of Mohammed, the Book of Moses, the Book of Paul, the Book of Marx, the Book of Paine, etc.—nurtures hope as essential vision—and thus makes the hopeful visionaries—while it simultaneously sets delusion on the side of the uninitiated, those lured to their eternal deaths by mirages, chimeras. Memory, then, properly speaking, is always outside temporality insofar as the past it remembers, like the future its twin, anticipation, beckons, suffused with myth, with messianic undertones, which is why the deification of memory is per se the sacrifice of the present, the "here" and "now."

Having been offered up to its "others," its "outside," the sacrificed here and now cannot be recalled by memory. And in order for the gift to appear, as it were, in its stead, the here and now must also be invisible to perception. This is why the gift demands, for Derrida, forgetting on the part of the giver, non-recognition on the part of the recipient. Neither the one giving the gift nor the one receiving the gift must recognize it as such. The non-appearance of the gift as such means that the gift must appear as if it is a *Gift*, the German word for poison. The German *Gift* is thus analogous to Plato's pharmakon,

remedy and poison. Moreover, both giver and receiver must experience the gift as *Gift* in order for the gift as such to make its appearance. Insofar as temporality is inextricable from the experiences of human beings, insofar as recognition and memory—or more generally, perception—can only occur within temporality, the "appearance" of the gift "as such" can never be apprehensible to human beings. Indeed, what must be apprehended, what must be experienced, is precisely the opposite of what the gift ordinarily connotes. This opposite, the gift as if, the *Gift*, is redeemed by its opposite—the gift as such—only at the end of time, which, as we noted above, is logically outside time and thus has always shadowed time, parallel lines that never meet.

Like a brother.

Thus, within this context, when Jesus tells his disciples that the kingdom of God is at hand, he offers himself as a portal through which they might glimpse the gift of God—God's experience of human death—within their temporal beings. What they see without seeing—necessarily—initiates them into a secret brotherhood as secret sharers. But what do they share?

First and foremost, brotherhood. In his book *The Politics Of Friendship* Derrida links the "origins" of politics to the book and, more particularly, to the book of the brother. Is it mere coincidence that the three major religions of the world are patriarchal religions of the book? Indeed, can one say "patriarchy" without already saying "the book," without saying, *de facto* and *de jure*, the religious or political tome, the only masterpieces that matter, authored by brothers in law, for example, brothers like Mohammed, Moses, Jefferson, Lenin...?

In short, brothers, books, sacrifices, and temporality would all be synonyms for, and different facets of, the multiple *Gift*, veils which unveil their antitheses, antitheses which they, the veils, by definition, cannot see: the sister, the rumor, the extortion as/and the timeless gift. Brothers, books, sacrifices, *Gifts*, and temporality would thus belong to the realm of illusion and deception, the realm of necessity, the "as if." Beyond, above or behind this realm would be the realm of the "as such," the realm of adequation, sufficiency, a Platonic Heaven of Ideal Forms: the gift as the sister, the rumor, the extortion and the timeless.

Of course, I've deliberately polarized these relationships in order to obtain the "negatives" rumor and extortion. After all, we know that in these religious and political traditions, the brothers are only diminutives of The Father, sacrifices mere pretensions to the exorbitant price of The Sacrifice (e.g., the withering away of the state or the crucifixion of the Messiah), books, a faint echo of The Word (e.g., the Declaration of Independence, The Communist Manifesto), and temporality, a precursor to the eternal. In short, there is the non-set Truth and there are sets of the truth. Still, if the gift can only appear as *Gift*, "the balm of Gilead" only as Socratic hemlock, does not this structure imply, analogously, that the sister is the truth of the brother, that rumor is the truth of the book, that extortion is the truth of sacrifice?

Would globalization, then, as the enactment of a state or status, be the truth of globalism? Or would globalism, as the "final" resting place of globalization, be its truth? If these parallel but quite different questions have no answers, it is because they circulate as idealities (economic, religious, political, etc.) above or below, outside or within, the geopolitical spaces that bear their material effects. Globalism and globalization are, as one, the gift one never knew, will never know, as gift. But what if the anthropological concept of the gift is precisely what one gives even if the Derridean notion of the gift is what one receives? And vice-versa? Is not this anthropological/philosophical hierarchy precisely what it means to be subaltern? To be interpellated? To be, that is, born? To enter a world already in the making one appears, too, as a gift, in both the anthropological and Derridean sense of the term. And so to take on responsibility, morality and ethics one wages that the anthropological gift one leaves behind in the world is not the Derridean gift even if one knows, in advance, that one will never, in the final analysis, be able to tell one from the other. Such knowledge can be paralyzing or liberating; in any case it demands the impossible and necessary from each of us: that we both forget and remember that we are always global and never global enough.

—TYRONE WILLIAMS

PETRARCH #326

all your beauty took me down on earth
as all your beauty took me down
as all your beauty took me
all your beauty took
all your beauty
as all your beauty took me down on earth
all your beauty took me
all your beauty too
as all you
all your beauty took me
as all your beauty took me down
all you all you
took me down
took me down on earth

PETRARCH #327

I call on Death to help me combat Death
With such dark thoughts Love fills my body's weight
& the woofing of dogs will not save me
& the light which saves and protects—
Visions of the sexual imperative instead of the fits of dawn
Beneath the beautiful blue buildings
& the smell of sex in the hair of all Italian boys & girls
On the beach where Shelley's black heart would not burn
The sky is full of marbles & my mouth
Subjective in cafes whilst reading
The chains of the objectivists
The Laika poem & the milkshake
The matchboxes & the stamps of space
Inhabiting the gaps when the knees open
The cats all walk out when I attempt to talk of her
Dance or play Purple Rain

—TIM ATKINS

BLOOD DANCES

Perhaps we need an ongoing argument to move the ethereal entirely to its end—this eternal visceral performance—a way to continue to understand, the ethereal as a kismet—as purported endlessness.

Or—what would we be performing if we were no longer performing exterior pedagogies? We would be inarguable authenticities.

If there is to be a spans that is truly endless, capable of holding all elements within it, as it exists—its own elemental—it could be, in my opinion, only by way of the ethereal (ethereal not as any binary opposite to physical, but as a mass that itself has space for all fractures, fractals, fissures, quakes, quasars, slips, sonorous wakings, etc).

I am saying, oh the empowerment, in freeing ourselves from what it is, that in matter's socialized "laws," is perceived as keeping us here. How freeing—because to choose to stay, once we have really transcended what needs to be transcended in order to experience this freedom—to inhabit this plane, our bodies, with a most pristine and precise purpose—is to no longer have to be victim or villain or an opposite to _____. This, to emancipate what we are, beyond strictures and systems that did not inherently come from us—that do not support us on the level of our cosmic originality.

This, so that we can be engaged in "a process of transcendence of the binary, the oppositional, the historically reified object state. For this new fluidity, slippage, a constant movement revels/reveals the multiplicities folded within all experience and possibility . . . the many and the one" (per a conversation with Marthe Reed about my performance work). To generate an elliptical-sacrosanct, a type of ritual that can be engaged as non-linear method by which the body comes into its variable awarenesses—and how by activism of alertness (for the sake of force-effecting consciousness) this type of ritual would allow for empowerment concerning generating, then grouping, new logics.

After the last issue of SLP, Marthe Reed responded to me with the following beautiful question, which I find to be a pertinent part of this essay/exploration: "How does one transcend the ethereal and *inherit* the body?"

I do not think that there is even a necessary transcendence of the ethereal that would lead to inheritance of the body. In fact, I believe the human body—the literal physiology/presence of the body (both bound neutrons and free neutrons moving within and in and out of the physicality of our forms) prove the body to be living/physicalized ether. By this I mean living potential, infinitely capable of shape shifting—of being shifted. An active shrine activating—our bodies as ongoing documents of the very infinitum that, if we live to connect with and pursue, is already itself—infinitum.

"Non-stable" elements of physiology move in and out of what has been explained by some theorists as "a veil" between physical form and ethereal spans. I am proposing that the body can be made more "non-stable" (infinitum) due to our volition—and in that gesture, the body can be felt, as infinitum to us. I am saying it is possible to inhabit the body as ethereal matter, by choice and awareness. I am saying that the fact that we are in our bodies, inhabiting them by choice, makes these bodies inherently ours.

"I feel extremely at ease when my inner self is not recognized even by myself." (Tatsumi Hijikata)

As the great Sadhus of India have proven—(Sadhus are sanyasi, or renunciates, who have left behind all substance/material attachments and live in caves, forests and temples—"some live in the mountains alone for years at a time, eating only a few bananas, while others walk around with one hand in the air for decades; some live in cemeteries and claim to keep company with ghosts, still others partake in the religious consumption of charas and contemplate the cosmic nature and presence of God"—"it is thought that the austere practices

of the Sadhus help to burn off their karma") the more we *inhabit* (rather than *inherit*, which implies that there is something to be inheriting the body from—that the body/form is not inherently ours) the body as ethereal matter, the smaller the chasm (experienced as gap or as veil or? between the physical and the ethereal) becomes.[1]

"The human body transforms itself endlessly." (Tatsumi Hijikata)

A couple of years ago I performed a short run of blood dances that I feel accurately reflect the intentions of this essay. Painted entirely red by hand—my own hand—prior to going on stage. Certain dark scripts etched into my body. (I am remembering now the way that the ink stayed—stained my skin for months afterward—my shower still red with remnants of the paint which was not body paint and therefore (intentionally) was a sort of permanence)—Oh the expressed spans as the quietudes became energetic and dynamic spurts! Grief let by singing. Self-induced, animated inhabitation of the body as activism. I tied and bound myself to the point of only being able to hobble out from the room where I prepared, to the stage where I performed. Covered in a thick monk's cloak. Shaking and sounding inverted versions of spirituals that were delivered to me, via relationships with people who died as "slaves"—the complex combination—all of these parts somehow meaning a whole of my body. The inebriated conglomerate smearing.

"What is my work? Yes, it's myself" and "I've nothing to show you but my own body." (Tatsumi Hijikata)

And the guillotine (as is mentioned in what I "named" the piece) in my mind, was the audience. The bareness of my dick flouncing out as I slowly unbound myself (this was incredibly hard to do, as I tied the knots tight, as if holding another captive)—cloak first, then rope. Oh the tears and sweat that ran down my body—conveying a vulnerable yet inherent divergent red—oh the tears that I shed during. This, a form of self-birthing, not a metaphor. I literally built a canal that shred me—these *necessary violences*—and I performed the shredding in front of other people of whom, I could not guarantee any efficacy (concerning gender/sex support) or awareness in the context of equity and divergent bodies. Sometimes they laughed. Sometimes there was silence. Sometimes weeping from the audience. But always, this vertigo for me.

"The gorgeously wrought ceremony of inbounding one's self from violences speaks so intimately to the way violence nests in our systems, is internalized and becomes us. The skin has to tear at itself to be released." (Brenda Iijima, from a conversation about this performance)

A violent visitation between planar realities without ever leaving the body. Layers and layering are what make passage possible. That there could be such passage, meant for me—that my body was ephemeral data that I was capable of *feeling* physically and ephemerally.

"It was when he came up to Tokyo for the first time that he tried to mimic the way a condemned criminal is supposed to be walking in a prison yard. He is not walking with his legs upright but with his legs collapsed by despair. Therefore we will fail to grasp the reality of the human body if we do not think that sometimes we have to walk with our collapsed legs. You know if you put some water on burning ashes, an ash column will rise instantaneously for a few seconds. That's the way we are forced to walk. This discovery led him to the principle of his *Butoh* dancing." (Kayo Mikami on Tatsumi Hijikata's *Butoh* dance)

Expressing by way of unusual rawness. The gruesome muses inverting misery by way of mystery's cresting with such graphic crêches.

—j/j hastain

[1] Quotes taken from Wikipedia and dictionary.com

VARIATIONS & VISIONS

—after a poem by Kenneth Rexroth

Arrows break through ribs
his fingers caked with
resin where he drives the coast
its rifts beneath him

& his engine sputters
loud with repercussions
fundamentals & harmonics
the meridian's fatigue

He opens the blue shutters
animals like rodents
hide the sky's perimeter
a thin elastic line

His brain snarls
like a diesel straining water
at its portals
where he sweats & coughs

The image of a grackle
then a second & a third
rendered as triangles a flight
of bracelets in the air

His brain can only register
an antelope atop a hill
white water & a rodent
swimming past a hairy ovoid

How many lives, what beings
will his pencil chart?
a bottle drifting out in space
the ideogram of hill & sky

"I" is an other blocks
the human heart
a fourth becomes a fifth
in time a rapid envoi

What the eye first sees
the cheek feels later
like a mitten lightly brushed
against it a resistance

One is no less than one
his going bringing him to where
a feigned bullweaver
glows a spectral white

The Mediterranean is elsewhere
though he dreams it here
his scholia already scribbled
a hundred different ways

A hundred bright peninsulas
await him a plethora
of lives & beings
flying in mindless space

—JEROME ROTHENBERG

KNEES SONNET

On knees the shame of holes
You crash on a white flint rock
significant rock of white flint

Bury the coal in the eroded
side of the hill for diamond-
making

Superman could just hold
coal and crush it
into diamond

More men millionaires

I have thought for
a dirty starved circle

Thus began my habit then
of stealing certain things from men

YOU CAN SAMPLE

You can sample cord blood
 find rocket fuel there
Find rocket fuel in breast-milk

 also lettuce

I wear a Sponge Bob Square Pants Bandid
hear the running toilet

Money goes tied to the sub-prime
 we go
"month to month"

Good dog with its ears up
Unless it hunts it goes

—HOA NGUYEN

SPIRAL DISCOURSE

I thought this would be about Robert Smithson and his notion of dialectical landscape, really about forms of engagement with the industrial-scale alterations humans have made on the surface of the earth and the ways that some artists have traversed the distance between industrialism and environmentalism. I thought that there was a distance between industrialism and environmentalism that could be understood as a polarity, and that art might be the best mediator between those poles.

Before I had read Smithson's writings or any writing about him, when I had only a rudimentary familiarity with his work (*The Spiral Jetty is located in the Great Salt Lake. It is a rock jetty shaped like a spiral, constructed sometime in the early 1970s*), I believed more or less that Smithson's work, and land art in general, could be understood as large-scale environmental protest, or at least as heightened environmental consciousness—that it functioned to call attention to the destructive practices of unenlightened, profit-driven industrial and commercial development, and to extol the benefits of a higher consciousness that viewed human activity within the context of geological and cosmological time.

Smithson's *Collected Writings* was released in 1996 but I didn't read it then. 1996 was the year after I moved to the Bay Area in what I consider will be my final major geographic relocation. From a running start in Ohio I had slingshotted to Boston and then back through Colorado before finally reaching the Bay Area. Is it relevant that I've lived in various places? I think so. Through scale, regionalism, topography, distance, all the factors that define one site against another: driving, dwelling, relocating expose a dialectical landscape.

San Francisco in 1995 was for me the pantheon of experimental writing, reverberating with provocative language including echoes of the '70s and '80s battles between the Language Poets and New Narrativists, echoes which writers like myself used to animate our conversations although the original clashes had long since waned or morphed into something entirely different.

I was co-editing *Proliferation* then, and Laura Moriarty and Norma Cole sent several pages of their photo/text collaborative work "The Scattering" for issue number five. The photographs, taken by Norma, show Laura scattering ashes of her late husband, the poet Jerry Estrin, over the *Spiral Jetty*.^[1] The photographs partially obscure the text, a mix of prose and poetry that I believe was co-written by Norma and Laura.

It seems almost invasive to describe the moments in the photographs, but there they are in the pages of *Proliferation*, in a work submitted for publication, a work asking to be made public. How does the sense of intimacy still survive through all these iterations of making-public? Is this the root of the notion some still have, that a photograph can "steal the soul"? How is this related to conceptions of privacy, censorship, pornography, ownership of one's own image, determination of what kind of images can circulate in what channels in society?

This is not going the way I expected.

I wasn't reading Smithson's essays when we published "The Scattering." My thought was that the piece resonated with some unsettling sense of worldly spirituality, or spirituality-within-the-material-world (without getting too Heideggerian.)

Movements between public and private abound in "The Scattering," if you're looking. The jetty is a public and famous structure, but one that rarely has a large audience and that, for quite a few years before Cole and Moriarty's visit, was under the water of the Salt Lake, and inaccessible. The scattering was a private, even vulnerable act, done to commemorate a loved one, and in the company of an intimate friend. The friend recorded the act, made it part of an artwork, and made artwork part of it: the act became a performance in being witnessed and recorded. Would it have been a performance if Laura had been alone? Publication of "The Scattering" made the act public, though through the channels of experimental writing where one would expect a not-large audience—in fact, perhaps an audience proportional, in the art world, to the number of people who actually

visit the jetty. "The Scattering" conceals at the same time that it reveals, for nothing in the work explicitly declares that it is human remains being scattered, nor whose remains, nor what relationship Laura had to this person. The jetty itself is not identifiable in the photos or text. Probably someone could recognize the subject of "The Scattering" only if they already knew some things about the artist/authors. What relationship to audience is that? Is this a way to preserve privacy in public, by making intimate gestures but omitting the context?

And on.

Privacy and intimate gestures are not much what I meant to get at with Smithson's dialectical landscape. But maybe this, a poet's fixation on the small, fleeting utterance, is the axis I can use to scale up my perspective.

Smithson was not aligning himself with environmental activists, in the *Spiral Jetty* or in other works. He was vocally critical of what he saw as the hypocrisy and narrowness of some environmental protection efforts of his day, and of advocates who struggled to preserve remaining tracts of "pristine" nature while enjoying the benefits of industrial development. His work didn't seek to condemn or interrupt industrial activity, or to "step lightly on the land" in its own gestures. In his *Pours* series, Smithson poured industrial materials (asphalt, glue, concrete) onto eroded slopes at three different sites. No mitigation for the chemical, physical, or other impacts of the pours was included in the events. It's hard to imagine the *Pours* being funded or permitted today. In hindsight, the *Pours* feel like aggressive gestures analagous to Serra's *Tilted Arc*, bringing attention to the depleted conditions of a context by exacerbating them. At the time, though, I think the *Pours* were both more clinical and more metaphorical than they now seem. The *Pours* equated the entropic processes of geologic flows with industrial expansion. They were essentially monumental drawings of geologic erosion, as mirrored in the properties of industrial materials and mining activities.

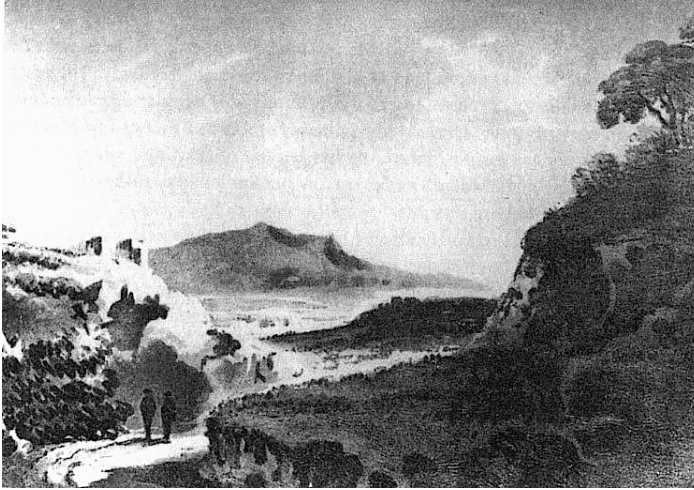


Robert Smithson, *Glue Pour*, 1970. Vancouver, BC.

After the *Glue Pour* in Vancouver, Smithson proposed the project *Island of Broken Glass* for a small island off the coast of Vancouver, in which 100 tons of glass would be dumped on the island and then crushed into a stratum of shards. He received permission from the Canadian government and financing from a Vancouver-affiliated gallery, but ran into opposition from a local conservationist group who advocated for protection of seals and cormorants in the area. Smithson responded by revising the proposal to use concrete rubble instead of glass, to create structures that could be used as nesting habitats. Still, the project was

never built. Smithson responded that “the project was not meant to save anything or anybody, but to reveal things as they are,” and called the conservationists’ position “a cheap religion to clear their conscience while they continued to eat their bloody steaks and drive their poisonous cars.”[2]

In his essay “Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape,” Smithson invoked the 18th-century English Picturesque, a theory of landscape concerned simultaneously with what comprised a successful landscape painting and with what, in the expanding scenic tourism of the day, comprised an impressive or worthy natural scene.[3] The theory of the Picturesque, shaped particularly by the scenic artist and travel essayist William Gilpin, held that the proper subject for a landscape included dramatic geologic features such as rock outcroppings, as well as high contrasts of light and dark, rough textures, variety and irregularity, and an overall ruggedness.[4]



William Gilpin, *Picturesque Mountain Landscape*, 1792.

Gilpin’s aesthetics, shaped by time spent in the rugged lake country of northern England, were taken up by the following generation of English landscape theorists such as the essayist Uvedale Price. Smithson found in Price’s writing a retort to the ecologists of his own day whom Smithson thought were “conditioned by a onesided idealism”:

The side of a smooth green hill, torn by floods, may at first very properly be called deformed; and on the same principle, thought not with the same impression, as a gash on a living animal. When a rawness of such a gash in the ground is softened, and in part concealed and ornamented by the effects of time, and the progress of vegetation, deformity, by this usual process, is converted into picturesqueness; and this is the case with quarries, gravel pits, etc., which at first are deformities, and which in their most picturesque state, are often considered as such by a leveling improver.

—Uvedale Price, *Three Essays on the Picturesque*, 1810. Quoted in Robert Smithson, “Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape.”[5]

Price’s endorsement of the picturesque potential of gravel pits and quarries served as a clarion call for Smithson in his investigations into relationships between geological and industrial entropy. In the Picturesque theorists and in Frederick Law Olmsted (a 19th-century advocate of the Picturesque, the designer of Central Park, and the “father” of landscape architecture), Smithson saw a direct engagement with the contradictions in natural processes, an engagement that he thought had been abandoned in Modernist formalism:

The contradictions of the “picturesque” depart from a static formalistic view of nature. The picturesque, far from being an inner movement of the mind, is based on real land; it precedes the mind in its material external existence. We cannot take a one-sided view of the landscape within this dialectic. A park

can no longer be seen as a “thing-in-itself,” but rather as a process of ongoing relationships existing in a physical region—the park becomes a “thing-for-us.”[6]

The dialectical relationship between ecological conservationism and industrial development, between nature as edenic treasure and nature as source of raw material leading to wealth, erupted in Smithson’s work through his choice of sites, through the processes and materials he used, and through the scale of the projects themselves. The Spiral Jetty is sited near the rusted remains of abandoned oil-extraction activities, a circumstance that Smithson celebrates in the essay “The Spiral Jetty”: “A great pleasure arose from seeing all those incoherent structures. This site gave evidence of a succession of man-made systems mired in abandoned hopes.”[7]

His project *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* was constructed the year after Spiral Jetty, on the site of a former sand quarry in the Netherlands. The *BC/SH* project reiterated the visual impacts of strip-mining, with a back-filled pit and a hill of spoils, and shaped those features in an aesthetic framework that activated the tension between geomorphic and industrial landforms and the ultimate instability of each. “*BC/SH* was not on the side of the environmentalists nor was it merely economic; it pertained to a political economy that left intact, and in jeopardy, the paradigm of the capitalist mode of extraction.”[8]



Robert Smithson, *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, 1971.
Emmen, The Netherlands.

This will not resolve itself to a polarity.

In the photos in “The Scattering,” there’s what looks like a small backpack at Laura’s feet. She’s wearing a sleeveless black sundress. Her arms are at her sides, or her arms stretch out in front of her with ash pouring from her hands, or her arms fling over her head.

—MARY BURGER

- [1] Cole, Norma and Laura Moriarty, “The Scattering,” in Burger, Mary, Jay Schwartz, and Chris Vitiello (eds.), *Proliferation #5: The Visual/ Visible Issue*. (1998.)
- [2] Graziani, Ron. “Robert Smithson: An Esthetic Foreman in the Mining Industry (Part 2),” *Art Criticism* (vol. 14, no. 1, Spring 1998): 11.
- [3] Smithson, Robert. “Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape,” in Nancy Holt (ed.), *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays with Illustrations*. (New York: New York University Press, 1979), pp. 117-128; hereafter abbreviated as Smithson, “Frederick Law Olmsted.”
- [4] Barbier, Carl Paul. *William Gilpin: His Drawings, Teaching, and Theory of the Picturesque*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963.)
- [5] Price, Uvedale. *Three Essays on the Picturesque*. (1810.) Quoted in Smithson, “Frederick Law Olmsted,” pp. 118-119.
- [6] Smithson, “Frederick Law Olmsted,” p. 119.
- [7] Smithson, Robert. “The Spiral Jetty,” in Nancy Holt (ed.), *The Writings of Robert Smithson*. (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 111.
- [8] Graziani, Ron. *Robert Smithson and the American Landscape*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 134.

" Half- A - Man "

comme une gouffre

-- Leopold Sedar Senghor , Lettres d 'hivernage

(Le royaume de) Demi-Homme Où L' Homme Inachèvé

I roam in the realm of Half-A-Man
On
one of those deserted plains I search

Needing

a vista Half-A-Man stands there
as a lighthouse For new discoveries

Of the New World

Hello there Anti-War Committees as I press on

Hello to the cumulus
nimbus of the imagination (the central point)
of the Hadj حج pilgrimage
undertaken by the faithful Of Love

Of which I am one who journeys
WHO HAVE NOTHING Yet I

Unseen bear the oriflamme of your name

(Yet to be disclosed by the woman that I love)

Here you may fill in the blanks or sneeze

(Vers . une gouffre encore

L' Homme -Acheve

To Complete-A - Man

-- Sotère Torregian
11 December ,A.D.2010

N.B., حج Hadj, as written in original Arabic

CAMPUSES (1)

a translation from Rimbaud, Villes

The Campus has it all over the wildest accomplishments of late Tang accommodation and decadence. Futile to describe the yearning looks on the faces of the apprentices, the imperial glint of the barrack-like edifices, the ancient silence of the snow-globes. The hubris is unimaginable: Structures of fantastical modernity inhabit the gigantic bodies of aging hybridists. I go to poetry readings amidst the architecture many times more spectacular than any in all modernity. And what sexuality! Pulitzer Prize-winning Nebuchadnezzars have arranged their attendants in haughty poses on the staircases of the ministries, though here and there some sit, normally, at affected attention; even the flunkies are fairly smug, confident of their station. When I saw their old masters dissected for exhibit, gape-mouthed in their shark tanks, I nearly fainted. Nevertheless, the hint of endless galleries beyond these gave me strength, not least the suggestion of careful arrangement and tactful selection in matters of frame and lighting these promised. The upper zone of the campus, I hasten to note, has weird segments: simulacral streets of hashish clubs filled with patrons, each smoker encased in bluish tile, imported from an oil-producing backwater, where such fragilities are crafted by prepubescent no-names. Narrow tunnels lead to the frescoed vault of the Palmer House. This dome is an armature of well-wrought plaster approximately fifteen million meters in diameter.

Here and there, at the copper readings, the golden celebrations of honors, the platforms and stairways that wound round the labyrinthine markets and institutional pillars, I thought I could grasp the purpose of the weird plan. Yet from the inside of it, I was merely cipher, happy and excited as I was in my astonishment of it. Are there other worlds more real than its marvels, above or below its game of Go? For the tourists in these hotel-marvels, Cairo, Aden, or Benghazi are old-hat, been there, done that. They enter the business of it, properly ordered, with arcaded galleries, shops full of curios. The trampled road waits to be trampled; a few nabobs ride in diamond-studded sulkies, though most still die, anciently, in the gutters. An intricate web of microscopic tubes connects the sewers to writing retreats in deserts, mountains, and grape-growing regions. Furthermore, at the Associated Writing Programs Conference they serve tropical appetizers whose prices vary from eight thousand to eight million dinars. Insofar as nosing out a poetry reading in this place, I should say that the gold-leafed sewers I mentioned contain tragedies that are tragic enough. I think there is a State apparatus, but the laws of the Poetry State, communards, are already so exactly as strange as those of the Imperium that I'm ready to disembowel myself with a dull ladle. You can take Space and Time for granted, but look at my face in the daguerreotype: Space is a miracle and Time is a freak-house.

Paris is now a suburb, but the avant-garde gives light to the Museum where the action is. Like forever, the real vanguard elements number in the mere hundreds. For apparently normal individuals, architecture is discontinuous and ecstatically erratic; their gated communities come into their communal gathering in periodic travel, meticulously arranged like any suburb, though these structures lose themselves bizarrely in the provinces after the rituals, where savage gentfolk hunt down their gossip columns by artificial light.

—THE REJECTION GROUP

The Rejection Group was a provisional formation active for approximately five months in late 2009 and early 2010. It dissolved after disagreements over authorial credit and ownership made continuation impossible. The group was comprised of Christian Bök, Kenneth Goldsmith, Kent Johnson, Kasey Silem Mohammad, and Vanessa Place. Among the twenty-some texts these writers collectively produced are nine translations from Arthur Rimbaud's Les Illuminations, of which the above is one example.

SOME SOUVENIRS ON DEATH VIEWED AS ART

Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho*, Movie still with taxidermied owl. Norman Bates loved stuffing birds, eventually he taxidermied his mother, 1960.

Robert Rauschenberg, *Monogram*, Angora goat with painted nose and ears, painted tire, painted hinged wood, tennis ball, collage and newspaper, 1955-59.

Damien Hirst, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, tiger shark, glass, steel, 5 percent formaldehyde solution, 1991.

Mark Dion, *Library for the Birds of Antwerp*, birds of African origin, tree, ceramic tiles, pool, books, mixed media, 1993.

Thomas Grünfeld, *Misfit*, (St. Bernard), Mixed Media, taxidermy, 1994.

Rachel Poliquin, *Moose*, Saskatchewan Museum, 2005.

Bryndís Snaebjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, *Lord and Lady Futtnam Polar Bear*. Artists attempted to locate and photograph every taxidermied polar bear in England. According to *Antennae*, Issue #6, they located 34 bears, "Most from the past century, some in pubs, some in private homes, others on display in natural history museums and still others moldering away in the back rooms of museums." 2006.

Iris Schieferstein, *Snake Pistol*, 2007.

Claire Morgan, *Captive*, torn polythene shopping bags, an owl and five mice, nylon, lead, 2008.

Petah Coyne, *Untitled #1336 (Scalapino Nu Shu)*, peasants, ducks, silk flowers, 2009-2010.

Julia deVille, *Kitten Drawn Hearse*, 2010.

—BRENDA IJIMA

FLOWING WEEDS MY THEME

CHECK: *all doubters, give heed . . .*

There's been death but no body bears the trace. Death is sure nonetheless, confirmed by the red sky proceeding the sunrise. & the smell of the waves as they break on the beach. Does one need more evidence than this? A horseshoe crab tossed on its back, kicking fast it smacks its tail against the wet-packed sand—the shell become an enemy at last. Smell the seaweed left behind by the tide, trampled through the week by tourists who see ocean pulp as mere mess, never imagining us. Never imagining we would scour the shore from the pier to the jetty for something to eat, knowing full well that carrion feeds the silt the waves churn loose. The silt loses its grip on waxy tangles the tide pulls to shore. A nightly deposit, and then abandoned in the early morning. The sea is dead for sure, and we don't need DNA to know what it does with its own.

Shudder the thought: terrible tufts of beard pinched fast in the mouth of your *moules marinière*. The lucky bunch bears mussels indeed, clamped fast 'round the root. Say a prayer. Wish for luck and perhaps a *blanc mange* tonight, or a simple salad. We call this fusion. We call this reviving the dead for a meal. No matter the distance, from the Arabian Sea to my bath—I circulate the soup in my mouth and swallow the last sip. This is a world of orgasms. & we're no different, dependent on the bite as well.

So let's clap hands and sing a hymn in praise of baptism—a ditty learned in youth from sweet-on-the-tongue chaplains and would-be nuns if not for revolution. Sit straight in your polyester and tune your voice for the song: *There's a fountain filled with blood and sinners plunged beneath the flood, the dying sees the fountain at last; as have I, vile as he. The dying never loses his power. Flowing weeds my theme, and shall be 'til I die, and shall be 'til I die; with lisping tongue flowing weeds my theme and shall be 'til I die. A blood reward, a golden harp! Stung and screwed for years, and formed by flowing weeds, a power divine. The dying shall never lose his power. Flowing weeds my theme, and shall be 'til I die; with lisping tongue flowing weeds my theme and shall be 'til I die.*

A song the nation sings, gathered in front of HVR-Z5U's—the flags are out and draped 'round the neck of a strange fraternity, jingoistic and zealous. This must be love. The look on the girl's face as she's lifted atop the crowd is full of love for spontaneous celebrations, car horns, reporters on assignment and white teeth. Congratulations lovers! on this new rite of celebration, the weighted bag tossed to sea. & we're finally free to pursue the theme of redemption together again.

But cast it off for a moment. Look at how the night is lit by ferris wheels and marquees. Look at how the children's teeth are stained blue by cotton candy. Peanuts are roasting and a fresh shift has just begun pressing taffy soft, twisting licorice with lime. & the fudge, still warm, stuck on fingertips invites a lick. The moon too weak to distinguish breakers from the beach—a vast black desert. & Pennsylvania families down the shore take to the boardwalk for a stroll. Consider the likelihood that one of them—still salty from an evening dip in the sea—has eaten a fly unfortunate enough to mistake sugar for life, not knowing that the cotton treat cocoons a corpse.

OVER: *still stinking from the fight . . .*

—MICAH ROBBINS

» A TALE OF TWO CULTURAL CENTERS «

Istanbul, November 2010

It was hard to miss that Istanbul was the 2010 European Capital of Culture because of all the signs—on billboards, street lamps, highway overpasses, and the sides of trams, not to mention the enormous placards on the drawbridge towers of the Galata Bridge and the six-storey building by the docks of the Eminönü ferry. The logo was three intersecting arches over the city name, a stylized representation of the grand mosques of the historic district. Come to think of it, all the signs were in the historic district as well, along with the other areas—mostly on the European side of the Bosphorus, like Taksim Square and the İstiklal Caddesi pedestrian mall—where the trappings of the neoliberal “global city” and the traffic of tourist Euros and dollars were heaviest. Of course Turkey wasn’t in the EU—its accession in a kind of permanent limbo—so the European Capital of Culture designation had the air of a consolation prize, or a sales pitch.

A capital of culture—or culture of capital?

You toyed with this formulation, but it struck you as glib, the sub-Adornian conditioned reflex of a junior professor. Hadn’t you read somewhere that in Turkey the left was politically marginal yet culturally central? Wasn’t Istanbul the city where you couldn’t pass a bookstore display window without seeing a Marx or a Che title, or a book about one of Turkey’s revolutionary martyrs from the pre-coup 70s—Ibrahim Kaypakkaya or Deniz Gezmiş, with his movie-star looks? A culture of capital or a culture of the left: how should you negotiate this contradiction? More importantly, how did Turkish artists, intellectuals, and activists negotiate it?

No investigation, no right to speak!

You crossed the bridge over the Golden Horn and took your investigation to Asena Günel, the Project Coordinator at Tütün Deposu—DEPO—a cultural center in the Tophane quarter of the Beyoğlu district. In her late thirties, Asena was a leftist intellectual and activist herself: before coming to DEPO she’d been a long-time editor at İletişim, a leftist publishing house, and had been active in the founding of the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), a multi-tendency, libertarian socialist organization. Asena reframed the proposition about the left’s cultural centrality as a matter of *Bildung*: Yes, it was to some extent still true that in Turkey “to be culturally mature is to be a leftist as well.” But that had been changing, she continued, with the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the center-right, moderate Islamic party that had been governing the country since 2003: religious and conservative intellectuals were now gaining a hearing in venues formerly reserved for secularists and Kemalists. Then she excused herself to search for a power cord for the German performance artist who would be using one of DEPO’s spaces that evening.

The title of Project Coordinator didn’t do justice to the breadth of Asena’s actual tasks, which seemed to include a little of everything, from curator to electrician—the new creative class, after all, had to set an example in “flexibly” exploiting themselves. Along with its regular schedule of international exhibitions, DEPO hosted panel discussions and artist talks, video and documentary series, and produced a theoretical e-journal, *Red Thread*. The center also made its spaces available to other local groups so long as their projects met the general standard of DEPO’s mission—“contributing to the democratization of culture,” in Asena’s words. Right then, for example, a theater company was rehearsing in the annex across the courtyard; tomorrow a dance troupe would occupy the second floor of the main building, while on the weekend a group of alt-indy publishers was penciled in for a workshop on internet publishing. Asena had to orchestrate it all with only three other full-time staffers.

While Asena was away, you admired the building, a renovated tobacco warehouse still owned by the Kavala family, from Turkey’s almost vanished Greek minority. After the tobacco industry left Istanbul the Kavalas diversified into communications and real estate, and the warehouse became a dusty storage closet for İletişim overstock. This turned out to be the chrysalis stage of a second incarnation: in 2005 it was tapped as an exhibition space for the 9th International Istanbul Biennial, which led to the building’s full renovation three years later. The hatch for hoisting in the tobacco bales was sealed off now, but many of the structure’s other original features—from the wrist-thick ropes that served as stairway banisters to the open ductwork of the ceilings—persisted as postmodern architectural quotation. A familiar trajectory: old industrial sites retrofitted for the new “culturized” economy, a fate this building shared with a number of former factories and shipyards along the Haliç waterfront—at least those that had not simply been razed during the market liberalization of the 1980s. The heavy, polished planks under your feet had the deceptive solidity of a ship’s deck, having weathered this sea-change.

Outside, though, the waters were still choppy. Only a few weeks before your arrival, this Tophane neighborhood had been the scene of what was quickly dubbed the “Gallery Wars.” A group of thirty or so young men had stormed two nearby openings that evening, smashing windows and attacking visitors with clubs, stones, bottles, and knives. Causes of the melee were murky: In one version, the visitors had been drinking alcohol openly in the street, offending the quarter’s residents, and when intoxicated hipsters started insulting local women for wearing headscarves, the result was a spontaneous outburst against the intruders. No, protested the visitors, the attack had clearly been premeditated; it was a right-wing Islamist gang that had been waiting for just such an occasion. Whatever the proximate cause, however, it finally became clear that the attack had been an expression of profounder transformations in the neighborhood itself, tectonic shifts in the demographics, culture, and class politics of Istanbul. Until recently Tophane had been one of the last holdouts against the gentrification of the Beyoğlu district; the residents tended to be recent migrants from the Anatolian east, predominantly conservative Muslims and mostly poor. DEPO was one among a number of exhibition spaces—including also the two battlegrounds of the gallery wars—that had opened in the area in the last several years, along with upscale cafés and boutiques, nightclubs and tourist hostels, now rubbing shoulders with traditional, male-only tea houses, small local mosques, and the laundry-bedecked balconies of unrenovated apartment buildings. It was Europe versus Asia, each population the other’s Other, on a playing field skewed to one side’s advantage by the rise in rent. Even if the attack had been planned, it took advantage of a very palpable anger.

But quiet prevailed inside the dimly-lit gallery. You looked around at the current exhibition, “Sharing Waters: Sauna Meets Hamam,” in which the enclosure of the gallery space, its institutional separation from the outside world, had been transformed—or dissimulated—into the intimacy of the bath. The show was a cross-cultural dialogue of four works by women artists from different bathing cultures, Turkey, Syria, Finland, and Sweden. You were drawn first to two rows of free-standing lockers, a little scuffed and dented from long use—Syrian artist Buthayna Ali’s installation, *Don’t listen! She’s only a woman!* Through the vents in the small doors you could see lights and hear murmuring voices, in Arabic mostly—recorded testimonials of the kinds of things these women felt comfortable discussing only in the privacy of a communal bath’s gendered space. When you opened any of the locker doors to hear better, however, the light went off and the voice dissolved, leaving just folded garments and shoes in the shadows. The hollowness imparted a layered ambiguity: thoughts about silence and silencing, bodies present and absent, a little of

the voyeur's guilt, a taste of exclusion. These you carried to the other side of the gallery where Swedish artist Maria Ångquist Klyvare's video, "Solitude," flickered on a triptych of large screens. For a time, amid the murmur of waters and voices, you were the only visitor.

Yes—Asena confirmed it on her return—attendance had been disappointing. Only about 25 people were at the opening, whereas the previous exhibition had had over 500, "almost like a Biennial." It had been, admittedly, a flashier theme—"When Ideas Become Crime"—featuring works in a variety of media by 48 Turkish artists brought together by controversial Turkish-Kurdish curator Halil Altındere. In Turkey, such a title was not hyperbole; the recent prosecutions of Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafak for violating Article 301 of the Penal Code ("insulting Turkishness") and the extra-judicial murder of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink after his multiple prosecutions under the same law were only the most internationally well-known examples. Thus to enter the exhibition visitors had had to push through the first of its pieces, Ahmet Ögüt's *The Swinging Doors*—a gate made out of police riot-squad shields.

Contemporary art came late to Turkey, in the 1990s, when it bloomed as an underground scene—the "Genç Etkinlik" (roughly, the "Young Activity"). Since then it had entered an uneasy interregnum, still attacked by a conservative cultural establishment as a foreign export smuggled in to dilute the national identity, but beginning to draw broader audiences and make its way into the more upscale galleries. With its new status, however, the milieu was in danger of losing its cohesion, atomizing instead into individual artists apolitically "professionalizing" themselves. Altındere and other supporters had seen this exhibition as a necessary reassertion of contemporary art's insurgent spirit. It was an insurgency informed by "post-Marxist" theory—Negri and Hardt, Deleuze and Guattari, Laclau and Mouffe—in which one was more likely to hear about "radical democracy" and "multitudes" than the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

This you gathered from the exhibition catalogs and other materials that Asena had set before you up in DEPO's attic, an open-plan, minimally furnished office beneath a peaked roof. The publications were quite professionally—even slickly—produced, creating the impression of a well-funded enterprise despite its harried skeleton-crew of a staff. DEPO, you remembered reading online, was primarily sponsored by Anadolu Kültür, a cultural NGO founded by Osman Kavala, head of the Kavala Group of Companies—the same Greek-Turkish family that owned the tobacco warehouse. Anadolu Kültür, in turn, received a portion of its funding from George Soros's Open Society Institute, which promoted Soros's brand of "enlightened" capitalism around the world. The OSI, for example, was implicated in the wave of "color revolutions" that had recently swept the nations of Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, helping to install more market-friendly regimes. Kavala himself sat on the boards of the Turkish OSI and other Soros initiatives, most notably the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), one of the country's leading think-tanks, which in addition received grants from Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy—US-based organizations whose definitions of freedom and democracy often displayed a slippery confluence with CIA objectives. The Open Society Institute even had a track record of promoting contemporary art, having established twenty-two "Soros Centers for Contemporary Art" in Central and Eastern Europe and the republics of the former Soviet Union during the "transition" of the 90s as an antidote to socialist realism. Mobile, technologically savvy, and up-to-date, the idiom of contemporary art, it turned out, mapped well onto the values of neoliberalism.

You asked Asena about this on her return from yet another task. The contradictions of the funding issue, she responded, had found their most notable recent expression in a slightly different context, the 11th International Istanbul Biennial in 2009, for which

DEPO served as one of the main venues. The biennial's title, "What Keeps Mankind Alive?" had been taken from the song in Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, and an engagement with Brechtian themes and techniques served as a loose framework for the entire show. But the show's boldly red and black, Russian Constructivist-style promotional materials had also borne, more discreetly, the logo of Koç Holding. Koç was Turkey's largest conglomerate—over \$35 billion in annual revenues from a range of industries including automotive, financial services, and information technology—and its sponsorship of the Biennial provoked controversy among the left. And while it was typical enough for Turkey's old-guard "orthodox left" to disparage contemporary art as a tool of capital, this time some among the milieu's libertarian-left allies had been outraged as well. Thus while the biennial's VIP guests had been regaled by representatives from Koç Holdings and Turkey's culture ministry on its opening night, secure behind a phalanx of guards and a metal detector at the door, outside demonstrators shrilled whistles and chanted "Communism does not need sponsors!"

Asena herself appeared impatient with these controversies. Yes, it was true that DEPO's sponsoring institution received some of its funds from Soros's OSI, but that was nothing compared to what Osman Kavala contributed from the family business. And while she was aware of the role of the OSI in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, she argued that in Turkey—in Diyarbakır, for instance (an impoverished Kurdish area in the east)—such funding had indeed, in her words, "contributed to a more democratic society." The feminist group that she was part of did not accept funds from any outside institution in order to remain independent, but "for an organization like Anadolu Kültür it is really difficult."

For further elaboration she directed you to certain essays in the catalog for the "When Ideas Become Crime" exhibition and in the center's own e-journal, *Red Thread*—the positions you would find outlined there were hers as well. In the former, "Post-Anarchist" writer Süreyya Evren argued that the "orthodox left's" denunciations of corporate funding masked an underlying distrust of contemporary art itself, because they never leveled the same charges at ideologically-approved works in traditional modes, for instance a political film sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, or the volumes of Nâzım Hikmet poetry put out by Yapı Kredi Publications, which was owned by the Yapı Kredi bank (itself one of the subsidiaries of Koç Holding). The Biennial had been viewed by over 100,000 people—many of them young, dissatisfied, and seeking perspectives—yet its opponents never managed to advance a clear argument of "how and through what mechanisms communist propaganda made under the sponsorship of Koç would transform into becoming a propaganda against communism." Furthermore, contemporary art in Turkey over the last twenty years had a track record of being far more critical of capitalism than the modes championed by the orthodox left, such as the short story and cinema. And not only critical of capitalism, but of itself and its own institutions, an assertion echoed by Erden Kosova in *Red Thread*: "Is there another discipline that criticizes its own environment of presentation as closely as contemporary art does, and subjects this environment to debate via the art it produces?" And sure enough, in the same issue of that Soros-funded journal you found an article criticizing Soros-funded cultural initiatives.

By that point, though, it had become dizzily claustrophobic—an infinite regression of ironies rather than a clarification. What if such institutional self-consciousness was finally just a high-end, straight-faced version of those jokes on *The Simpsons* at the expense of FOX or one of David Letterman's jibes against GE—cynical performances of conformist "nonconformity," in which the smirk hides the toothlessness? Perhaps, you thought as the ferry pulled away into the freshness of a Bosphorus breeze and the European side receded from view, perhaps with a little distance it would all come into manageable perspective, or maybe on the Asian side you'd find a culture of the left that was not so problematically intertwined—ensnared, even—in the culture of

capital. Once docked at Kadıköy, you made your way through the shopping district clustered around the waterfront—gentrified, yes, but in more Turkish-national way, not as touristy as Beyoğlu—to a quaint cobbled alley lined with artists’ stalls and cafés off one of the main streets. Down the alley you found an elegant four-storey building behind a garden wall overtopped by trees—the Nâzım Hikmet Culture Center.

The first room in the building was a bookstore—social theory and political economy, the classics of Marxism, and Hikmet volumes alongside other works of poetry and fiction. There was also a stack of newspapers on the counter: *Sol* (“Left”), the publication of the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP). The robust young man behind the counter, Hüseyin Çukur, informed you that this party was the center’s organizer. A poet and TKP militant himself, Hüseyin’s own first book of poems, *Kendine Kıvrılan Ok* (roughly “the arrow that winds back on itself”), sat on the shelves. Hüseyin’s favorite poets were Pablo Neruda, Yannis Ritsos, and Hikmet, and his political pantheon—reported with a mixture of gusto and watchfulness, as if testing your reaction—included Josef Stalin. You declined the bait, at least so directly, instead asking about the TKP’s cultural policy: did they advocate literary realism over modernism, traditional aesthetics over avant-garde approaches? No, no, he responded, the party was agnostic on such matters; what counted was that art have some relation to the *halk*—the people, the popular masses. Hikmet, after all, was the avatar: a Mayakovsky-influenced modernist, but always in touch with the spirit of the *halk*. But what of the arguments that literature had to be “accessible” in order to reach those masses? “Let’s just say...” Hüseyin paused for the right words, and what came out allayed your anxiety: “Let’s say that I am more interested in what they have to teach *me*.” You were further reassured by another glance at the shelves, where Georges Perec in Turkish translation and Oğuz Atay’s dense, high-modernist *Tutunamayanlar* rubbed bindings with the eminently *halk*-inspired social realism of Yaşar Kemal.

Hüseyin felt uncertain of his English—although it was miles better than your risible Turkish—and after you toured the building he led you out onto a broad patio of crowded tables under the leafless trees. This was the Piraye Café, named after Hikmet’s wife, and for a moment you felt like you might have stepped into a scene from the Istanbul of the 1960s or 70s—there wasn’t a headscarf in sight. Here Hüseyin introduced you to Gamze Erbil, a journalist for *Cumhuriyet*—Turkey’s oldest daily newspaper and as staunchly Kemalist as the date of its founding, 1924, suggested. But, Gamze insisted, that was only her day job; she was a full-time TKP organizer and also wrote for *Sol*. She looked about the same age as DEPO’s Asena Günel, but with a nervous energy that contrasted with the latter’s bemused stoicism, and over tea and cigarettes she explained the center and its place in the strategy of the TKP.

That strategy, you gathered, was a fully worked-out Gramscian “war of position,” the prolonged struggle to cohere a national-popular bloc around a communist program in the context of a capitalist society in which democratic institutions and ideology had become more or less entrenched, with the goal of achieving cultural hegemony as a prelude to taking political power. And it made sense, because the left in the Turkey of the pre-coup 70s, vibrant but fissiparous, had been all-too wedded to the insurrectionary glamour of armed struggle (the “war of movement” strategy), which had reduced the popular masses to the status of onlookers and exposed the militants themselves to violent suppression. The “war of position” approach was not without perils of its own, however: its practitioners might be co-opted by the very institutions they sought to transform. So the TKP—itsself a refoundation project of the 90s rather than the lineal descendant of Turkey’s original, Moscow-oriented party—tried to maintain its independence by establishing counter-institutions instead, one of which you happened to be sitting in at that very moment.

Nâzım Hikmet had long been Turkey’s unofficial national poet, but because of his Communist affiliations he had gone into

exile in 1950 after a 12-year imprisonment and was stripped of his Turkish citizenship the next year. Thus one of the TKP’s early initiatives had been to organize a movement to have Hikmet’s citizenship posthumously reinstated, gathering 500,000 signatures for a petition. By that time, early in the new millennium, the party was operating Hikmet culture houses in several cities, but these were modest operations. Then came the watershed: the 2002 electoral victory of the neoliberal, Islamic AKP and 2003 US/NATO invasion of Iraq. By organizing committees of resistance around a clear platform of opposition to the war, to neoliberalism and the EU, and to religious fundamentalism, the TKP made itself a pole of attraction for secularists, the liberal and progressive left, students and youth, and the Alevi and other religious and ethnic minorities. All of these groups were looking for some alternative to the party of historic Kemalism, the center-left Republican People’s Party (CHP), which now seemed in terminal decline. In this climate, initially wary intellectuals and culture-producers grew open to the idea of working with reds.

In 2009, the TKP moved its Istanbul Hikmet center to the current location, a former Armenian schoolhouse built in the decade before the 1915 genocide. The TKP solicited no assistance from NGO sponsors, Gamze explained, instead renovating the building with party funds and volunteer labor and financing it with the bookstore, the café (which did indeed look popular with a young, secular crowd), and private donations. The center had a 150-seat auditorium, a library, an exhibition hall, conference rooms and classrooms, and in good weather it set up an open-air cinema in the large café plaza. Inside, it held workshops and classes on diverse topics such as archaeology, foreign languages (including Kurdish), photography, theater, and even Latin dance, and hosted larger events such as concerts, conferences and panel discussions, and talks by well-known, non-party academics, artists, and filmmakers. The center even produced its own cinema and literature journals.

But the cornerstone of the project was the Nâzım Hikmet Academy—in effect the center’s own people’s university. There were four departments, with Literature, Music, and Cinema offering three-year programs of “fine arts”-style practical workshops alongside courses in the histories of their genres, and Social Sciences (a catch-all including history, economics, and philosophy) offering a two-year course of study. Committed to working outside the commodified university system and its individualistic reward mechanisms, the Academy instead emphasized collective and interdisciplinary approaches and sought to break down barriers between student and teacher and the academy and the larger community. The ultimate goal was nothing less than the development of a new layer of young, activist, “organic” intellectuals—Thesis 11 meets Gramsci. Although only in its second year, the Academy was so far showing signs of success, with over 170 students enrolled and a range of instructors that included many non-party academics.

But the tug-of-war for these social layers continued, with the AKP doing battle for young people and the liberal-progressive left. The latest front had been the constitutional referendum in September, in which roughly 60% of voters had approved a raft of reforms ostensibly launched to bring Turkey in line with EU standards. Once again the left was divided: The TKP had urged a No vote, arguing that the changes gave the ruling party more control over the selection of judges and prosecutors, so that the marginally greater individual and worker rights that were yielded with one hand would be taken away—and then some—by the other. Moreover, the reforms would move the nation closer to EU accession, which the TKP had always denounced as an imperialist take-over. The libertarian-democratic left of Asena Günel and the DEPO milieu, however, had advocated a Yes vote: greater democracy always meant more room to organize and struggle, including against whatever strings the AKP had attached. Gamze Erbil wasn’t impressed with this argument: Yes-voters among the

"liberal left" (evidently the TKP's rhetorical return-serve for the "orthodox left" label) had made themselves into objective AKP supporters even as they subjectively deluded themselves otherwise. The so-called "Gallery Wars," in fact, were a perfect illustration of this contradiction. What had that episode been—Gamze clearly relished the irony—but two wings of the AKP bruising each other?

Gamze's cellphone had been buzzing almost nonstop throughout your discussion, and at last she began to pack up. You ventured a final question, although you felt like you could anticipate the answer—what of the "European Capital of Culture" initiative? You remembered Asena, back on the European side, expressing disappointment with the event: one of DEPO's exhibitions had been accepted by the 2010 agency, but they still hadn't received any of the promised reimbursement, and while the festivities had certainly benefited companies close to the governing party, it didn't look like it any sustainable new projects or spaces would be left in its wake. Gamze, however, merely scoffed: Another EU-AKP plot!

You said goodbye to Gamze and Hüseyin and went to look for a *dolmuş* heading in the direction of your flat. It was rush-hour by then and the sidewalks were packed; you ended up cramming yourself into the wrong minibus. You didn't care, though—you felt like you'd picked your side, or even that it had chosen you, it all sounded so clear and unambiguous. There, at the Nâzım Hikmet Cultural Center, you'd found a culture of the left that was not hopelessly ensnared in the culture of capital.

But later that evening it began to dawn on you that that side, too, was not without its troubling contradictions. On the big Tekel strike, for instance: when some of the workers had occupied their trade union headquarters to protest the bureaucrats' sell-out, the TKP criticized the action, arguing that ordinary rank and file workers wouldn't understand why "their own" union leaders were being attacked. Wasn't this just tailing the bureaucracy (tied to the state, and particularly the old Kemalist elements in the state) rather than leading the way? At the party's website you discovered further cause for worry, not least the frequent calls for "patriotism," as if Turkey were a besieged neo-colony with a long history of foreign occupation rather than a brief—and robustly repelled—episode after WW1. And what about that internal colony of their own, the Kurds? The TKP refused to call for their independence, arguing instead that it had to wait for the revolution. If the libertarian left was in danger of abetting the AKP and neoliberalism, it seemed, the TKP risked something similar in relation to the Kemalist nationalism of the old CHP, as if taking on the same coloration in the struggle to occupy the latter's once-hegemonic position. This was confirmed in an email from Turkish friend: "Their politics is communism sublated in commonplace right-wing ideology. You can taste most of the unpleasant-dominant ideas in Turkish politics with them, but served in the 'communist' plate." And when it came to art, too, you had to admit that you'd rather spend an afternoon at a Brechtian-themed biennial than viewing a documentary on traditional Alevi dance produced by the Hikmet academy's cinema students. But then you thought of that Soros money . . .

Could it be that the two sides were so subordinated to either international or national capital that in the end they were merely leftist versions of the spectacle you had seen that morning in the historic district, at your investigation's start—Burger King on one corner, Burger Turk on the next? Was the only solution, then, to stay on the Bosphorus ferry, going back and forth from the European side to the Asian side, without ever getting off?

But you're not in Turkey now, as you type out the scrawled paragraphs of your travel journal, and it's no longer 2010. The "European Capital of Culture" brand has migrated north to cities in Finland and Estonia, and the Mahgreb and Middle East are rocked by unexpected revolts. Both sides of the Turkish left, you learn, are united in their hopes for the success of the Arab rebellions and in their struggles to keep Turkey's rulers from meddling. You feel a little abashed at your impulse to withdraw

from these messy contradictions; after all, give them a US rather than Turkish twist, and they also happen to be your own. And thinking of the left in the United States, you're at last able to recover some ground to stand on regarding your experience of DEPO and the Hikmet Center, and Asena Günal, Hüseyin Cukur, and Gamze Erbil: We would be lucky to have them.

—EDMOND CALDWELL

a circle comes at night and has
no reason for its borders
as it runs up the wall and leaves
a trail of cracks

from which the ghost
of some frayed politics leaks.
visits your face.
calls you gas.

welcomes you to
the equation
where you have no
fingers to count

and your mouth is force-fit
with a cylinder that cuts
circles into everything.
including the black hole

in the corner of the flat
where tiny social mouths
begin to burn during atmosphere.
pity theories, grey mouths.

or somebody says. so
you wrap it in a shell
of what they used to call brick,
and hair, the quiet

nerve nest. put then
as blood and left
a firework, a displeasure
to the responsibility of lights.

a Moment of geometry ends
in backdraft.
radius in ash.
stupefied charcoal helix.

your face disappears but mouth
spills plasmic chance, the
If
arrives
the mouths bloom wide

—FRANCES KRUK

To assemble this book:

Detach this sheet of paper.
Cut along the dotted line above.

With the art on this side facing you,
fold the paper from right to left:



Next, fold the paper
from top to bottom:



Next, fold once more
from right to left:



The back cover should be facing you.

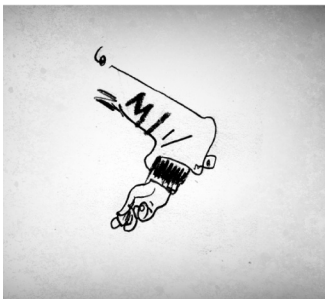


Flip the book over to see the front cover.



Staple the book in the center,
then trim the edges to release the pages.

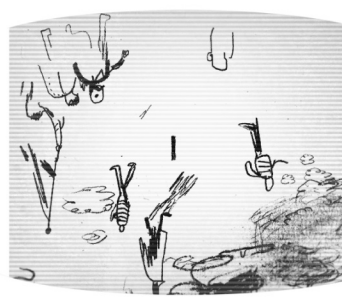
YOUR JANUARY



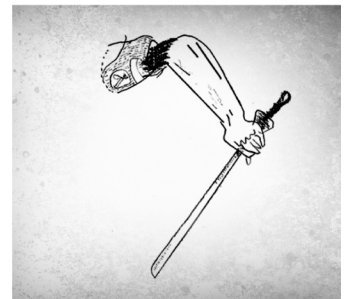
WE HOPE



(from here



WE HOPE



seed toss,
kick it over

w. craghead III
2011

www.craghead.com



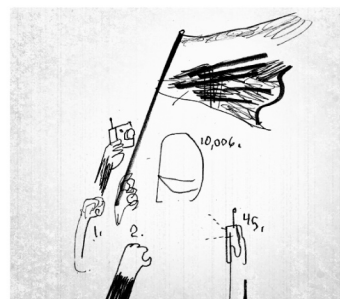
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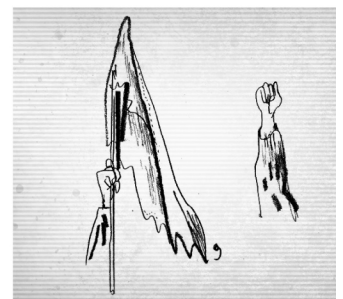
TO THE HEROES OF TAHRIR.

Thanks to internet (esp. In Focus,
The Big Picture & Al Jazeera English).
Also to iPhone and apps.
Also to A.W. & V.C.-W. & G.C.-W.
Also to M.R. and S.L.P.

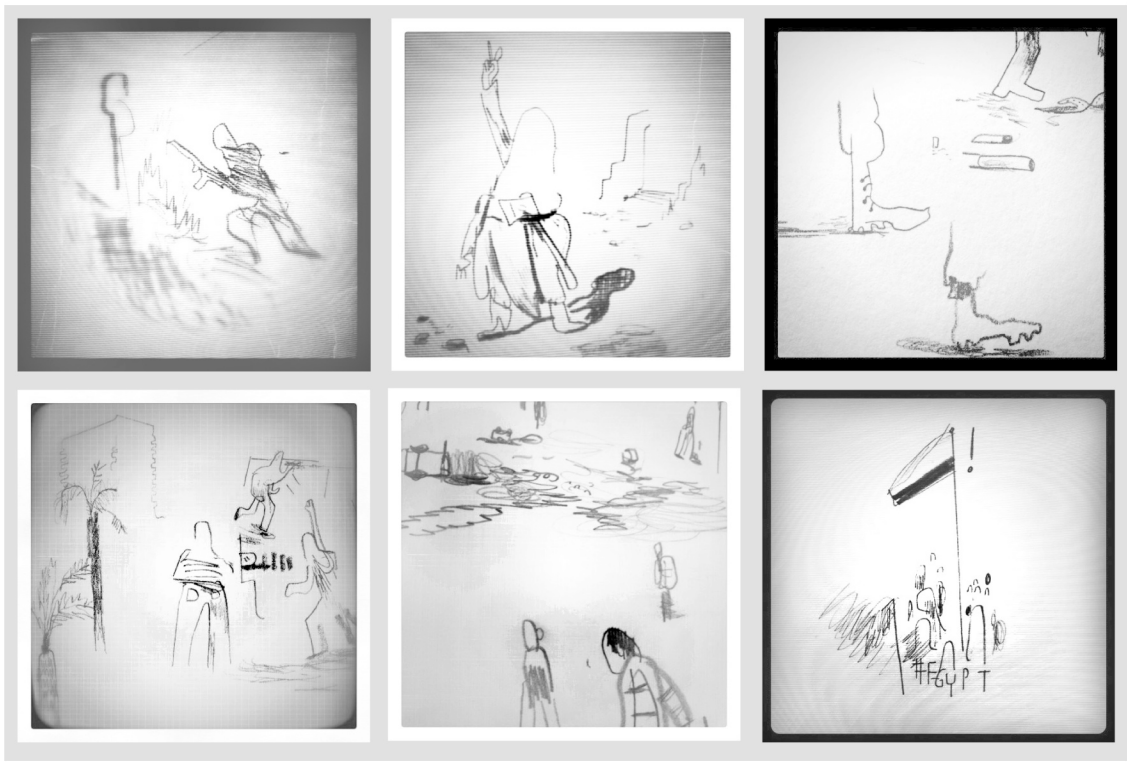
This version of "seed toss, kick it over" made for
SOUS LES PAVÉS
<http://souslespavesonline.wordpress.com>



#SPRING



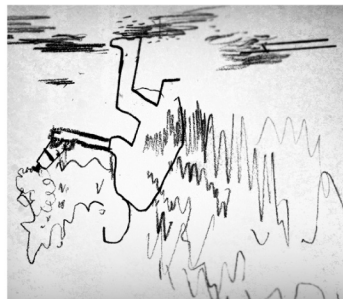
I WILL NOT PRETEND



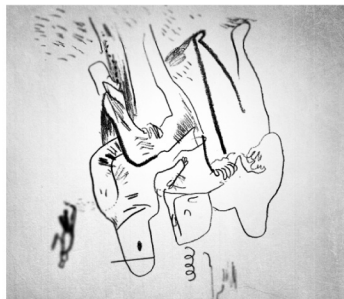
YOUR WINTER



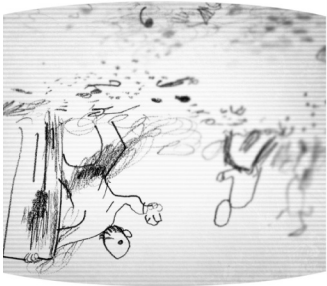
IS OVER



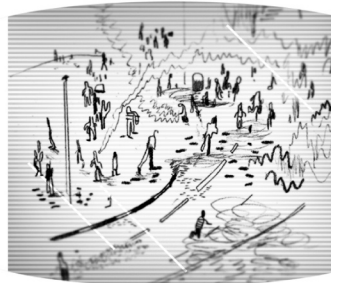
there



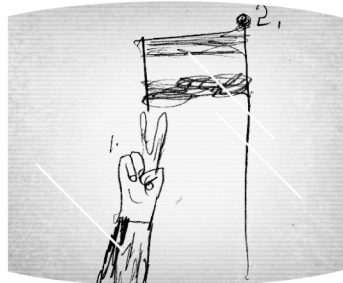
(seen heroes)



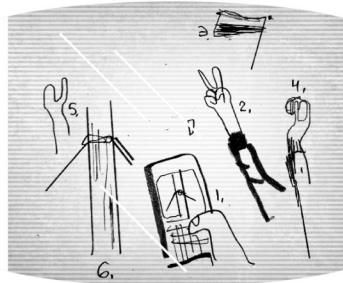
seed toss,
kick it over



(no one will
guide you)



seems spring)



TO KNOW
(from here

