

We Would Prefer Not To

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We Would Prefer Not To

Steven Henry Madoff and Brian Kuan Wood

This issue of OnCurating takes political resistance and sanctuary as its subject, with Herman Melville's nineteenth-century literary avatar Bartleby as its tutelary spirit. Bartleby is known only by his family name, thus a monocular unit, a nomination of single-mindedness, from start to finish. The act of civil disobedience is always one of immutably stubborn decision delivered through latency—that is, of time as an event of delay. Bartleby's famous refrain, "I would prefer not to," is understood here as an instruction whose pedagogical intent is to allay or even reverse by delay the victory of ruinous forces. As an *avant-garde* in the true sense of assault and defense from the frontlines, artists and curators have, of course, long practiced political critique, offering expressions of protest and resistance as both lines of attack and bastions of sanctuary. What this issue presents under the banner "We Would Prefer Not To" are essays, interviews with artists, and portfolios of images from artists and exhibitions, past and present, that have unleashed their trickster impulse in the name of circuitousness, in the name of politically fueled delay and *dérive*, in the name, so to speak, of Bartleby.

As we reach toward the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is inevitable that technology's advanced forms of invasive visual control incite the critical optics of artists. In Ikechukwu Casmir Onyewuenyi's speculative essay, "On 'Shy Trump' Voters and the Politics of Care," he deploys the term "sousveillance" as a lever to pry open the governmentality of a punitive watchfulness from below that curtails freedoms insidiously. Citing the work of Hasan Elahi's darkly humorous project *Tracking Transience*, he analyzes the overarching state of state paranoia that seeks to unveil citizen privacy as the warren of terrorism, while the artist's diaristic unfolding of his every move offers transparency as a form of Denial-of-Service Attack, overwhelming the system with a deluge of detail.

Interviews with artists Zach Blas, Jesse Darling, and Nadim Abbas reveal even more so the ways that contemporaneity rhymes with a Bartleby-like infusion of seeping hostility toward the authors of our homogenizing and monolithic technological dystopia, whether through the adoption of surveillant means, as we see in the works of Blas, in the open rebuttal of Eurocentric patriarchal authority presented by Darling, or the existential entropy that Abbas understands as the birthright of the *otaku* heirs to Bartleby, whose sensibility he describes as an "immobility born out of a conviction that all choice is illusory."

Essays by Jovanna Venegas and Patrick Jaojoco take polar views of how to step into the terrain of discontent and retort, with Venegas surveying the history of tricksterism, from the Archaic Greek "Homeric Hymn to Hermes" to Walid Raad's love of political sleight of hand, while Jaojoco advocates for an aggressively direct curatorial forensics to expose what he calls the "blankness of *location*" that must be addressed through site specificity in order to overcome the capitalist absorption of place, its symptomatic erasure of history, and its mechanisms of marginalization. Jaojoco adds to this a portfolio of images for the issue from the 2015 exhibition, *Don't Follow the Wind*, that speaks of place in another way. The exhibition was situated in the irradiated Fukushima exclusion zone—a show that can't actually be seen by the public (other than a few images documenting its installation) and which therefore raises the exhibition to

the level of an apophatic question: Isn't the forced limitation of visibility as an embodied metaphorical strategy as potent a form of political critique as the freely seen? In the names of protest and posterity, what exhibitionary models can we employ toward cautionary and prescriptive ends?

Another portfolio, Vera Petukhova's revisiting of the 1990 exhibition *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, gives further evidence of the irony and implicit melancholy of tricksterism. Posing an unspoken parallel between the stagy incertitude of *Bartleby* and Soviet dissidence, we might find a saboteur intelligence lurking seriocomically at the heart of a towering and crumbling bureaucracy.

Such excursions into the past to commemorate and revive schemes of resistance are underwritten by pendant pieces of a more meta nature placed throughout the issue, regarding Melville's story (Gilles Deleuze), exhibition-making (Hendrik Folkerts), and abyssal philosophy in black experience (Nana Adusei-Poku), along with pieces that speak to the usefulness of *Bartleby* as an exemplar of "disobedient" practices, both formally and politically. *Bartleby* remains, after more than one hundred and fifty years, the nearly mute and implacably sibylline force of an anti-authority as authority, of an eternal gaze into the power of a prodigious and fruitful No-thing.

Reticence and Mortgage: Bartleby as Sanctuary

Steven Henry Madoff

We've hardly begun to show our supreme uninterest. It's not because our attention has slipped. No, quite the opposite. Our attention is on high alert. Our attention is mega-attention, giga-attention. Our attention is on fire. Which is why we're now ready to show that we have *accidentally* stopped paying attention—whatever interest there was, now a winter leaf. Oh, sorry, it slipped our mind, we were in the other room when the call came in, phone was dead, the email got dumped in the spam folder, how did *that* happen? In other words, *we would prefer not to*. It's an ethical matter, really. Well, of course, it's an existential one too. Which is to say that we don't want to get blown up, exploited, patted on the back with the condescension of the Big Hand, spat on, burned, shot, kicked, put on a list, expatriated, color-type, gender-type, god-type, you name it. So, the file got lost when the warrant came in. Sorry, the system's down. Just give us a couple minutes, hours, millennia. Going out for a second on lunch break, e-cigarette, be right back.

Question: Have you ever read “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street”? By Herman Melville. 1853 (elsewhere that year Vincent van Gogh is born, Christian Doppler dies, the Crimean War begins). The setting is a locus of inimitably quaint technology, pure nineteenth-century vintage. Bartleby, it's rumored, once worked in the Dead Letter Office in Washington. Already eschatology intersects a consciousness infiltrated by microcosmic entropy. Here is the place where “sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring:—the finger it was meant for, perhaps, molders in the grave; a bank-note sent in swiftest charity:—he whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers anymore.”¹ Ah Bartleby! It's his phrase we now turn to as political portent, oath, and slogan.

Bartleby ends up in a prison yard. Debtor's prison, as it once was called. A wraith of mysterious origins, who worked in a law office. The proscriptions of capital apply. He comes from nowhere, comes to work in the copying out of rules, a legal tender, so to speak, tending to laws as dead to him as the letters of the dead, and to each request for him to work, to copy (an endless *mise en abyme* of the repetition of the *sign* of law), to this he speaks his existential claim on all collaboration with the empty signature of absented governance. He says, “I would prefer not to.” “I would prefer not to” is his deferential negative, a condition of refusal, polite yet wholly in an anti-supplicative mode, indicating a dispersive deflationary state of passive absolutism. Well, what does he *want* to do instead? The case of “not” is the case of not *this*, but also of the “not” as “this,” as an object unto itself of supreme Not-ness. He's cooled to low centigrade. He's ice disappearing into permanent imperviousness, this Not-law like cubes rattling in the empty glass of Bartleby's final satiation.

Now Bartleby's calling again. He's on the line, maybe online, from who knows where, but he's chattering his repetition into the mechanical chamber of bureaucratic doom, whispering his hovering oath of disobedience-as-truth—if truth's not too buried under the preemptive ambitions of our un-democracy. He's saying: “At present I prefer not to”; “At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable”; “I would prefer to be left alone here”; “Do you not see the reason for yourself”; “I would prefer not to quit you”; “No;

I would prefer not to make any change”; “I would not like it at all; though, as I said before, I am not particular”; “I like to be stationary. But I am not particular”; “No: at present I would prefer not to make any change at all.” Bartleby, in his hall of mirrored phrases, both limited and recursive, prefers not to make any change at all. He’s the perfect mirror of Law as its reversal.

And yet, of course, he’s *only* about change, about a fundamental undoing through not doing, dead set with his dead letters, his unwritten scrivening, to passively refute the ossified rule of external regulation, of Law as calcified imagination, as calcified life. He isn’t interested in people, only in place. He prefers the closed-in, the screen around his desk, the office door, then the office hallway, then the high walls of the prison yard, then the final blocked entrance of self-imposed starvation. To be closed in is apparently a form of place as erasure, as non-identification in the face of the clarity—that is, the clear light—of the law as Law and its copying as the infinite affirmation of strictures. To be closed in is to reduce the extension of identity, to impose Not-law as the emblem of Bartleby’s existential claim, which is to be fatherless in the book of Authority. And yet he’s a father of tyranny himself, the autocrat of his stiff little “prefer not to” that’s unquestionably his zenith of particularity.

Bartleby carries the symbolic heft of the father of all those who *prefer* the one to the many, the Olympian or Stygian solemnity of the separate, the performance of *Not* that clips the chain of fraternity and assumes the imprimatur and ultimacy of the single. His preferences, one after the other, accumulate a certain iconoclastic prestige. His tie to Being is just as emphatic as all other things muttering their agency, but just as emphatically he remains uncondoned by any agency of the consensual. And like Nature, which is chained to the habit of insistence, Bartleby is the terrifying encompassment of insistence as opposed to adjustment, which is the hallmark of being in society with others. His imperiousness of the Not is the finger that points toward the regions (social, sacrificial, eschatological) of a supernal determinacy to rest at the entrance of the not-done. And so, Bartleby’s conditional tense—his famous “*would prefer not to*”—is again a mirror and reversal of Law, of nineteenth-century society’s high diction of decorum, with its faint whiff of Englishness. The clerk as lord. It is not, therefore, *actually* conditional. It is yet another mirror image. It’s the signal of rebuttal and repudiation unto death.

That’s the story, first and finally, literally and toward his ultimately civic gravitas. Not as Gilles Deleuze theorizes, who in his own reading of Bartleby points to the scrivener’s “negativism beyond negotiation,” but lodges this in a formula of indeterminacy, when refusal isn’t indeterminate at all.² Not Jacques Rancière’s (brilliant) quibbling with Deleuze over a theory of representation that’s proposed as the meta-business of Melville here and elsewhere (*Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*).³ And definitely not the mystifying inability of Giorgio Agamben to understand Bartleby’s actions, stated again and again in simple English; who builds a fascinating but useless armature of references to the ancient tradition of the Skeptics to claim, astonishingly, that “I would prefer not to” isn’t a negative or terminus at all, but like some glittering low plinth on which anything may leave its footprint of contingency that lies across the threshold between one decision and another.⁴ Each of them has, of course, written incisively about politics, and yet all that seems at stake for them with the provocation of Bartleby is intellectual capital. For us at this moment, a more violent urgency is at hand. For them, the story is a diving board into the pool of literature and language’s burdens of mimesis and mediation, aesthetically, formally, ontologically—it’s “entire system of signification,” as Rancière says. Yet the sheer weight of making Bartleby the signifier of *sui generis*-ness

per se, of the breaker of representation also per se, never addresses the inseparable relation of speech act to act in the story. Or more kinetically, the *intensification*, the *slow locomotion* from one to the other, and that language alone and language *as such* are not the meditative omphalos of Melville's tale. Bartleby's (*in*)actions are. In fact, he's the mid-day twin of Billy Budd—Melville's hero who, in a single second of explosion, hammers home the certitude of ethical life. Instead, Bartleby's famous speech act is fundamentally and finally significant *only* as the languorous accretion of meditative refusal in its fulfillment as deed; a machine of the arrogant certainty of active refusal; a minotaur of refusal stomping in its cage. He succeeds within his narrow power to rise above contingency like a True North of moral inflexibility *ad honorem* to fix his No among the stars. His terminus is both specific, personal and mortal, and a spectacle, in his particularity, of generalization.

He never says he's not-quite-not. He says *he prefers not to*, meaning plain and simple that he's not going to do... anything whatever except say he's not going to do anything whatever. Anything, that is, except die in one last putsch of obedience to the inscription of Law. Carl Schmitt famously wrote: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception."⁵ But Bartleby? He's the sovereign of exception who decides through the expression of indifference to decision, who is himself the catastrophic sign of determinism and exclusion, of the rigidity of Law. Avatar of a pure negativity, yet one without the centrifugal urge of malice, he embodies the clarified sense of contradiction, which is an utterance *against* or *apart* from saying, of claiming through speech, receding into the performative state of reversal, of inaction-as-action, conditioned by his unspoken necessity to do *against* and activate with his always rearward gesture the practice of not-Law. Which is to say that Bartleby as an object of demonstration for us is not solely or crucially *aesthetic*. No, he's Our Man of Political Inversion.

His case exudes what can be called foundational personal irony that lends its iron to our political call. Foundational personal irony is the irony of a schism of the self within itself, of consciousness as a consciousness of consciousness as a conquest of de-affirmation. That's our pale-eyed scrivener behind his screen in the attorney's office: the chill archetype of a de-affirming affirmatization rung out in that complement to contradiction: the hiss of *reticence*, from the Latin "again" and "be silent" (*re* and *tacere*)—to be silent again in that particular sense of withholding and withdrawal, again of moving rearward in a repetition of near muteness. That's our man of weaponized opacity, the eternal ethical armament against Law's legibility, with its prosecutorial demand for obedience. And precisely that is our theme: this negative formation without malice, this utterance of not-Law that isn't anarchy, but a will toward the counter-voice of resistance.

And so there's another word to put alongside reticence, and that is *mortgage*, as Bartleby's identity as the servant of Law makes him property as such (a container of administrative place) and ties him to that first sense of mortgage as literally, from the French *mort* and *gaige*, a dead pledge, since "the deal dies when the debt is paid." He who worked in the Dead Letter Office ingested the mortality of expired communications, becoming a cipher of the interim, hoofing it toward theological ascension and the hard gravity of political disobedience, of the mortgage concluded with the final payment of refusal. He's the Not of no-longer-property, the No of the serenity of after-mortgage, in which preference is the cudgel of that foundational personal irony that cleaves, that makes the air thick and blank, an illegibility imposed on Law's impositions. The debt was paid; a message sent by Melville 165 years ago and picked up now, again, while autocracies roam the world. And to which we now must answer.

Notes

- 1** Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," in *Billy Budd, Bartleby, and Other Stories*. Penguin Books, New York, 2016, p. 54.
- 2** Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, The Formula," in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, pp. 68-90.
- 3** Jacques Rancière, "Deleuze, Bartleby, and the Literary Formula," in *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*, trans. Charlotte Mandell. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2004, pp. 146-164.
- 4** So Agamben writes: "Bartleby does not consent, but neither does he simply refuse to do what is asked of him." But did Agamben actually read the story? Is there any point in the story in which Bartleby does what's asked of him? Doesn't Bartleby, in fact, refuse in his actions? Agamben is so busy inventing his narrow case based solely on blinkered literalism that he isolates Bartleby's words from his deeds and contorts the story into a grand philosophical echo chamber that ignores Bartleby for what he is: an engine of refusal, of civil disobedience. See Giorgio Agamben, "Bartleby, or On Contingency," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999, pp. 243-271.
- 5** Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005, p. 5.
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Curatorial Archaeogeographies: History of Place as Political Action

Patrick Jaojoco

“What is the fate of place?” Edward S. Casey asks in his seminal 2013 book, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*,¹ which reconsiders the complexity of our physical surroundings. In modernity, that fate seems bleak and is subject to the blankness of *location*, a word so often linked to the vagaries of real-estate developers and their venal narratives or to another form of narrative—film shoots “on location,” where stories unfold, conceiving place as both *tablula rasa* and a site for production. In either case, land is always already in a state of erasure to be mapped over. We can think of location, then, as both noun and verb: it describes place, but also holds within it the specific sense of an intentional action that has financial, political, and social consequences.

Location can be understood as the physical formation of capital, and in Casey’s theorizing, the long and varied histories of locations are typically disregarded, replaced by privileged, foreign identities. Before there was a parking lot, a high-rise, a stadium, a pipeline, there was the absolute nothing of capitalist erasure, capitalist amnesia. Yet what can also be argued is that location defined as place is the terraforming of history in all its complexities. Housed within landscapes and architectures are the myriad intersections of geology and histories of all kinds that were first activated and then kept alive by those already in and around that place. As such, there is an ethics of place that reaches far beyond the nothingness of location; an ethics that ultimately illuminates those histories marginalized or suppressed in the process of location-building. Through cultural archaeology and by directly confronting the modernist project of the continuous development of location, we can think anew about ways to overcome these dangers of erasure that touch directly on the curatorial, as the white cube, for example, falls precisely into the production of amnesiac spaces. Of course, institutional critique, including critique of the white cube, as well as curating outside the white cube, have long been performed. But to build on these practices on the landscape level may be of use in conceiving activist artistic and curatorial work that resists narratives of usurpation, whose allegorical model can certainly be found in Melville’s *Bartleby* (see Steven Henry Madoff’s introduction that discusses *Bartleby* as property.)

To turn to the modernist project itself, the development of location per se was (and still is) deemed a form of progress, as in so many other areas of modernism. Progress can be written as gentrification, a highly visible process seen all over the world, and in the case of New York City, where I live, includes the practice of redlining that racializes the entire process.² Just down my street in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn—currently a largely Latino neighborhood—a building likely built in the 1800s was recently torn down, its history only remaining in family photographs and Google Earth databases of years past. Its replacement? A modern apartment building geared toward young creatives who, though largely liberal, typically play into the modernist ideals of location. Of course, long before contemporary capitalism inhabited Bushwick, it was an area for wealthy Dutch brewers, and before that, part of the indigenous Lenape nation. This is the continuous clearing of history in the name of development, and architectures of the past house myriad stories, each changing with the bodies that move through them.

Recent Black Lives Matter protests, for instance, have taken the traditional route of the streets, but have also gathered in public spaces with more limited histories of protest. In September, 2016, in Charlotte, North Carolina, after the murder of a black man, Keith Lamont Scott, by a police officer, protesters gathered around the Bank of America Stadium, where a football game was underway. Police in riot gear surrounded the stadium while protesters shouted Black Lives Matter slogans. The game continued, but spectators were disrupted and the architecture was activated, not destroyed, in a way wholly other than its ordinary use—a politicization of place that turned the hegemony of location in an entirely different, if temporary, direction. What would it mean to refuse, resist, reconsider a place's development when curating today? The history of place needs to be considered all the more deeply in curatorial practices, particularly in light of the proliferation of site-specific commissions now produced as part of the global rash of biennials. Every biennial inhabits place, but even if culturally beneficial, biennials are nonetheless a consequent and component of the continuing onslaught of location, whose economic engine is inimically entwined with the politics of marginalization and erasure.

As usual in this regard, artists are leading the way. Take the example of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), set to be built through North Dakota. There are communities, such as the indigenous Standing Rock tribe of the Sioux nation, that are resisting. Their burial sites and sacred grounds will be destroyed if Energy Transfer Partners, LP (the company building the pipeline) sets to work. Police violence has disrupted community protests, yet at the same time, the forms history takes by way of art are strong. The artist collective Winter Count (Cannupa Hanska Luger, Merritt Johnson, Nicholas Galanin, Ginger Dunnill, and Dylan McLaughlin) focuses on the histories surrounding the proposed pipeline and its contentious relationship with indigenous sovereignty.



"Chanting and bicycle officers outside BofA Stadium before Panthers vs Vikings."
Tweeted image by @jsiner (Jeff Siner).

Their 2017 video, *We Are in Crisis*, shows the contested landscape from a drone's viewpoint, juxtaposing shots of oil processing plants with the encampments of water protectors at Standing Rock, North Dakota. A lightly distorted voice recounts a mythologized history of industrialization, describing it as a “fearful creature that we have nourished” that “reached out of the killing fields, where its belly remained, and found refuge in our homes.”³ Reciting this origin story in mythological style, the tale poignantly addresses large-scale processes, mining the present for an alternative history told in the *longue durée*.⁴ The socioeconomic past is intertwined with geological and landscape processes, enabling a conceptualization of place in resistance to hegemonic interpretations of modernity and landscape, and proposing an activist revision of landscape in reaction to the ravages of location.

For Eyal Weizman's research initiative of forensic architecture, the goal is not to excavate remains, but to keep them in the ground. Instead, landscape use and political activism are joined with the goal of claiming stakes. The most appropriate term for this is “political archaeogeography,” a combination of archaeology and geography that activates historical sites in the political realm. By focusing resistance against the violence of erasure and considering the long-term history associated with the land as well as a landscape's current use (or potential for use), curators can work with artists in addressing development as a project for archaeogeography, interrogating location toward a layered understanding of all forms of economic, social, geological, and geographic stratification—the landscape *tout court*.

Of course, another line driven through the landscape by political and economic forces is the borderline, and this is the subject of the collective Postcommodity (Raven Chacon, Cristóbal Martínez, and Kade L. Twist). Their work titled *Repellent Fence* (2015), for example, engages the realpolitik of the border as an archaeogeographical allegory. Stretching two miles, the “fence” is formed by a line of gigantic PVC balloons that crosses the Mexican-American border along an ancient indigenous trade route. By memorializing the trade route, Postcommodity exposes an intersectional history that refuses broad simplifications of nationalization and globalization, and ultimately asks: globalization for whom?

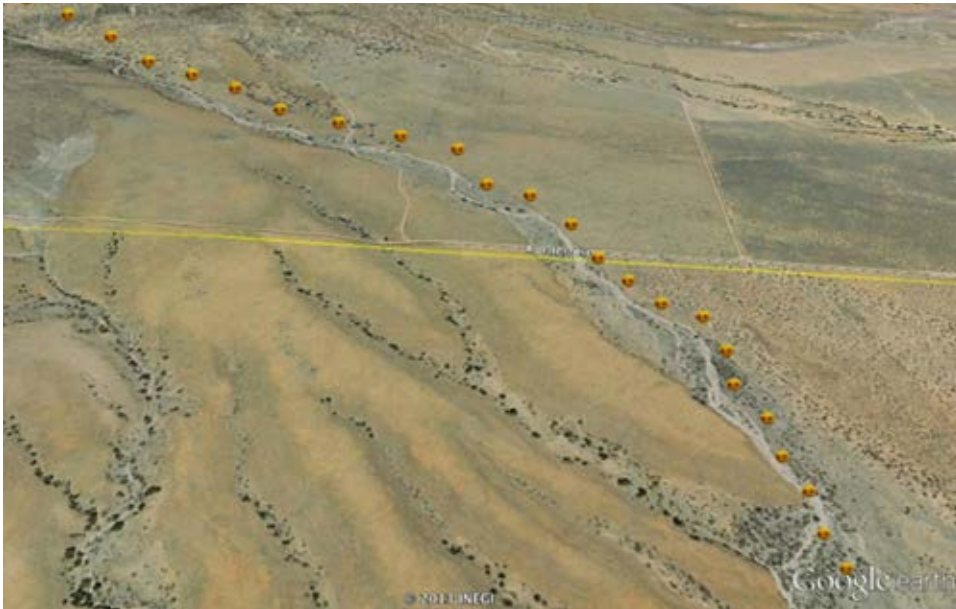


Winter Count (Cannupa Hanska Luger, Nicholas Galanin, Dylan McLaughlin, Merritt Johnson, Ginger Dunnill). *We Are In Crisis*, 2016. Video still. Courtesy of the artists.

The history of the border might begin to answer this question. In the sixteenth century, the discovery of silver in what is now Mexico drew some colonial settlers to the land, then a territory of Spain. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the ambitions of the United States and its doctrine of Manifest Destiny to grab land “from sea to shining sea”⁵ led to war with Mexico and eventually the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that gave more than 960,000 square miles of territory to the U.S.⁶ Manifest Destiny, with its violent marginalization and destruction of the pasts embodied by indigenous populations, is the precursor to location, and Postcommodity’s *Repellent Fence* reinscribes these histories in a contemporary political context, performing the political archaeogeography so crucial to the visibility and discourse of resistance movements today.



Artist study of balloon installed near the border fence, 2015. Image courtesy of Postcommodity.



Google map artist sketch of *Repellent Fence* intersecting border, 2014. Image courtesy of Postcommodity.

This artistic mode has important implications in the curatorial realm, as we can use this mode of thought to urge public/landscape art curators to research and create contexts in which these intersectional histories override the erosive forces of location, working with artists whose works address the destruction of memory in this way or invite artists to do so. Without this reparative curatorial task, there is the possibility of falling into the trap of the land as a blank canvas for the artist-developer. Richard Serra's infamous sculptural installation, *Tilted Arc* (1981), for instance, is often referred to as a public failure. Its lack of consideration for the public's use of the space is a small example of a lack of consideration of spatial history and stakeholders. On this note, an active curatorial methodology beginning with "in place" rather than "on location" can be carried back to the city in a forensics that is not necessarily focused on violence, but rather on extended histories well beyond the developments of ten, fifty, or even one hundred years prior. By making visible the histories of place past their present valuations, projects then become politically active, as history lurks behind the present in ways that have direct political implications.

This is a way in which curatorial projects can have direct activist-oriented activity without necessarily relying on existing visual cultures of activism. To return to Edward S. Casey, the histories of place are in more and more precarious positions, as "this century [...] in its capacity to eliminate all perceptible places from a given region [...] heightens awareness of the unreplaceability of these places, their singular configuration and unrepeatable history."⁷ By giving form to what Giorgio Agamben has called the "unlived element in everything that is lived"⁸ (the long and varied histories behind the present day), curators can expand the realm of activism to include the purview of cultural production I have described. Objects, bodies, and exhibitionary and discursive projects are the basis and platforms of this curatorial archaeogeographical forensics to bring darkened histories to light and declare, "I would prefer not to" in the face of presumed sovereign spaces of development that do nothing but extinguish memory, history, and the vibrancy of an engaged cultural and political life.

Notes

- 1 Edward S. Casey. *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 2013.
- 2 Redlining in New York City and elsewhere is a Depression-era policy, coming out of a newly minted Federal Housing Administration, of encouraging new development and investment in some areas of the city while actively discouraging investment in others. The policy was and is blatantly racist, defining "green zones" for investment as "lacking 'a single foreigner or Negro'" by some appraisers, as pointed out by Ta-Nehisi Coates in his essay "The Case for Reparations" in the June 2014 issue of *The Atlantic*.
- 3 Winter Count, *We Are in Crisis*, 2017. Video, color, sound. 3:02 minutes. Accessed 3.08.2017. <http://www.cannupahanska.com/wintercount/>.
- 4 Mid-century historian Fernand Braudel and the Annales School of historians developed this term to describe a mode of history told in large-scale and long-term structural changes as opposed to the reduction of history to a string of connected events (*histoire événementielle*).
- 5 Katharine Lee Bates, "America the Beautiful," 1895.
- 6 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. www.ourdocuments.gov. 1848. Accessed 3.4.2017.
- 7 Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p. xiii.
- 8 Giorgio Agamben, "What is the Contemporary?," *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2009, p. 51.

Patrick Jaojoco is a Brooklyn-based curator and writer. His research focuses on political ecology and intersections of radically nonlinear histories and temporalities. He is part of the curatorial collective Frontview, which is currently working on a project on decolonization and cartography. He has assisted with numerous institutional exhibitions, including Danilo Correale: *At Work's End* and Zach Blas: *Contra-Internet*, both curated by Laurel Ptak at Art in General, NY; and *Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s* curated by Gianni Jetzer at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, DC. Independently, he has curated shows across New York including *con•tin•u•ums (time beyond lifetimes)*; *Low-Grade Euphoria*, both at the Pfizer Building, Brooklyn; *DRIPP*, an intensive collaborative project with four artists and two curators presented at the 2016 SPRING/BREAK Art Show; and *humanimalands*, an exhibition investigating the fluid ontologies of humans, animals, and landscapes in the Anthropocene presented at CP Projects Space. Jaojoco received his MA in Curatorial Practice from the School of Visual Arts and his BA in English Literature and Environmental Studies from New York University.

Turning the Glass

Hendrik Folkerts

During documenta 14, the Neue Galerie in Kassel housed a large number of vitrines, given the exhibition's interest in many historical objects that form the fabric of European (art) history, from Johann Joachim Winckelmann's first edition of *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (History of the Art of Antiquity) and the documents that evidence the history of looted art in Germany to the decree that outlined the conditions of slavery in seventeenth-century France titled *Code Noir*. On the one hand, a vitrine shields an object that is precious and vulnerable, protecting it from harmful elements. Yet, more importantly, the glass that separates the public from the object functions as a display mechanism that presupposes a unilateral spectatorship; the spectator's gaze renders the object into something that is *subjected to*, conditioned by the physical act of looking down or into the vitrine. If we want to propose the exhibition as a space for critical inquiry or empowerment through resistance, it is necessary to first identify it as a site of *disempowerment*, in order to acknowledge the extent to which curatorial labor and practices as well as the public's role are still implied, perhaps even complicit in, the structures of power underpinning exhibition-making and history.

First, let us acknowledge the space we are in: a white room. Coining the phrase "the white cube," artist and writer Brian O'Doherty was one of the first commentators on the ideological undercurrents of the space in which we have grown accustomed to see visual art—that equally lit, off-white, supposedly neutral room. O'Doherty famously argues that in postmodernism, the white cube is far from neutral and corresponds with the history of modernism, produced as an aesthetic technology that both generates and is generated by a specific Western canon along a linearized history of art; a seemingly disembodied context that produces content through the exchange of cultural, commercial, and aesthetic values.¹ Furthermore, the pristine whiteness of its walls assumes an authority and neutrality that can even be read along racial lines, with its perpetuation as a continued validation of the values of a white, academic community.² Writer and curator Elena Filipovic contends that the large-scale, perennial exhibition format so omnipresent in our experience of contemporary art since the late twentieth century has

produced a paradox: while it replicates the white cube of the museum and the gallery space as a display mechanism (the non-place of contemporary art, so to speak), the biennial and large-scale exhibition often claims a position of site-specificity or context-responsiveness. This is a paradox further induced by the antagonism that such exhibitions declare against the operations of neoliberalism, while the homogenous space in which it takes place denotes homogenization as a prerequisite for the neoliberal condition.³ If such legacies of presenting and seeing art persist, we must perpetually demonstrate and modify its apparatus. Indeed, to quote O'Doherty, "[i]f the white wall cannot be summarily dismissed, it can be understood. [...] The wall *is* our assumption."⁴

Let us take a step back and consider the exhibition as a format. The presentation of art in a public setting is closely entangled with the history of power—of the church, the monarchy and the nation state—and, more specifically, with the history of the bourgeoisie, in which art became an important signifier of taste and cultivation as well as economic and social status. In his essay "The Exhibitionary Complex," Tony Bennett approaches the exhibition as an epistemological category in the dissemination of power in modern history, commenting on Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) to juxtapose the rise of the complex of public museums, exhibitions, and world fairs in the nineteenth century with transitions in the punitive system of the same period. The notion of punishment shifted from public spectacle as both warning and implementation of power (the scaffold on the city square, so to speak) to incarceration in the prison complex, and thus isolation in a state of *complete surveillance*. Whereas the exhibitionary complex develops from private (the monarch's cabinet of curiosities) to public, with the Great Exhibition in London's Crystal Palace (1851) as the author's key example. In this parallel, Bennett argues that, rather than rendering the social body of the populace visible to the all-seeing eye of power through the disciplinary panopticon, the exhibitionary complex proposed knowledge and pedagogy as instruments to render power visible to its constituents in a celebration of the state's cultural, architectural and, industrial accomplishments. Indeed, this imbues people with power, quite

literally empowering them. In Bennett's words, the institutions of the exhibitionary complex "sought to allow the people, and *en masse* rather than individually, to know rather than to be known, to become the subjects rather than the objects of knowledge." This is in order to "become, in seeing themselves from the side of power, both the subjects and objects of knowledge, knowing power and what power knows, and knowing themselves as (ideally) known by power, interiorizing its gaze as a principle of self-surveillance and, hence, self-regulation."⁵

Within the colonial mechanisms of the nation state, the exhibition also served as an instrument for the implementation of Eurocentric racial theories and the subjugation of the colonial subject. In the aforementioned essay, Bennett refers to how the national courts or displays at such world fairs as the Great Exhibition in London or the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia (1876) categorized along the lines of national, supranational or racial groupings. The notion of progress was enacted to correlate the stages of (industrial) production and the relation between nation and race. Colonized groups and people of color were represented as occupying the lowest level of production and thus subordinate to the display of the European powers.⁶ This cultural production of imperialism was extended to more widely accessible spectacles, such as the carnival, the circus, and the fair, and then consolidated in the phenomenon of the colonial exhibition and, of course, the ethnographic museum. This type of exhibition did not limit itself to the display of production or artefacts, but included the actual display of human bodies as colonial subjects. As art historian Charmaine Nelson has observed, such displays clearly and deliberately separated the space of the privileged observer from that of the colonial "other," as part of "the colonial apparatus which visually objectified the exhibited human subjects and racialized the bodies of the exhibition spectators."⁷

If the exhibition as a typology was born out of a drive to demonstrate and impose the power of the imperialist nation-state, and the museum's white wall as a canvas on which the subsequent (Euro-American-centered) canon of art history could unfold, the sense of empowerment is an affective one. It is employed to internalize and incorporate those power structures into both its subjects and spectators. Whereas content may have radically shifted—and many museum and gallery displays, as well as large-scale perennial exhibitions, are motivated by a strong political engagement to critically approach such notions as colonialism—the nation-

state, the production of capitalism, and the apparatus of the exhibition remain largely intact. This generates a paradox and begs the question whether or not we can produce critical, even empowering exhibitions within the conceptual and physical architecture of the spaces we operate in.

To transform what may well be a state of utter paralysis into a productive contradiction, first of all necessitates that we acknowledge a complicity in the act of exhibiting: one cannot produce criticality without adopting the history of exhibition-making and the power dynamic inherent in it. The space of exhibition-making is thus one charged with ideology and political significance both as a positive and a negative, to borrow from photographic vocabulary. Yet, second of all, rather than shying away from this or completely ignoring it altogether, we need to embrace and even intensify it. If the exhibition could be employed to empower its spectators with the self-control and self-surveillance that required the nation-state to function, or if the white wall turned out to be not a blank canvas at all, they can also be asked to disempower those very histories and power structures by revealing them in an act of self-reflexivity. If we use the same display apparatus to exhibit the objects that have long produced the power mechanisms that gave the exhibitionary complex its *raison-d'être*, we do not only subject the object in question to scrutiny and analysis but also turn the act of exhibiting on itself. In this instance, the performance of the exhibition can embody the contradiction of its disciplinary history and its critical intent, amplifying both in relation to each other.

The vitrine seems the most apt metaphor to include us, the spectators, in this process. After all, it is precisely in the moment when the light hits the glass of the vitrine that we see ourselves and the objects we look down at. It is a moment when the act of exhibiting relates strongly to our self-image and bodies, and the vitrine's glass can become a mirror that is turned to reveal what is underneath and above.

Notes

1 Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space (expanded edition)*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999, pp. 14-15, 79-80.

2 Kathleen Connellan, "White Spaces," in: ACRAWSA e-journal, vol. 2, no. 1, 2006, p. 7.

3 Elena Filipovic, "The Global White Cube," in: Vander-

linden, Barbara and Elena Filipovic (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 67-68.

4 O'Doherty, *ibid.*, p. 80.

5 Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," in: *New Formations*, No. 4 (Spring 1988), p. 76.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

7 Charmaine Nelson, "The 'Hottentot Venus in Canada: Modernism, Censorship and the Racial Limits of Female Sexuality,'" in: Willis, Deborah (ed.), *Black Venus 2010*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2010, p. 114.

Hendrik Folkerts was recently appointed the Dittmer Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Art Institute of Chicago. He was curator at documenta 14 (Athens, April 8 – July 16 / Kassel, June 10 – September 17, 2017) from 2014 until 2017. With a focus on performance and Conceptual Art, indigenous practices, and Southeast Asian art, he curated a large number of new artist commissions and, together with the team led by artistic director Adam Szymczyk, was responsible for the exhibition in Athens and Kassel. Prior to this, Folkerts was Curator of Performance, Film, and Discursive Programs at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (2010–15). He studied art history at the University of Amsterdam, specializing in contemporary art and theory, feminist practices, and performance. From 2009 to 2011, Folkerts was coordinator of the Curatorial Program at de Appel Arts Centre in Amsterdam. His texts have been published in journals and magazines such as *Artforum International*, *South as a State of Mind*, *Mousse Magazine*, *The Exhibitionist*, *Metropolis M*, *Art & the Public Sphere*, and in various catalogues. Folkerts is coeditor of *The Shadowfiles #3: Curatorial Education* (2013), *Facing Forward: Art & Theory from a Future Perspective* (2014), and the journal *Stedelijk Studies #3: The Place of Performance* (2015).

Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story Of Wall-street Herman Melville

From *The Piazza Tales*, 1856

I am a rather elderly man. The nature of my avocations for the last thirty years has brought me into more than ordinary contact with what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet nothing that I know of has ever been written:—I mean the law-copyists or scriveners. I have known very many of them, professionally and privately, and if I pleased, could relate divers histories, at which good-natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep. But I waive the biographies of all other scriveners for a few passages in the life of Bartleby, who was a scrivener of the strangest I ever saw or heard of. While of other law-copyists I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done. I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and in his case those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, *that* is all I know of him, except, indeed, one vague report which will appear in the sequel.

Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it is fit I make some mention of myself, my *employées*, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented.

Imprimis: I am a man who, from his youth upwards, has been filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best. Hence, though I belong to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous, even to turbulence, at times, yet nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace. I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause; but in the cool tranquility of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages and title-deeds. All who know me, consider me an eminently *safe* man. The late John Jacob Astor, a personage little given to poetic enthusiasm, had no hesitation in pronouncing my first grand point to be prudence; my next, method. I do not speak it in vanity, but simply record the fact, that I was not unemployed in my profession by the late John Jacob Astor; a name which, I admit, I love to repeat, for it hath a rounded and orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion. I will freely add, that I was not insensible to the late John Jacob Astor's good opinion.

Some time prior to the period at which this little history begins, my avocations had been largely increased. The good old office, now extinct in the State of New York, of a Master in Chancery, had been conferred upon me. It was not a very arduous office, but very pleasantly remunerative. I seldom lose my temper; much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages; but I must be permitted to be rash here and declare, that I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master in Chancery, by the new Constitution, as a—premature act; inasmuch as I had counted upon a

life-lease of the profits, whereas I only received those of a few short years. But this is by the way.

My chambers were up stairs at No. – Wall-street. At one end they looked upon the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft, penetrating the building from top to bottom. This view might have been considered rather tame than otherwise, deficient in what landscape painters call “life.” But if so, the view from the other end of my chambers offered, at least, a contrast, if nothing more. In that direction my windows commanded an unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade; which wall required no spy-glass to bring out its lurking beauties, but for the benefit of all near-sighted spectators, was pushed up to within ten feet of my window panes. Owing to the great height of the surrounding buildings, and my chambers being on the second floor, the interval between this wall and mine not a little resembled a huge square cistern.

At the period just preceding the advent of Bartleby, I had two persons as copyists in my employment, and a promising lad as an office-boy. First, Turkey; second, Nippers; third, Ginger Nut. These may seem names, the like of which are not usually found in the Directory. In truth they were nicknames, mutually conferred upon each other by my three clerks, and were deemed expressive of their respective persons or characters. Turkey was a short, pursy Englishman of about my own age, that is, somewhere not far from sixty. In the morning, one might say, his face was of a fine florid hue, but after twelve o'clock, meridian—his dinner hour—it blazed like a grate full of Christmas coals; and continued blazing— but, as it were, with a gradual wane—till 6 o'clock, *p.m.* or thereabouts, after which I saw no more of the proprietor of the face, which gaining its meridian with the sun, seemed to set with it, to rise, culminate, and decline the following day, with the like regularity and undiminished glory. There are many singular coincidences I have known in the course of my life, not the least among which was the fact, that exactly when Turkey displayed his fullest beams from his red and radiant countenance, just then, too, at that critical moment, began the daily period when I considered his business capacities as seriously disturbed for the remainder of the twenty-four hours. Not that he was absolutely idle, or averse to business then; far from it. The difficulty was, he was apt to be altogether too energetic. There was a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness of activity about him. He would be incautious in dipping his pen into his inkstand. All his blots upon my documents, were dropped there after twelve o'clock, meridian. Indeed, not only would he be reckless and sadly given to making blots in the afternoon, but some days he went further, and was rather noisy. At such times, too, his face flamed with augmented blazonry, as if cannel coal had been heaped on anthracite. He made an unpleasant racket with his chair; spilled his sand-box; in mending his pens, impatiently split them all to pieces, and threw them on the floor in a sudden passion; stood up and leaned over his table, boxing his papers about in a most indecorous manner, very sad to behold in an elderly man like him. Nevertheless, as he was in many ways a most valuable person to me, and all the time before twelve o'clock, meridian, was the quickest, steadiest creature too, accomplishing a great deal of work in a style not easy to be matched—for these reasons, I was willing to overlook his eccentricities, though indeed, occasionally, I remonstrated with him. I did this very gently, however, because, though the civilest, nay, the blandest and most reverential of men in the morning, yet in the afternoon he was disposed, upon provocation, to be slightly rash with his tongue, in fact, insolent. Now, valuing his morning services as I did, and resolved not to lose them; yet, at the same time made uncomfortable by his inflamed ways after twelve o'clock; and being a man of peace, unwilling by my admonitions to call forth unseemly retorts from him; I took upon me, one

Saturday noon (he was always worse on Saturdays), to hint to him, very kindly, that perhaps now that he was growing old, it might be well to abridge his labors; in short, he need not come to my chambers after twelve o'clock, but, dinner over, had best go home to his lodgings and rest himself till teatime. But no; he insisted upon his afternoon devotions. His countenance became intolerably fervid, as he oratorically assured me—gesticulating with a long ruler at the other end of the room—that if his services in the morning were useful, how indispensable, then, in the afternoon?

“With submission, sir,” said Turkey on this occasion, “I consider myself your right-hand man. In the morning I but marshal and deploy my columns; but in the afternoon I put myself at their head, and gallantly charge the foe, thus!”—and he made a violent thrust with the ruler.

“But the blots, Turkey,” intimated I.

“True,—but, with submission, sir, behold these hairs! I am getting old. Surely, sir, a blot or two of a warm afternoon is not to be severely urged against gray hairs. Old age—even if it blot the page—is honorable. With submission, sir, we *both* are getting old.”

This appeal to my fellow-feeling was hardly to be resisted. At all events, I saw that go he would not. So I made up my mind to let him stay, resolving, nevertheless, to see to it, that during the afternoon he had to do with my less important papers.

Nippers, the second on my list, was a whiskered, sallow, and, upon the whole, rather piratical-looking young man of about five and twenty. I always deemed him the victim of two evil powers—ambition and indigestion. The ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents. The indigestion seemed betokened in an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing the teeth to audibly grind together over mistakes committed in copying; unnecessary maledictions, hissed, rather than spoken, in the heat of business; and especially by a continual discontent with the height of the table where he worked. Though of a very ingenious mechanical turn, Nippers could never get this table to suit him. He put chips under it, blocks of various sorts, bits of pasteboard, and at last went so far as to attempt an exquisite adjustment by final pieces of folded blotting paper. But no invention would answer. If, for the sake of easing his back, he brought the table lid at a sharp angle well up towards his chin, and wrote there like a man using the steep roof of a Dutch house for his desk:—then he declared that it stopped the circulation in his arms. If now he lowered the table to his waistbands, and stooped over it in writing, then there was a sore aching in his back. In short, the truth of the matter was, Nippers knew not what he wanted. Or, if he wanted any thing, it was to be rid of a scrivener's table altogether. Among the manifestations of his diseased ambition was a fondness he had for receiving visits from certain ambiguous-looking fellows in seedy coats, whom he called his clients. Indeed I was aware that not only was he, at times, considerable of a ward-politician, but he occasionally did a little business at the Justices' courts, and was not unknown on the steps of the Tombs. I have good reason to believe, however, that one individual who called upon him at my chambers, and who, with a grand air, he insisted was his client, was no other than a dun, and the alleged title-deed, a bill. But with all his failings, and the annoyances he caused me, Nippers, like his compatriot Turkey, was a very useful man to me; wrote a neat, swift hand; and, when he chose, was not deficient in a gentlemanly sort of deportment. Added to this, he always dressed in a gentlemanly sort of way; and so, incidentally, reflected credit upon my chambers. Whereas with respect to Turkey, I had much ado to keep him from being a

reproach to me. His clothes were apt to look oily and smell of eating-houses. He wore his pantaloons very loose and baggy in summer. His coats were execrable; his hat not to be handled. But while the hat was a thing of indifference to me, inasmuch as his natural civility and deference, as a dependent Englishman, always led him to doff it the moment he entered the room, yet his coat was another matter. Concerning his coats, I reasoned with him; but with no effect. The truth was, I suppose, that a man of so small an income, could not afford to sport such a lustrous face and a lustrous coat at one and the same time. As Nippers once observed, Turkey's money went chiefly for red ink. One winter day I presented Turkey with a highly-respectable looking coat of my own, a padded gray coat, of a most comfortable warmth, and which buttoned straight up from the knee to the neck. I thought Turkey would appreciate the favor, and abate his rashness and obstreperousness of afternoons. But no. I verily believe that buttoning himself up in so downy and blanket-like a coat had a pernicious effect upon him; upon the same principle that too much oats are bad for horses. In fact, precisely as a rash, restive horse is said to feel his oats, so Turkey felt his coat. It made him insolent. He was a man whom prosperity harmed.

Though concerning the self-indulgent habits of Turkey I had my own private surmises, yet touching Nippers I was well persuaded that whatever might be his faults in other respects, he was, at least, a temperate young man. But indeed, nature herself seemed to have been his vintner, and at his birth charged him so thoroughly with an irritable, brandy-like disposition, that all subsequent potations were needless. When I consider how, amid the stillness of my chambers, Nippers would sometimes impatiently rise from his seat, and stooping over his table, spread his arms wide apart, seize the whole desk, and move it, and jerk it, with a grim, grinding motion on the floor, as if the table were a perverse voluntary agent, intent on thwarting and vexing him; I plainly perceive that for Nippers, brandy and water were altogether superfluous.

It was fortunate for me that, owing to its peculiar cause—indigestion—the irritability and consequent nervousness of Nippers, were mainly observable in the morning, while in the afternoon he was comparatively mild. So that Turkey's paroxysms only coming on about twelve o'clock, I never had to do with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieved each other like guards. When Nippers' was on, Turkey's was off; and *vice versa*. This was a good natural arrangement under the circumstances.

Ginger Nut, the third on my list, was a lad some twelve years old. His father was a carman, ambitious of seeing his son on the bench instead of a cart, before he died. So he sent him to my office as student at law, errand boy, and cleaner and sweeper, at the rate of one dollar a week. He had a little desk to himself, but he did not use it much. Upon inspection, the drawer exhibited a great array of the shells of various sorts of nuts. Indeed, to this quick-witted youth the whole noble science of the law was contained in a nut-shell. Not the least among the employments of Ginger Nut, as well as one which he discharged with the most alacrity, was his duty as cake and apple purveyor for Turkey and Nippers. Copying law papers being proverbially dry, husky sort of business, my two scriveners were fain to moisten their mouths very often with Spitzenbergs to be had at the numerous stalls nigh the Custom House and Post Office. Also, they sent Ginger Nut very frequently for that peculiar cake—small, flat, round, and very spicy— after which he had been named by them. Of a cold morning when business was but dull, Turkey would gobble up scores of these cakes, as if they were mere wafers—indeed they sell them at the rate of six or eight for a penny—the scrape of his pen blending with the crunching of the crisp particles in his mouth. Of all the fiery afternoon

blunders and flurried rashnesses of Turkey, was his once moistening a ginger-cake between his lips, and clapping it on to a mortgage for a seal. I came within an ace of dismissing him then. But he mollified me by making an oriental bow, and saying—"With submission, sir, it was generous of me to find you in stationery on my own account."

Now my original business—that of a conveyancer and title hunter, and drawerup of recondite documents of all sorts—was considerably increased by receiving the master's office. There was now great work for scriveners. Not only must I push the clerks already with me, but I must have additional help. In answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man one morning, stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer. I can see that figure now—pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn! It was Bartleby.

After a few words touching his qualifications, I engaged him, glad to have among my corps of copyists a man of so singularly sedate an aspect, which I thought might operate beneficially upon the flighty temper of Turkey, and the fiery one of Nippers.

I should have stated before that ground glass folding-doors divided my premises into two parts, one of which was occupied by my scriveners, the other by myself. According to my humor I threw open these doors, or closed them. I resolved to assign Bartleby a corner by the folding-doors, but on my side of them, so as to have this quiet man within easy call, in case any trifling thing was to be done. I placed his desk close up to a small side-window in that part of the room, a window which originally had afforded a lateral view of certain grimy back-yards and bricks, but which, owing to subsequent erections, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light. Within three feet of the panes was a wall, and the light came down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome. Still further to a satisfactory arrangement, I procured a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined.

At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically.

It is, of course, an indispensable part of a scrivener's business to verify the accuracy of his copy, word by word. Where there are two or more scriveners in an office, they assist each other in this examination, one reading from the copy, the other holding the original. It is a very dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair. I can readily imagine that to some sanguine temperaments it would be altogether intolerable. For example, I cannot credit that the mettlesome poet Byron would have contentedly sat down with Bartleby to examine a law document of, say five hundred pages, closely written in a crimped hand.

Now and then, in the haste of business, it had been my habit to assist in comparing some brief document myself, calling Turkey or Nippers for this purpose. One object I had in placing Bartleby so handy to me behind the screen, was to avail myself of his services on such trivial occasions. It was on the third day, I think, of his being with me, and before any necessity had arisen for having his own writing examined, that, being much hurried to complete a small affair I had in hand, I abruptly called to Bartleby. In my haste and natural expectancy of instant compliance, I sat with my head bent over the original on my desk, and my right hand sideways, and somewhat nervously extended with the copy, so that immediately upon emerging from his retreat, Bartleby might snatch it and proceed to business without the least delay.

In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do—namely, to examine a small paper with me. Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when without moving from his privacy, Bartleby in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, “I would prefer not to.”

I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me, or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood my meaning. I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume. But in quite as clear a one came the previous reply, “I would prefer not to.”

“Prefer not to,” echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the room with a stride. “What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here—take it,” and I thrust it towards him.

“I would prefer not to,” said he.

I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been any thing ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors. I stood gazing at him awhile, as he went on with his own writing, and then reseated myself at my desk. This is very strange, thought I. What had one best do? But my business hurried me. I concluded to forget the matter for the present, reserving it for my future leisure. So calling Nippers from the other room, the paper was speedily examined.

A few days after this, Bartleby concluded four lengthy documents, being quadruplicates of a week’s testimony taken before me in my High Court of Chancery. It became necessary to examine them. It was an important suit, and great accuracy was imperative. Having all things arranged I called Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut from the next room, meaning to place the four copies in the hands of my four clerks, while I should read from the original. Accordingly Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut had taken their seats in a row, each with his document in hand, when I called to Bartleby to join this interesting group.

“Bartleby! quick, I am waiting.”

I heard a slow scrape of his chair legs on the uncarpeted floor, and soon he appeared standing at the entrance of his hermitage.

“What is wanted?” said he mildly.

“The copies, the copies,” said I hurriedly. “We are going to examine them. There”—and I held towards him the fourth quadruplicate.

“I would prefer not to,” he said, and gently disappeared behind the screen.

For a few moments I was turned into a pillar of salt, standing at the head of my seated column of clerks. Recovering myself, I advanced towards the screen, and demanded the reason for such extraordinary conduct.

“*Why* do you refuse?”

“I would prefer not to.”

With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but in a wonderful manner touched and disconcerted me. I began to reason with him.

“These are your own copies we are about to examine. It is labor saving to you, because one examination will answer for your four papers. It is common usage. Every copyist is bound to help examine his copy. Is it not so? Will you not speak? Answer!”

“I prefer not to,” he replied in a flute-like tone. It seemed to me that while I had been addressing him, he carefully revolved every statement that I made; fully compre-

hended the meaning; could not gainsay the irresistible conclusions; but, at the same time, some paramount consideration prevailed with him to reply as he did.

“You are decided, then, not to comply with my request—a request made according to common usage and common sense?”

He briefly gave me to understand that on that point my judgment was sound. Yes: his decision was irreversible.

It is not seldom the case that when a man is browbeaten in some unprec-
edented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith. He begins, as it were, vaguely to surmise that, wonderful as it may be, all the justice and all the reason is on the other side. Accordingly, if any disinterested persons are present, he turns to them for some reinforcement for his own faltering mind.

“Turkey,” said I, “what do you think of this? Am I not right?”

“With submission, sir,” said Turkey, with his blandest tone, “I think that you are.”

“Nippers,” said I, “what do *you* think of it?” “I think I should kick him out of the office.”

(The reader of nice perceptions will here perceive that, it being morning, Turkey’s answer is couched in polite and tranquil terms, but Nippers replies in ill-tempered ones. Or, to repeat a previous sentence, Nippers’ ugly mood was on duty and Turkey’s off.)

“Ginger Nut,” said I, willing to enlist the smallest suffrage in my behalf, “what do you think of it?”

“I think, sir, he’s a little *lunny*,” replied Ginger Nut with a grin.

“You hear what they say,” said I, turning towards the screen, “come forth and do your duty.”

But he vouchsafed no reply. I pondered a moment in sore perplexity. But once more business hurried me. I determined again to postpone the consideration of this dilemma to my future leisure. With a little trouble we made out to examine the papers without Bartleby, though at every page or two, Turkey deferentially dropped his opinion that this proceeding was quite out of the common; while Nippers, twitching in his chair with a dyspeptic nervousness, ground out between his set teeth occasional hissing maledictions against the stubborn oaf behind the screen. And for his (Nippers’) part, this was the first and the last time he would do another man’s business without pay.

Meanwhile Bartleby sat in his hermitage, oblivious to every thing but his own peculiar business there.

Some days passed, the scrivener being employed upon another lengthy work. His late remarkable conduct led me to regard his ways narrowly. I observed that he never went to dinner; indeed that he never went any where. As yet I had never of my personal knowledge known him to be outside of my office. He was a perpetual sentry in the corner. At about eleven o’clock though, in the morning, I noticed that Ginger Nut would advance toward the opening in Bartleby’s screen, as if silently beckoned thither by a gesture invisible to me where I sat. The boy would then leave the office jingling a few pence, and reappear with a handful of ginger-nuts which he delivered in the hermitage, receiving two of the cakes for his trouble.

He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I; never eats a dinner, properly speaking; he must be a vegetarian then; but no; he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger-nuts. My mind then ran on in reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts. Gingernuts are so called because they contain ginger as one of their peculiar constituents, and the final flavoring one. Now what was ginger? A hot, spicy thing. Was Bartleby hot and spicy? Not at all. Ginger, then, had no effect upon Bartleby. Probably he preferred it should have none.

Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance. If the individual so resisted be of a not inhumane temper, and the resisting one perfectly harmless in his passivity; then, in the better moods of the former, he will endeavor charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgment. Even so, for the most part, I regarded Bartleby and his ways. Poor fellow! thought I, he means no mischief; it is plain he intends no insolence; his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me. I can get along with him. If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve. Yes. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his strange willfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. But this mood was not invariable with me. The passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me. I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition, to elicit some angry spark from him answerable to my own. But indeed I might as well have essayed to strike fire with my knuckles against a bit of Windsor soap. But one afternoon the evil impulse in me mastered me, and the following little scene ensued:

“Bartleby,” said I, “when those papers are all copied, I will compare them with you.”

“I would prefer not to.”

“How? Surely you do not mean to persist in that mulish vagary?” No answer.

I threw open the folding-doors near by, and turning upon Turkey and Nippers, exclaimed in an excited manner—

“He says, a second time, he won’t examine his papers. What do you think of it, Turkey?”

It was afternoon, be it remembered. Turkey sat glowing like a brass boiler, his bald head steaming, his hands reeling among his blotted papers.

“Think of it?” roared Turkey; “I think I’ll just step behind his screen, and black his eyes for him!”

So saying, Turkey rose to his feet and threw his arms into a pugilistic position. He was hurrying away to make good his promise, when I detained him, alarmed at the effect of incautiously rousing Turkey’s combativeness after dinner.

“Sit down, Turkey,” said I, “and hear what Nippers has to say. What do you think of it, Nippers? Would I not be justified in immediately dismissing Bartleby?”

“Excuse me, that is for you to decide, sir. I think his conduct quite unusual, and indeed unjust, as regards Turkey and myself. But it may only be a passing whim.”

“Ah,” exclaimed I, “you have strangely changed your mind then—you speak very gently of him now.”

“All beer,” cried Turkey; “gentleness is effects of beer—Nippers and I dined together to-day. You see how gentle *I* am, sir. Shall I go and black his eyes?”

“You refer to Bartleby, I suppose. No, not to-day, Turkey,” I replied; “pray, put up your fists.”

I closed the doors, and again advanced towards Bartleby. I felt additional incentives tempting me to my fate. I burned to be rebelled against again. I remembered that Bartleby never left the office.

“Bartleby,” said I, “Ginger Nut is away; just step round to the Post Office, won’t you? (it was but a three minute walk,) and see if there is any thing for me.”

“I would prefer not to.” “You *will* not?”

“I *prefer* not.”

I staggered to my desk, and sat there in a deep study. My blind inveteracy returned. Was there any other thing in which I could procure myself to be ignomini-

ously repulsed by this lean, penniless wight?—my hired clerk? What added thing is there, perfectly reasonable, that he will be sure to refuse to do?

“Bartleby!” No answer.

“Bartleby,” in a louder tone. No answer.

“Bartleby,” I roared.

Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons, he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage.

“Go to the next room, and tell Nippers to come to me.”

“I prefer not to,” he respectfully and slowly said, and mildly disappeared. “Very good, Bartleby,” said I, in a quiet sort of serenely severe self-possessed tone, intimating the unalterable purpose of some terrible retribution very close at hand. At the moment I half intended something of the kind. But upon the whole, as it was drawing towards my dinner-hour, I thought it best to put on my hat and walk home for the day, suffering much from perplexity and distress of mind.

Shall I acknowledge it? The conclusion of this whole business was, that it soon became a fixed fact of my chambers, that a pale young scrivener, by the name of Bartleby, had a desk there; that he copied for me at the usual rate of four cents a folio (one hundred words); but he was permanently exempt from examining the work done by him, that duty being transferred to Turkey and Nippers, one of compliment doubtless to their superior acuteness; moreover, said Bartleby was never on any account to be dispatched on the most trivial errand of any sort; and that even if entreated to take upon him such a matter, it was generally understood that he would prefer not to—in other words, that he would refuse pointblank.

As days passed on, I became considerably reconciled to Bartleby. His steadiness, his freedom from all dissipation, his incessant industry (except when he chose to throw himself into a standing reverie behind his screen), his great, stillness, his unalterableness of demeanor under all circumstances, made him a valuable acquisition. One prime thing was this,—*he was always there*;—first in the morning, continually through the day, and the last at night. I had a singular confidence in his honesty. I felt my most precious papers perfectly safe in his hands. Sometimes to be sure I could not, for the very soul of me, avoid falling into sudden spasmodic passions with him. For it was exceeding difficult to bear in mind all the time those strange peculiarities, privileges, and unheard of exemptions, forming the tacit stipulations on Bartleby’s part under which he remained in my office. Now and then, in the eagerness of dispatching pressing business, I would inadvertently summon Bartleby, in a short, rapid tone, to put his finger, say, on the incipient tie of a bit of red tape with which I was about compressing some papers. Of course, from behind the screen the usual answer, “I prefer not to,” was sure to come; and then, how could a human creature with the common infirmities of our nature, refrain from bitterly exclaiming upon such perverseness—such unreasonableness. However, every added repulse of this sort which I received only tended to lessen the probability of my repeating the inadvertence.

Here it must be said, that according to the custom of most legal gentlemen occupying chambers in densely-populated law buildings, there were several keys to my door. One was kept by a woman residing in the attic, which person weekly scrubbed and daily swept and dusted my apartments. Another was kept by Turkey for convenience sake. The third I sometimes carried in my own pocket. The fourth I knew not who had.

Now, one Sunday morning I happened to go to Trinity Church, to hear a celebrated preacher, and finding myself rather early on the ground, I thought I would walk around to my chambers for a while. Luckily I had my key with me; but upon applying it to the lock, I found it resisted by something inserted from the

inside. Quite surprised, I called out; when to my consternation a key was turned from within; and thrusting his lean visage at me, and holding the door ajar, the apparition of Bartleby appeared, in his shirt sleeves, and otherwise in a strangely tattered dishabille, saying quietly that he was sorry, but he was deeply engaged just then, and—preferred not admitting me at present. In a brief word or two, he moreover added, that perhaps I had better walk round the block two or three times, and by that time he would probably have concluded his affairs.

Now, the utterly unsurmised appearance of Bartleby, tenanting my law-chambers of a Sunday morning, with his cadaverously gentlemanly *nonchalance*, yet withal firm and self-possessed, had such a strange effect upon me, that incontinently I slunk away from my own door, and did as desired. But not without sundry twinges of impotent rebellion against the mild effrontery of this unaccountable scrivener. Indeed, it was his wonderful mildness chiefly, which not only disarmed me, but unmanned me, as it were. For I consider that one, for the time, is a sort of unmanned when he tranquilly permits his hired clerk to dictate to him, and order him away from his own premises. Furthermore, I was full of uneasiness as to what Bartleby could possibly be doing in my office in his shirt sleeves, and in an otherwise dismantled condition of a Sunday morning. Was any thing amiss going on? Nay, that was out of the question. It was not to be thought of for a moment that Bartleby was an immoral person. But what could he be doing there?—copying? Nay again, whatever might be his eccentricities, Bartleby was an eminently decorous person. He would be the last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity. Besides, it was Sunday; and there was something about Bartleby that forbade the supposition that he would by any secular occupation violate the proprieties of the day.

Nevertheless, my mind was not pacified; and full of a restless curiosity, at last I returned to the door. Without hindrance I inserted my key, opened it, and entered. Bartleby was not to be seen. I looked round anxiously, peeped behind his screen; but it was very plain that he was gone. Upon more closely examining the place, I surmised that for an indefinite period Bartleby must have ate, dressed, and slept in my office, and that too without plate, mirror, or bed. The cushioned seat of a rickety old sofa in one corner bore the faint impress of a lean, reclining form. Rolled away under his desk, I found a blanket; under the empty grate, a blacking box and brush; on a chair, a tin basin, with soap and a ragged towel; in a newspaper a few crumbs of ginger-nuts and a morsel of cheese. Yes, thought I, it is evident enough that Bartleby has been making his home here, keeping bachelor's hall all by himself. Immediately then the thought came sweeping across me, What miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible! Think of it. Of a Sunday, Wall-street is deserted as Petra; and every night of every day it is an emptiness. This building too, which of week-days hums with industry and life, at nightfall echoes with sheer vacancy, and all through Sunday is forlorn. And here Bartleby makes his home; sole spectator of a solitude which he has seen all populous—a sort of innocent and transformed Marius brooding among the ruins of Carthage!

For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not-unpleasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam. I remembered the bright silks and sparkling faces I had seen that day, in gala trim, swan-like sailing down the Mississippi of Broadway; and I contrasted them with the pallid copyist, and thought to myself, Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none. These sad fancyings—

chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain—led on to other and more special thoughts, concerning the eccentricities of Bartleby. Presentiments of strange discoveries hovered round me. The scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding sheet.

Suddenly I was attracted by Bartleby's closed desk, the key in open sight left in the lock.

I mean no mischief, seek the gratification of no heartless curiosity, thought I; besides, the desk is mine, and its contents too, so I will make bold to look within. Every thing was methodically arranged, the papers smoothly placed. The pigeon holes were deep, and removing the files of documents, I groped into their recesses. Presently I felt something there, and dragged it out. It was an old bandanna handkerchief, heavy and knotted. I opened it, and saw it was a savings' bank.

I now recalled all the quiet mysteries which I had noted in the man. I remembered that he never spoke but to answer; that though at intervals he had considerable time to himself, yet I had never seen him reading—no, not even a newspaper; that for long periods he would stand looking out, at his pale window behind the screen, upon the dead brick wall; I was quite sure he never visited any refectory or eating house; while his pale face clearly indicated that he never drank beer like Turkey, or tea and coffee even, like other men; that he never went any where in particular that I could learn; never went out for a walk, unless indeed that was the case at present; that he had declined telling who he was, or whence he came, or whether he had any relatives in the world; that though so thin and pale, he never complained of ill health. And more than all, I remembered a certain unconscious air of pallid—how shall I call it?—of pallid haughtiness, say, or rather an austere reserve about him, which had positively awed me into my tame compliance with his eccentricities, when I had feared to ask him to do the slightest incidental thing for me, even though I might know, from his long-continued motionlessness, that behind his screen he must be standing in one of those dead-wall reveries of his.

Revolving all these things, and coupling them with the recently discovered fact that he made my office his constant abiding place and home, and not forgetful of his morbid moodiness; revolving all these things, a prudential feeling began to steal over me. My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity; but just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew to my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion. So true it is, and so terrible too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill. To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach.

I did not accomplish the purpose of going to Trinity Church that morning. Somehow, the things I had seen disqualified me for the time from church-going. I walked homeward, thinking what I would do with Bartleby. Finally, I resolved upon this;—I would put certain calm questions to him the next morning, touching his history, etc., and if he declined to answer them openly and unreservedly (and I supposed he would prefer not), then to give him a twenty dollar bill over and above whatever I might owe him, and tell him his services were no longer required; but

that if in any other way I could assist him, I would be happy to do so, especially if he desired to return to his native place, wherever that might be, I would willingly help to defray the expenses. Moreover, if, after reaching home, he found himself at any time in want of aid, a letter from him would be sure of a reply.

The next morning came.

“Bartleby,” said I, gently calling to him behind his screen. No reply.

“Bartleby,” said I, in a still gentler tone, “come here; I am not going to ask you to do any thing you would prefer not to do—I simply wish to speak to you.”

Upon this he noiselessly slid into view.

“Will you tell me, Bartleby, where you were born?” “I would prefer not to.”

“Will you tell me *any thing* about yourself?” “I would prefer not to.”

“But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me? I feel friendly towards you.”

He did not look at me while I spoke, but kept his glance fixed upon my bust of Cicero, which as I then sat, was directly behind me, some six inches above my head. “What is your answer, Bartleby?” said I, after waiting a considerable time for a reply, during which his countenance remained immovable, only there was the faintest conceivable tremor of the white attenuated mouth.

“At present I prefer to give no answer,” he said, and retired into his hermitage.

It was rather weak in me I confess, but his manner on this occasion nettled me. Not only did there seem to lurk in it a certain calm disdain, but his perverseness seemed ungrateful, considering the undeniable good usage and indulgence he had received from me.

Again I sat ruminating what I should do. Mortified as I was at his behavior, and resolved as I had been to dismiss him when I entered my offices, nevertheless I strangely felt something superstitious knocking at my heart, and forbidding me to carry out my purpose, and denouncing me for a villain if I dared to breathe one bitter word against this forlornest of mankind. At last, familiarly drawing my chair behind his screen, I sat down and said: “Bartleby, never mind then about revealing your history; but let me entreat you, as a friend, to comply as far as may be with the usages of this office. Say now you will help to examine papers to-morrow or next day: in short, say now that in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable:—say so, Bartleby.”

“At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable,” was his mildly cadaverous reply.

Just then the folding-doors opened, and Nippers approached. He seemed suffering from an unusually bad night’s rest, induced by severer indigestion than common. He overheard those final words of Bartleby.

“*Prefer not*, eh?” gritted Nippers—“I’d *prefer* him, if I were you, sir,” addressing me—“I’d *prefer* him; I’d give him preferences, the stubborn mule! What is it, sir, pray, that he *prefers* not to do now?”

Bartleby moved not a limb.

“Mr. Nippers,” said I, “I’d prefer that you would withdraw for the present.”

Somehow, of late I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word “prefer” upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions. And I trembled to think that my contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. And what further and deeper aberration might it not yet produce? This apprehension had not been without efficacy in determining me to summary means.

As Nippers, looking very sour and sulky, was departing, Turkey blandly and deferentially approached.

“With submission, sir,” said he, “yesterday I was thinking about Bartleby here, and I think that if he would but prefer to take a quart of good ale every day, it

would do much towards mending him, and enabling him to assist in examining his papers.”

“So you have got the word too,” said I, slightly excited.

“With submission, what word, sir,” asked Turkey, respectfully crowding himself into the contracted space behind the screen, and by so doing, making me jostle the scrivener. “What word, sir?”

“I would prefer to be left alone here,” said Bartleby, as if offended at being mobbed in his privacy.

“*That’s* the word, Turkey,” said I—“that’s it.”

“Oh, *prefer*? oh yes—queer word. I never use it myself. But, sir, as I was saying, if he would but prefer—”

“Turkey,” interrupted I, “you will please withdraw.” “Oh certainly, sir, if you prefer that I should.”

As he opened the folding-door to retire, Nippers at his desk caught a glimpse of me, and asked whether I would prefer to have a certain paper copied on blue paper or white. He did not in the least roguishly accent the word prefer. It was plain that it involuntarily rolled from his tongue. I thought to myself, surely I must get rid of a demented man, who already has in some degree turned the tongues, if not the heads of myself and clerks. But I thought it prudent not to break the dismissal at once.

The next day I noticed that Bartleby did nothing but stand at his window in his dead-wall revery. Upon asking him why he did not write, he said that he had decided upon doing no more writing.

“Why, how now? what next?” exclaimed I, “do no more writing?” “No more.”

“And what is the reason?”

“Do you not see the reason for yourself,” he indifferently replied.

I looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occurred to me, that his unexampled diligence in copying by his dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me might have temporarily impaired his vision.

I was touched. I said something in condolence with him. I hinted that of course he did wisely in abstaining from writing for a while; and urged him to embrace that opportunity of taking wholesome exercise in the open air. This, however, he did not do. A few days after this, my other clerks being absent, and being in a great hurry to dispatch certain letters by the mail, I thought that, having nothing else earthly to do, Bartleby would surely be less inflexible than usual, and carry these letters to the post-office. But he blankly declined. So, much to my inconvenience, I went myself.

Still added days went by. Whether Bartleby’s eyes improved or not, I could not say. To all appearance, I thought they did. But when I asked him if they did, he vouchsafed no answer. At all events, he would do no copying. At last, in reply to my urgings, he informed me that he had permanently given up copying.

“What!” exclaimed I; “suppose your eyes should get entirely well—better than ever before—would you not copy then?”

“I have given up copying,” he answered, and slid aside.

He remained as ever, a fixture in my chamber. Nay—if that were possible—he became still more of a fixture than before. What was to be done? He would do nothing in the office: why should he stay there? In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear. Yet I was sorry for him. I speak less than truth when I say that, on his own account, he occasioned me uneasiness. If he would but have named a single relative or friend, I would instantly have written, and urged their taking the poor fellow away to some convenient retreat. But he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe. A bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic. At length,

necessities connected with my business tyrannized over all other considerations. Decently as I could, I told Bartleby that in six days' time he must unconditionally leave the office. I warned him to take measures, in the interval, for procuring some other abode. I offered to assist him in this endeavor, if he himself would but take the first step towards a removal. "And when you finally quit me, Bartleby," added I, "I shall see that you go not away entirely unprovided. Six days from this hour, remember."

At the expiration of that period, I peeped behind the screen, and lo! Bartleby was there.

I buttoned up my coat, balanced myself; advanced slowly towards him, touched his shoulder, and said, "The time has come; you must quit this place; I am sorry for you; here is money; but you must go."

"I would prefer not," he replied, with his back still towards me. "You *must*."

He remained silent.

Now I had an unbounded confidence in this man's common honesty. He had frequently restored to me sixpences and shillings carelessly dropped upon the floor, for I am apt to be very reckless in such shirt-button affairs. The proceeding then which followed will not be deemed extraordinary.

"Bartleby," said I, "I owe you twelve dollars on account; here are thirty-two; the odd twenty are yours.—Will you take it?" and I handed the bills towards him.

But he made no motion.

"I will leave them here then," putting them under a weight on the table. Then taking my hat and cane and going to the door I tranquilly turned and added—"After you have removed your things from these offices, Bartleby, you will of course lock the door—since every one is now gone for the day but you—and if you please, slip your key underneath the mat, so that I may have it in the morning. I shall not see you again; so good-bye to you. If hereafter in your new place of abode I can be of any service to you, do not fail to advise me by letter. Good-bye, Bartleby, and fare you well."

But he answered not a word; like the last column of some ruined temple, he remained standing mute and solitary in the middle of the otherwise deserted room.

As I walked home in a pensive mood, my vanity got the better of my pity. I could not but highly plume myself on my masterly management in getting rid of Bartleby. Masterly I call it, and such it must appear to any dispassionate thinker. The beauty of my procedure seemed to consist in its perfect quietness. There was no vulgar bullying, no bravado of any sort, no choleric hectoring, and striding to and fro across the apartment, jerking out vehement commands for Bartleby to bundle himself off with his beggarly traps. Nothing of the kind. Without loudly bidding Bartleby depart—as an inferior genius might have done—I *assumed* the ground that depart he must; and upon that assumption built all I had to say. The more I thought over my procedure, the more I was charmed with it. Nevertheless, next morning, upon awakening, I had my doubts,—I had somehow slept off the fumes of vanity. One of the coolest and wisest hours a man has, is just after he awakes in the morning. My procedure seemed as sagacious as ever.—but only in theory. How it would prove in practice—there was the rub. It was truly a beautiful thought to have assumed Bartleby's departure; but, after all, that assumption was simply my own, and none of Bartleby's. The great point was, not whether I had assumed that he would quit me, but whether he would prefer so to do. He was more a man of preferences than assumptions.

After breakfast, I walked down town, arguing the probabilities *pro* and *con*. One moment I thought it would prove a miserable failure, and Bartleby would be found all alive at my office as usual; the next moment it seemed certain that I should see his chair empty. And so I kept veering about. At the corner of Broadway and Canal-street, I saw quite an excited group of people standing in earnest conversation.

"I'll take odds he doesn't," said a voice as I passed. "Doesn't go?—done!" said I, "put up your money."

I was instinctively putting my hand in my pocket to produce my own, when I remembered that this was an election day. The words I had overheard bore no reference to Bartleby, but to the success or non-success of some candidate for the mayoralty. In my intent frame of mind, I had, as it were, imagined that all Broadway shared in my excitement, and were debating the same question with me. I passed on, very thankful that the uproar of the street screened my momentary absent-mindedness.

As I had intended, I was earlier than usual at my office door. I stood listening for a moment. All was still. He must be gone. I tried the knob. The door was locked. Yes, my procedure had worked to a charm; he indeed must be vanished. Yet a certain melancholy mixed with this: I was almost sorry for my brilliant success. I was fumbling under the door mat for the key, which Bartleby was to have left there for me, when accidentally my knee knocked against a panel, producing a summoning sound, and in response a voice came to me from within—"Not yet; I am occupied."

It was Bartleby.

I was thunderstruck. For an instant I stood like the man who, pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless afternoon long ago in Virginia, by a summer lightning; at his own warm open window he was killed, and remained leaning out there upon the dreamy afternoon, till some one touched him, when he fell.

"Not gone!" I murmured at last. But again obeying that wondrous ascendancy which the inscrutable scrivener had over me, and from which ascendancy, for all my chafing, I could not completely escape, I slowly went down stairs and out into the street, and while walking round the block, considered what I should next do in this unheard-of perplexity. Turn the man out by an actual thrusting I could not; to drive him away by calling him hard names would not do; calling in the police was an unpleasant idea; and yet, permit him to enjoy his cadaverous triumph over me,—this too I could not think of. What was to be done? or, if nothing could be done, was there any thing further that I could *assume* in the matter? Yes, as before I had prospectively assumed that Bartleby would depart, so now I might retrospectively assume that departed he was. In the legitimate carrying out of this assumption, I might enter my office in a great hurry, and pretending not to see Bartleby at all, walk straight against him as if he were air. Such a proceeding would in a singular degree have the appearance of a home-thrust. It was hardly possible that Bartleby could withstand such an application of the doctrine of assumptions. But upon second thoughts the success of the plan seemed rather dubious. I resolved to argue the matter over with him again.

"Bartleby," said I, entering the office, with a quietly severe expression, "I am seriously displeased. I am pained, Bartleby. I had thought better of you. I had imagined you of such a gentlemanly organization, that in any delicate dilemma a slight hint would suffice—in short, an assumption. But it appears I am deceived. Why," I added, unaffectedly starting, "you have not even touched that money yet," pointing to it, just where I had left it the evening previous.

He answered nothing.

"Will you, or will you not, quit me?" I now demanded in a sudden passion, advancing close to him.

"I would prefer *not* to quit you," he replied, gently emphasizing the *not*.

"What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?" He answered nothing.

"Are you ready to go on and write now? Are your eyes recovered? Could you copy a small paper for me this morning? or help examine a few lines? or step round to

the post-office? In a word, will you do any thing at all, to give a coloring to your refusal to depart the premises?"

He silently retired into his hermitage.

I was now in such a state of nervous resentment that I thought it but prudent to check myself at present from further demonstrations. Bartleby and I were alone. I remembered the tragedy of the unfortunate Adams and the still more unfortunate Colt in the solitary office of the latter; and how poor Colt, being dreadfully incensed by Adams, and imprudently permitting himself to get wildly excited, was at unawares hurried into his fatal act—an act which certainly no man could possibly deplore more than the actor himself. Often it had occurred to me in my ponderings upon the subject, that had that altercation taken place in the public street, or at a private residence, it would not have terminated as it did. It was the circumstance of being alone in a solitary office, up stairs, of a building entirely unhallowed by humanizing domestic associations—an uncarpeted office, doubtless, of a dusty, haggard sort of appearance;—this it must have been, which greatly helped to enhance the irritable desperation of the hapless Colt.

But when this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him. How? Why, simply by recalling the divine injunction: "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." Yes, this it was that saved me. Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle—a great safeguard to its possessor. Men have committed murder for jealousy's sake, and anger's sake, and hatred's sake, and selfishness' sake, and spiritual pride's sake; but no man that ever I heard of, ever committed a diabolical murder for sweet charity's sake. Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should, especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy. At any rate, upon the occasion in question, I strove to drown my exasperated feelings towards the scrivener by benevolently construing his conduct. Poor fellow, poor fellow! thought I, he don't mean any thing; and besides, he has seen hard times, and ought to be indulged.

I endeavored also immediately to occupy myself, and at the same time to comfort my despondency. I tried to fancy that in the course of the morning, at such time as might prove agreeable to him, Bartleby, of his own free accord, would emerge from his hermitage, and take up some decided line of march in the direction of the door. But no. Half-past twelve o'clock came; Turkey began to glow in the face, overturn his inkstand, and become generally obstreperous; Nippers abated down into quietude and courtesy; Ginger Nut munched his noon apple; and Bartleby remained standing at his window in one of his profoundest dead-wall reveries. Will it be credited? Ought I to acknowledge it? That afternoon I left the office without saying one further word to him.

Some days now passed, during which, at leisure intervals I looked a little into "Edwards on the Will," and "Priestly on Necessity." Under the circumstances, those books induced a salutary feeling. Gradually I slid into the persuasion that these troubles of mine touching the scrivener, had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom. Yes, Bartleby, stay there behind your screen, thought I; I shall persecute you no more; you are harmless and noiseless as any of these old chairs; in short, I never feel so private as when I know you are here. At last I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life. I am content. Others may have loftier parts to enact; but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain.

I believe that this wise and blessed frame of mind would have continued with me, had it not been for the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon me by my professional friends who visited the rooms. But thus

it often is, that the constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the more generous. Though to be sure, when I reflected upon it, it was not strange that people entering my office should be struck by the peculiar aspect of the unaccountable Bartleby, and so be tempted to throw out some sinister observations concerning him. Sometimes an attorney having business with me, and calling at my office and finding no one but the scrivener there, would undertake to obtain some sort of precise information from him touching my whereabouts; but without heeding his idle talk, Bartleby would remain standing immovable in the middle of the room. So after contemplating him in that position for a time, the attorney would depart, no wiser than he came.

Also, when a Reference was going on, and the room full of lawyers and witnesses and business was driving fast; some deeply occupied legal gentleman present, seeing Bartleby wholly unemployed, would request him to run round to his (the legal gentleman's) office and fetch some papers for him. Thereupon, Bartleby would tranquilly decline, and yet remain idle as before. Then the lawyer would give a great stare, and turn to me. And what could I say? At last I was made aware that all through the circle of my professional acquaintance, a whisper of wonder was running round, having reference to the strange creature I kept at my office. This worried me very much. And as the idea came upon me of his possibly turning out a long-lived man, and keep occupying my chambers, and denying my authority; and perplexing my visitors; and scandalizing my professional reputation; and casting a general gloom over the premises; keeping soul and body together to the last upon his savings (for doubtless he spent but half a dime a day), and in the end perhaps outlive me, and claim possession of my office by right of his perpetual occupancy: as all these dark anticipations crowded upon me more and more, and my friends continually intruded their relentless remarks upon the apparition in my room; a great change was wrought in me. I resolved to gather all my faculties together, and for ever rid me of this intolerable incubus. Ere revolving any complicated project, however, adapted to this end, I first simply suggested to Bartleby the propriety of his permanent departure. In a calm and serious tone, I commended the idea to his careful and mature consideration. But having taken three days to meditate upon it, he apprised me that his original determination remained the same; in short, that he still preferred to abide with me.

What shall I do? I now said to myself, buttoning up my coat to the last button. What shall I do? what ought I to do? what does conscience say I *should* do with this man, or rather ghost. Rid myself of him, I must; go, he shall. But how? You will not thrust him, the poor, pale, passive mortal,—you will not thrust such a helpless creature out of your door? you will not dishonor yourself by such cruelty? No, I will not, I cannot do that. Rather would I let him live and die here, and then mason up his remains in the wall. What then will you do? For all your coaxing, he will not budge. Bribes he leaves under your own paperweight on your table; in short, it is quite plain that he prefers to cling to you.

Then something severe, something unusual must be done. What! surely you will not have him collared by a constable, and commit his innocent pallor to the common jail? And upon what ground could you procure such a thing to be done?—a vagrant, is he? What! he a vagrant, a wanderer, who refuses to budge? It is because he will *not* be a vagrant, then, that you seek to count him *as* a vagrant. That is too absurd. No visible means of support: there I have him. Wrong again: for indubitably he *does* support himself, and that is the only unanswerable proof that any man can show of his possessing the means so to do. No more then. Since he will not quit me, I must quit

him. I will change my offices; I will move elsewhere; and give him fair notice, that if I find him on my new premises I will then proceed against him as a common trespasser.

Acting accordingly, next day I thus addressed him: "I find these chambers too far from the City Hall; the air is unwholesome. In a word, I propose to remove my offices next week, and shall no longer require your services. I tell you this now, in order that you may seek another place."

He made no reply, and nothing more was said.

On the appointed day I engaged carts and men, proceeded to my chambers, and having but little furniture, every thing was removed in a few hours. Throughout, the scrivener remained standing behind the screen, which I directed to be removed the last thing. It was withdrawn; and being folded up like a huge folio, left him the motionless occupant of a naked room. I stood in the entry watching him a moment, while something from within me upbraided me.

I re-entered, with my hand in my pocket—and—and my heart in my mouth. "Good-bye, Bartleby; I am going—good-bye, and God some way bless you; and take that," slipping something in his hand. But it dropped upon the floor, and then,—strange to say—I tore myself from him whom I had so longed to be rid of.

Established in my new quarters, for a day or two I kept the door locked, and started at every footfall in the passages. When I returned to my rooms after any little absence, I would pause at the threshold for an instant, and attentively listen, ere applying my key. But these fears were needless. Bartleby never came nigh me. I thought all was going well, when a perturbed looking stranger visited me, inquiring whether I was the person who had recently occupied rooms at No. – Wall-street.

Full of forebodings, I replied that I was.

"Then sir," said the stranger, who proved a lawyer, "you are responsible for the man you left there. He refuses to do any copying; he refuses to do any thing; he says he prefers not to; and he refuses to quit the premises."

"I am very sorry, sir," said I, with assumed tranquility, but an inward tremor, "but, really, the man you allude to is nothing to me—he is no relation or apprentice of mine, that you should hold me responsible for him."

"In mercy's name, who is he?"

"I certainly cannot inform you. I know nothing about him. Formerly I employed him as a copyist; but he has done nothing for me now for some time past."

"I shall settle him then,—good morning, sir."

Several days passed, and I heard nothing more; and though I often felt a charitable prompting to call at the place and see poor Bartleby, yet a certain squeamishness of I know not what withheld me.

All is over with him, by this time, thought I at last, when through another week no further intelligence reached me. But coming to my room the day after, I found several persons waiting at my door in a high state of nervous excitement. "That's the man—here he comes," cried the foremost one, whom I recognized as the lawyer who had previously called upon me alone.

"You must take him away, sir, at once," cried a portly person among them, advancing upon me, and whom I knew to be the landlord of No. – Wall-street.

"These gentlemen, my tenants, cannot stand it any longer; Mr. B—" pointing to the lawyer, "has turned him out of his room, and he now persists in haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in the entry by night. Every body is concerned; clients are leaving the offices; some fears are entertained of a mob; something you must do, and that without delay."

Aghast at this torrent, I fell back before it, and would fain have locked myself in my new quarters. In vain I persisted that Bartleby was nothing to me—no more than to any one else. In vain:—I was the last person known to have any thing to do

with him, and they held me to the terrible account. Fearful then of being exposed in the papers (as one person present obscurely threatened) I considered the matter, and at length said, that if the lawyer would give me a confidential interview with the scrivener, in his (the lawyer's) own room, I would that afternoon strive my best to rid them of the nuisance they complained of.

Going up stairs to my old haunt, there was Bartleby silently sitting upon the banister at the landing.

"What are you doing here, Bartleby?" said I. "Sitting upon the banister," he mildly replied.

I motioned him into the lawyer's room, who then left us.

"Bartleby," said I, "are you aware that you are the cause of great tribulation to me, by persisting in occupying the entry after being dismissed from the office?"

No answer.

"Now one of two things must take place. Either you must do something, or something must be done to you. Now what sort of business would you like to engage in? Would you like to re-engage in copying for some one?"

"No; I would prefer not to make any change." "Would you like a clerkship in a dry-goods store?"

"There is too much confinement about that. No, I would not like a clerkship; but I am not particular."

"Too much confinement," I cried, "why you keep yourself confined all the time!"

"I would prefer not to take a clerkship," he rejoined, as if to settle that little item at once.

"How would a bar-tender's business suit you? There is no trying of the eyesight in that."

"I would not like it at all; though, as I said before, I am not particular." His unwonted wordiness inspirited me. I returned to the charge.

"Well then, would you like to travel through the country collecting bills for the merchants? That would improve your health."

"No, I would prefer to be doing something else."

"How then would going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation,—how would that suit you?"

"Not at all. It does not strike me that there is any thing definite about that. I like to be stationary. But I am not particular."

"Stationary you shall be then," I cried, now losing all patience, and for the first time in all my exasperating connection with him fairly flying into a passion. "If you do not go away from these premises before night, I shall feel bound—indeed I *am* bound—to—to—to quit the premises myself!" I rather absurdly concluded, knowing not with what possible threat to try to frighten his immobility into compliance. Despairing of all further efforts, I was precipitately leaving him, when a final thought occurred to me—one which had not been wholly unindulged before.

"Bartleby," said I, in the kindest tone I could assume under such exciting circumstances, "will you go home with me now—not to my office, but my dwelling—and remain there till we can conclude upon some convenient arrangement for you at our leisure? Come, let us start now, right away."

"No: at present I would prefer not to make any change at all."

I answered nothing; but effectually dodging every one by the suddenness and rapidity of my flight, rushed from the building, ran up Wall-street towards Broadway, and jumping into the first omnibus was soon removed from pursuit. As soon as tranquility returned I distinctly perceived that I had now done all that I possibly could, both in respect to the demands of the landlord and his tenants, and with regard to my own desire and sense of duty, to benefit Bartleby, and shield him from rude persecu-

tion. I now strove to be entirely care-free and quiescent; and my conscience justified me in the attempt; though indeed it was not so successful as I could have wished. So fearful was I of being again hunted out by the incensed landlord and his exasperated tenants, that, surrendering my business to Nippers, for a few days I drove about the upper part of the town and through the suburbs, in my rockaway; crossed over to Jersey City and Hoboken, and paid fugitive visits to Manhattanville and Astoria. In fact I almost lived in my rockaway for the time.

When again I entered my office, lo, a note from the landlord lay upon the desk. I opened it with trembling hands. It informed me that the writer had sent to the police, and had Bartleby removed to the Tombs as a vagrant. Moreover, since I knew more about him than any one else, he wished me to appear at that place, and make a suitable statement of the facts. These tidings had a conflicting effect upon me. At first I was indignant; but at last almost approved. The landlord's energetic, summary disposition had led him to adopt a procedure which I do not think I would have decided upon myself; and yet as a last resort, under such peculiar circumstances, it seemed the only plan.

As I afterwards learned, the poor scrivener, when told that he must be conducted to the Tombs, offered not the slightest obstacle, but in his pale unmoving way, silently acquiesced.

Some of the compassionate and curious bystanders joined the party; and headed by one of the constables arm in arm with Bartleby, the silent procession filed its way through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon.

The same day I received the note I went to the Tombs, or to speak more properly, the Halls of Justice. Seeking the right officer, I stated the purpose of my call, and was informed that the individual I described was indeed within. I then assured the functionary that Bartleby was a perfectly honest man, and greatly to be compassionated, however unaccountably eccentric. I narrated all I knew, and closed by suggesting the idea of letting him remain in as indulgent confinement as possible till something less harsh might be done—though indeed I hardly knew what. At all events, if nothing else could be decided upon, the alms-house must receive him. I then begged to have an interview.

Being under no disgraceful charge, and quite serene and harmless in all his ways, they had permitted him freely to wander about the prison, and especially in the inclosed grass-platted yard thereof. And so I found him there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves.

"Bartleby!"

"I know you," he said, without looking round,— "and I want nothing to say to you."

"It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby," said I, keenly pained at his implied suspicion. "And to you, this should not be so vile a place. Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here. And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass."

"I know where I am," he replied, but would say nothing more, and so I left him.

As I entered the corridor again, a broad meat-like man, in an apron, accosted me, and jerking his thumb over his shoulder said—"Is that your friend?"

"Yes."

"Does he want to starve? If he does, let him live on the prison fare, that's all."

"Who are you?" asked I, not knowing what to make of such an unofficially speaking person in such a place.

"I am the grub-man. Such gentlemen as have friends here, hire me to provide them with something good to eat."

“Is this so?” said I, turning to the turnkey. He said it was.

“Well then,” said I, slipping some silver into the grub-man’s hands (for so they called him). “I want you to give particular attention to my friend there; let him have the best dinner you can get. And you must be as polite to him as possible.”

“Introduce me, will you?” said the grub-man, looking at me with an expression which seemed to say he was all impatience for an opportunity to give a specimen of his breeding.

Thinking it would prove of benefit to the scrivener, I acquiesced; and asking the grub-man his name, went up with him to Bartleby.

“Bartleby, this is Mr. Cutlets; you will find him very useful to you.”

“Your sarvant, sir, your sarvant,” said the grub-man, making a low salutation behind his apron. “Hope you find it pleasant here, sir;—spacious grounds—cool apartments, sir—hope you’ll stay with us some time—try to make it agreeable. May Mrs. Cutlets and I have the pleasure of your company to dinner, sir, in Mrs. Cutlets’ private room?”

“I prefer not to dine to-day,” said Bartleby, turning away. “It would disagree with me; I am unused to dinners.” So saying he slowly moved to the other side of the inclosure, and took up a position fronting the dead-wall.

“How’s this?” said the grub-man, addressing me with a stare of astonishment. “He’s odd, aint he?”

“I think he is a little deranged,” said I, sadly.

“Deranged? deranged is it? Well now, upon my word, I thought that friend of yours was a gentleman forger; they are always pale and genteel-like, them forgers. I can’t pity ’em—can’t help it, sir. Did you know Monroe Edwards?” he added touchingly, and paused. Then, laying his hand pityingly on my shoulder, sighed, “he died of consumption at Sing-Sing. So you weren’t acquainted with Monroe?”

“No, I was never socially acquainted with any forgers. But I cannot stop longer. Look to my friend yonder. You will not lose by it. I will see you again.”

Some few days after this, I again obtained admission to the Tombs, and went through the corridors in quest of Bartleby; but without finding him.

“I saw him coming from his cell not long ago,” said a turnkey, “may be he’s gone to loiter in the yards.”

So I went in that direction.

“Are you looking for the silent man?” said another turnkey passing me. “Yonder he lies—sleeping in the yard there. ‘Tis not twenty minutes since I saw him lie down.”

The yard was entirely quiet. It was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them. The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung.

Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused; then went close up to him; stooped over, and saw that his dim eyes were open; otherwise he seemed profoundly sleeping. Something prompted me to touch him. I felt his hand, when a tingling shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet.

The round face of the grub-man peered upon me now. “His dinner is ready. Won’t he dine to-day, either? Or does he live without dining?”

“Lives without dining,” said I, and closed his eyes.

“Eh!—He’s asleep, aint he?”

“With kings and counselors,” murmured I.

* * * * *

There would seem little need for proceeding further in this history. Imagination will readily supply the meager recital of poor Bartleby's interment. But ere parting with the reader, let me say, that if this little narrative has sufficiently interested him, to awaken curiosity as to who Bartleby was, and what manner of life he led prior to the present narrator's making his acquaintance, I can only reply, that in such curiosity I fully share, but am wholly unable to gratify it. Yet here I hardly know whether I should divulge one little item of rumor, which came to my ear a few months after the scrivener's decease. Upon what basis it rested, I could never ascertain; and hence, how true it is I cannot now tell. But inasmuch as this vague report has not been without certain strange suggestive interest to me, however sad, it may prove the same with some others; and so I will briefly mention it. The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration. When I think over this rumor, I cannot adequately express the emotions which seize me. Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring;—the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulders in the grave; a bank-note sent in swiftest charity:—he whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death.

Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!

On “Shy Trump” Voters and the Politics of Care: Surveillance, Sousveillance, and Self

Ikechukwu Casmir Onyewuenyi

1. Silent Majorities Turned Stealth

On the eve of the 2016 US presidential election, everyone—in America and abroad—expected a landslide victory for Hillary Clinton. Poll after poll tipped Clinton, the Democratic nominee, as the victor over Republican contender Donald Trump. Even GOP strategists had consigned their fate to Trump’s sinking poll numbers. And rightly so: Trump’s platform ran on misogyny, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-black racism, anti-LGBTQ, ableism, and every other discriminatory rhetoric out there. Supremacist diatribes became populist fodder for a seemingly beleaguered “silent majority” in white working-class America who vote without having real representation in public policy decisions.¹ For years, the silent voices of America were subordinated to the moneyed minorities close to politicians and lobbyists. But with a mandate to “drain the swamp,” we find ourselves with Trump as the 45th President of the United States. That Trump has been hailed the “People’s President” in right-wing, conservative quarters² prompts the question of how his unscrupulous decision-making and offensive manner roused among his supporters a different kind of silence—a silence not of non-representation, but of stealth, and one that becomes increasingly present.

With the backing of this silent majority turned stealth, Trump’s ascendancy becomes an even more baffling affair, not least due to speculation that this subset of his voting bloc engaged in a game of deception. Their ruse begins with having stymied the polling system with intentional misreporting, supposedly introducing prediction errors. From the *New York Times* to ABC News/*Washington Post* polls, and even Trump’s beloved Fox News, the forecasts—a blend of online or live-interview and automated phone polls—earmarked Clinton as the winner. Contrary to popular belief, the purely online USC Dornsife/*Los Angeles Times* Presidential Election “Daybreak” Poll was the only poll to peg Trump as the winner. This discrepancy is telling, as it gestures towards the online sphere of polling functioning as a hideout: well-educated and higher-income

Trump voters were more willing to voice their support for Trump on online polling portals than with a live interviewer.³ The degree of subterfuge was even more noticeable among exit polls: four swing states—Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, all slated to go for Clinton—actually swung for Trump when it came to actual vote counts.⁴

How did we get here? Explanations for the unforeseen Trump presidency have spanned voter suppression to the “red shift” phenomenon.⁵ The notion of a silent, stealth majority could be generative for uncovering another rationale: the emergence of the “shy Trump” voter. The prospect arises from German political scientist Elizabeth Noelle-Neuman’s *spiral of silence* hypothesis: “under the pressure of a hostile opinion climate (national, local, or group level) individuals are reluctant to voice their opinions on morally loaded issues.”⁶ While Trump drew enormous hostility for his divisive rhetoric, he also drew secret admirers—a fact we are only beginning to grapple with.

Despite the exit polls, the existence of such a “shy Trump” voter remains uncertain. They have also been dubbed a “mirage”—an inconsequential voting bloc who did nothing to sway the election. The 104-page report from American Association for Public Opinion Research does indicate a semblance of the “shy Trump” effect, however. In three of the four swing states listed above, polling data revealed that between eleven–fifteen percent of voters who told pollsters they were undecided or considering a third-party candidate ultimately voted for Trump. In the final week of the campaign, their swing towards Trump caused Clinton to lose by nearly thirty points in Wisconsin, by seventeen points in Pennsylvania and Florida, and by eleven in Michigan.⁷ Consider Wisconsin: Of the fourteen percent of voters who made their decision in the final week, fifty-nine percent voted for Trump and thirty percent voted for Clinton. What do we make of these findings? By not announcing their choice in pre-election polls, these last-minute Trump voters effectively skewed polling

data, leading many to identify them as Independents and prematurely name Clinton as the victor. However, the slim margin Clinton lost these states by throws into question just how inconsequential "shy Trump" voters were. These coy Trump supporters were anything but a mirage. Instead, there is a real possibility that a segment of Trump supporters employed a brand of chicanery that didn't necessarily announce polling data as dead, but as a useful tool—being hardly a sure science—for deception when rejigged to serve one's own ends.

A number of think pieces focused on the feigned timidity of "shy Trump" voters.⁸ Take Aradhna Krishna, a sensory marketing theorist who leveled that "the numbers the pollsters obtained for some undecided voters and some committed Clinton voters appears to have been false data—accepted as correct, but in actually [sic] not."⁹ From this, Krishna advances that "shy Trump" voters didn't withdraw from reporting to polls—they blatantly "lie[d] in the polls and distorted the data."¹⁰ Such claims suggest "shy Trump" voters to be a stealth majority indeed. But their stealth is not a classic case of cognitive dissonance or internal conflict—Trump was always their man despite the misgivings they expressed. Hence, what Krishna intimates above feels less dissonant than dissident—a brand of deceit.

Reflecting on this quiet dissidence warrants a meditation on the figure of Bartleby from Herman Melville's short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street," whose logic not only suffuses "shy Trump" voters, but also delineates their strategic engagement with the institution of polling. Between extremes of refusal and acceptance, we could dismiss "shy Trump" voters as *liars* per Krishna. But I intuit that there is more to it than simply lying. Michel Foucault notes that "resistors under a military occupation" are not liars.¹¹ What if we were to instead "substitute for the word 'lie' such words as... *indirection*"?¹² What if we were to situate the lie along a course of errant movement, to open the lie to a spatial possibility? It comes as no surprise, then, that Gilles Deleuze adopts a referent evoking space—the "zone of indiscernibility"—when writing on the formulaic utterances of Bartleby.¹³ For Deleuze, Bartleby's familiar slogan *I would prefer not to* could be read as a (political) stratagem within this indeterminate zone. Following the narrative arc of Melville's short story, one gathers that reasoning with Bartleby never quite reveals a logic in his stance. At best, Bartleby's dogged reticence and failure to reveal his preference (or lack thereof) developed into a radical politics of silence

and stealth. In point, by offering up, over and over again, this seemingly trite response, Bartleby's words—and inaction—do not refuse, accept, or lie vis-à-vis any particular end; rather, *I prefer not to* holds out the possibility of an otherwise act, a concatenation of the three options into something askew, slanted. Such an act, for "shy Trump" voters, is what comes out of that errant movement from silent to stealth or, more precisely, a shuttling back-and-forth between the two. Circling back to the polls, we see this movement in the shift from undecided voter to full-fledged Trump supporter a week before the election. On this account, the silence and stealth emerge as bedfellows of a politics that, on the surface, inures the "shy Trump" voter to protracted periods of inactivity.

This quiet storming of the White House prompts us to rethink the possibility of movement within the inactive. To this end, what if we consider "shy Trump" voters operating as sleeper cells—idle but ready operatives, awaiting a signal? Angling in this slanted way, the sleeper cell creates this capacious space of subterfuge, one where refusal, acceptance, and lying can appear and disappear at will, on command. Hence, from silence to stealth and somewhere in between, the sleeper cell affords a logic that deciphers not just Bartleby's zone of indiscernibility, but the machinations of "shy Trump" voters over the course of the presidential race. The dormant posturing in these late-deciding Trump voters was awakened when it mattered. Interestingly, we attend to their dissidence differently under this guise—the sleeper cell—recognizing that the inconspicuous can be equally inimical when pushed.

Glimpses of this sleeper cell theory emerge in the ideas of political scientists Samara Klar, Yanna Krupnikov, and Elizabeth Connors. They had this to say on the radical politics of "shy Trump" voters:

The challenge here is that people refuse to answer survey questions in a variety of ways. Hiding your views need not mean lying. It could mean saying that you're undecided or simply not taking the poll at all. Right now, the data don't tell us definitively what happened.¹⁴

Notwithstanding the data, "shy Trump" voters' actions were less double-dealing than *preferring not to* engage in politics as usual. Again, their sly gestures aren't exactly flagrant lies or, alternately, refusals to concede to political affiliation. Echoing Deleuze, "shy Trump" voters scheme within a supposed sphere of indecision—they'll get to polling and voting, just not according to your

liking or within the prescribed time. Navigating this zone of indiscernibility as a sleeper cell results in likely Trump voters going undercover, hiding as undecided voters or would-be Independents in order to *shy* away from partisan politics.¹⁵ Read this way, what we have on our hands is a new type of *turncoat*, one that hides in plain sight as they deflect—as opposed to desert—party lines, only to return back to the fold *when it counts*. This mode of political angling is not new for Republicans: following the 2008 presidential election, political analyst Sasha Issenberg scoured election data to reveal a niche of voters who communicate to pollsters their support for Obama “but ended up backing McCain” when it came to voting.¹⁶

A large part of this surreptitious behavior has been aided by American elections migrating to cyberspace—a terrain where computers count votes and cloud servers transmit, store, and share data of registered voters.¹⁷ Polling has also embraced network technology, with the Internet giving voters the opportunity for a Bartleby-like posture towards polling, refusing to politically engage until beckoned. And even when responding to pollsters, akin to Bartleby, “shy Trump” supporters still communicated in unclear terms. This revelation finds support in the USC Dornsife/*Los Angeles Times* poll. Although this online forecast saw Trump coming out on top, the data uncovered a recalcitrance among “shy Trump” voters coupled with private embarrassment. A response of this nature doesn’t necessarily trouble the Bartleby logic, but it introduces an affective agenda to Bartleby’s feigned indeterminacy. Consistent with this, from this online poll, David Lauter noted “Trump voters were notably less comfortable about telling a telephone pollster about their vote.”¹⁸ This affective artifice mirrors how Bartleby, under every utterance, had consigned his fate without explicitly revealing it—wading, instead, in a lexical ambivalence. On par with late-deciding Trump voters, the Internet has afforded the context to be “shy” or to forego the discomfort of white lies for what Krishna calls “a feeling of anonymity.”¹⁹

2. Sousveillance as Care

“Shy Trump” voters’ deft recovery highlights a need to reassess the institution of polling as a means of surveillance. As the monitoring of citizens by an (appointed) authority figure, polling is typically seen as a form of surveillance. Antithetical to authoritarian forms of monitoring from above is where we find *sousveillance*—the *sous* denoting a gaze from “below,” or, in relation to surveillance, a watching “up” of authority

(or even fellow citizens, although in the context of social media networks, peer-to-peer watching has been termed co-veillance). Such acts of monitoring from below approximate the polling charades of “shy Trump” voters insofar as they modulated their behavior in anticipation of the backlash that comes with outward allegiance to Trump. Achieving this behavior shift through sousveillance saw “shy Trump” voters enact a wily form of resistance by appearing to oblige the surveillance apparatus—embracing tactics of monitoring, watching—all the while providing input that critiques, misleads or dismantles apparatuses of control. Indeed, for “shy Trump” voters, toppling surveillance structures became a matter of using dissident input that flatters in order to misdirect.

Inherent in this act of flattery is a *stasis* constituted in and through polling. If we understand stasis as a type of turmoil plagued by inactivity, then, generally speaking, polling sets out to steer the volatility of politics (and the polis) by mining for predictable outcomes. However, “shy Trump” voters rendered the predictable as improbable by leaving pollsters beholden to a false sense of stability. In Bartleby’s each and every perfunctory remark—*I prefer not to*—he extended a false sense of possibility, such that his proprietor held out hope, questioning and engaging the tight-lipped clerk even after every rebuff. Sousveillance dangles a similar carrot in submitting to (or watching) authority, inverting the panopticon to surveil the surveiller. Again, these endeavors of undersight have grown thanks to cyberspace and the transition of polling to online platforms. Reckoning with this exodus and concurrent inversion means we must also grapple with the fact that practitioners of sousveillance appropriate technological tools—high-speed wireless networks, wearable-computing devices, and social media apps—in order to not just gaze from below, but to introduce a stasis in the machinations of the gaze from above.

In the optics of “shy Trump” voters an upward gaze from the low place of silence colluded with the low *lying* place of stealth, doubly undermining the “high” status of polling in society.²⁰ While these gestures of sousveillance present a retort to Foucault’s disciplinary societies and Deleuze’s subsequent societies of control, I prefer to regard and read “shy Trump” voters as invoking a curatorial *care for self*, a mode of governance and sociality that reconfigures the discipline-control matrix on personal terms.

Articulated by Foucault in his lectures at the Collège de France in 1982, the "care of oneself" was a way of self-writing that was not entirely in the service of knowing others and the world but of knowing oneself.²¹ Hence, pollsters, politicians, and partisan lines were secondary to developing self-knowledge. Instead, the care required to know oneself is grounded in the meditative "exercise of personal writing," which aims to shape a new self by collating what one has heard or read.²² Self-writing concatenates the many "voices" we access into one voice—the self.²³ This chorus of voices parallels with the immeasurable and unquantifiable scale of cyberspace: How does one enact self-care amid such a deluge of data culled through the watchful eye of institutions peering from above? While "shy Trump" voters subversively participated in polls—submitting themselves as false data—let us not forget that sousveillance does not only entail watching authority from below or from a place of efficacy, nor does it always result in the toppling of the surveillance apparatus. It may, however, garble the surveillance apparatus. In fact, if we take the extrajudicial killing of American citizens at the hand of the police, we can see just how futile turning the camera on authorities in hopes of wresting justice can be. If self-care is our goal here, then, following Foucault, it may not be in our best interests to move in concert with "shy Trump" voters, whose way of self-writing was about knowing oneself, let alone in a manner truly inattentive to others.

3. Watching You Watching Me

On the other hand, Hasan Elahi's project, *Tracking Transience* (2003), might be of help in articulating a self-care that navigates the watchful eye of both authorities and the streams of data circling and controlling our existence, and on Elahi's own terms. Elahi does draw somewhat from "shy Trump" voters, willingly submitting to the surveillance apparatus, yet he goes about it in a way that is not wrought with subterfuge. In *Tracking Transience*, Elahi, a Bangladeshi-born interdisciplinary artist, stages an ongoing digital performance in which he creates an honest, round-the-clock document of his life. There are reasons for this: an FBI tip in 2002 wrongly identified Elahi as a terrorist stockpiling explosives in a storage unit in Tampa, Florida; that same year, after a flight from Amsterdam, Elahi, a naturalized American, was detained at the airport, placed under investigation for six months, and mandated to complete multiple hour-long interrogations and nine separate polygraphs. Elahi was eventually cleared of suspicion and removed from the terrorist watch list. Even so, Elahi became wary of future runs-in with the FBI and took precaution

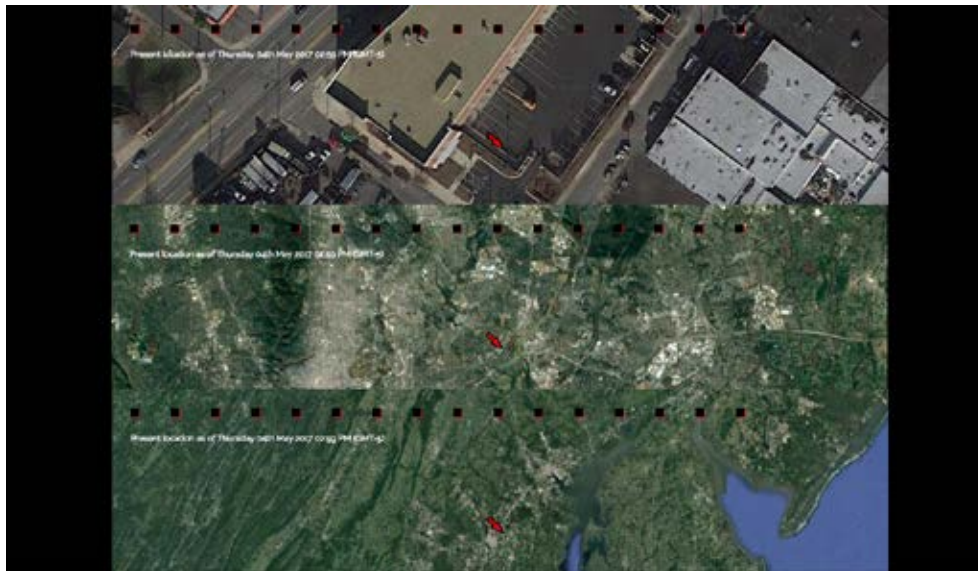
by divulging his every waking moment to the authorities. Initially, Elahi called the FBI to regularly alert them of his pending flights and itinerary; these calls turned into emails that gradually "got longer and longer and longer with pictures, with travel tips."²⁴ Then Elahi made a website—*Tracking Transience*. It's not clear if Elahi was tired from penning elaborate emails, but the website—an amalgamation of images detailing the artist's whereabouts—was engineered to save time and resources for the FBI.²⁵

As of July, 2014, Elahi had curated roughly 70,000 photos into the most inane categories: toilet bowls (all shot in bird's eye view); meals on flights; and green and white road signs, just to name a few. This catalogue of images may have now reached over 100,000. Thanks to developments in machine identification, much of the backend categorical sorting is handled by some code Elahi wrote—all he needs to do is point and shoot on his iPhone. Each image, however, is riddled with anonymity, with Elahi opting to document his existence as if it could be anyone else. With the aid of GPS tracking, Elahi feeds the *Tracking Transience* platform with Google Maps imagery of his location, which allows viewers to scale back the layers of anonymity. Further verification of all this sousveillance activity comes via an independent third-party: Elahi's bank. Every purchase by Elahi find its way onto this digitized behemoth of media, with his comings and goings corroborated by his bank transactions.

These efforts of sousveillance became—and continue to be—source material for *Tracking Transience*, which reads as a Foucauldian form of (digital) self-writing playing out not just as a "care of the self" but, more importantly, a "care of the data."²⁶ The latter concept, fleshed out in media and cyberculture theorists Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker's *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (2007), considers two realities: (i) the rise of cybernetics within biological and computer networks has seen the body read *as data*; and (ii) classical medicine has failed to care for and cure the body. Addressing this, Galloway and Thacker establish a through line in *The Exploit* from care (*curare*), to cure (*cura*), and then to curation: "one must curate that which eludes the cure."²⁷ The "that" eluding cure here is the fleshy body—now impervious to medicine—that, for all intents and purposes, moves as a datafied, technological entity. From the looks of *Tracking Transience*, Elahi has latched onto this through line as he carefully curates his body into "informatic patterns [of data] on the screen" for the intelligence agencies to monitor at



Screenshot of various surveilled tacos via Hasan Elahi's *Tracking Transience v2.2* website. Courtesy of the artist.



Screenshots via *Tracking Transience v2.2* website of Hasan Elahi's location on Thursday, May 4, 2017 at 2:59PM (GMT -5). Satellite images from Google Maps show the artist's location at various altitudes. Courtesy of the artist.

their discretion.²⁸ The fact that the Department of Homeland Security, National Security Agency, and the CIA, among others, continue to frequent his *Tracking Transience* website speaks to the incurability of his body—the supposed terroristic leanings he cannot rid himself of.

Elahi's elaborate acts of self-watching or turning the camera on himself comes out of a long tradition of sousveillance-based art. But unlike Vito Acconci, Sophie Calle, Laurie Long, and Jill Magid, among others, who have dabbled in sousveillance, Elahi moves altogether differently in that he doesn't identify with or play the detective.²⁹ Long treated her dating life as a "spy mission" in *The Dating Surveillance Project* (1998);

Acconci randomly selected and stalked passersby in *Following Piece* (1969); Calle followed a man throughout his travels in Venice in *Suite Vénitienne* (1980); and Majid used letters and video to flirt with the Merseyside Police and Liverpool City Council in *Evidence Locker* (2004). Of the many artists who dared to surveil, Magid is worth considering further, as *Evidence Locker* provides a generative foil to unpack *Tracking Transience* and the stakes of care in sousveillance.

In the American conceptual artist's *Evidence Locker*, Magid pens thirty-one love letters to the police in order to gain access to CCTV footage of her travels around Liverpool. The missives detail the day's events in a decidedly oblique, non-linear fashion, with the recipient



Hasan Elahi, *Tracking Transience: Security & Comfort V4.0*, 2012, detail. Photograph by: Larry Qualls. Courtesy of the artist and Larry Qualls Archive.

equally elusive (Magid addresses the police officer on duty in some instances, the camera in others). Letter #15, however, is telling: On February 12, 2004, Magid recounts to the Merseyside Police an incident where three young men accosted her—a failed purse snatch. To the artist's dismay, the men were later apprehended. Be that as it may, Magid's exchange while filing the police report highlights the shortcomings of loving the surveiller: the officer doctored Magid's words even when the artist admitted she could not "recall" the entire event or "which arm the bag had been on." It's unclear what became of the three young men.

Film theorist Patricia Pister lauded *Evidence Locker* for its "affective dimensions to an otherwise impersonal mechanism" and for exploring the "disruptive advantage of surveillance systems by showing their non-compressibility on an affective level."³⁰ Granted, Magid kept on penning her *billets-doux* after that run-in with the police—a move that speaks to non-compressibility: her hokey letters, as Pister argues, did not "break" or "bend" the circuits of the surveillance apparatus.³¹ Rather,

when the surveillance system did rear its hydra-like head, Magid's affective charm was *nihil ad rem*.³² *Evidence Locker* finds Magid bending over backwards to gather its CCTV footage, as well as being bent out of shape and seemingly flustered by the unscrupulous police report (unless it was all a performance for the reader). Circuit breakers, for Deleuze, were entities that "create vacuoles of noncommunication...so we can elude control."³³ Along these lines, did Magid elude control or give into it? It seems like the latter. We can read her continued correspondence with her lovers—the camera, police officers—after that fifteenth letter as acquiescing to the surveillance apparatus. If that is the case, how do we then make sense of her acts of sousveillance within paradigms of subterfuge and self-care? Is she really trying to compromise the top-down, authoritarian glare of the security state? And is her "care of oneself" an honest parsing of many voices to know the self?

Sousveillance efforts that pander to the surveillance system have drawn the ire of the Surveillance Camera Players (SCP), a group of artists who unconditionally oppose installation and use of video surveillance in public places. Not surprisingly, the SCP roundly lambasted Magid for playing detective, fetishizing technology, and aiding and abetting "a [surveillance] system that routinely harasses, arrests and even murders immigrants, poor people and native-born Blacks."³⁴ For SCP, escapades like *Evidence Locker* "produce no critical response to [surveillance]."³⁵ Instead, Magid seems to simplify the fraught relations between surveillance, criminalization, and justice: the thirty-one love letters and videos that comprise *Evidence Locker* insinuate that we might all benefit from pen-pal relations with Big Brother. However, surveillance never writes back, let alone in a complementary, effusive tone. Displays of affect are increasingly becoming a pernicious gesture before surveillance systems as machine-learning algorithms attached to Facebook work to not only identify suicidal users and link them to "commercial offers for mental health services, but [also] single them out in their perceived vulnerability for intrusive, deceptive, and/or manipulative marketing techniques."³⁶ Even beyond screen-mediated surveillance, the strategic use of affect failed black mental health therapist Charles Kinsey as he lay in the middle of the street soothing Arnaldo Rios, his client with autism. His pleadings to a police officer did not bend the system—he was shot. The reason: a pathetic "I don't know."

4. (Non)communicative Bodies

Contrary to *Evidence Locker*, Elahi's initial emails—somewhat akin to Magid's letters—were abandoned to create what, in form and function, register as the “noncommunicative vacuoles” that typify the circuit breaker. In point, rather than feed the surveillance apparatus with his every waking move, Elahi submits his own scrambled sousveillance data to a server that curates his online self into a truly rhizomatic complexity. Elahi is everywhere and nowhere at once. Moving in such a way finds *Tracking Transience* mirroring (without the guilt) an Abagnalian “catch me if you can.” Moreover, we never see Elahi himself in any of the images that populate his archive of sousveillance. Even the date of each image is omitted, with Elahi every so often revealing the day and month—never the year. Despite all this hacktivism on Elahi's part, like *Evidence Locker*, it is worth considering whether the “creative noncommunication” of *Tracking Transience* “eludes control,” as Deleuze originally articulated. I believe it does. After all, Elahi's embrace of digital technology, no doubt, comes with a politics of resisting control, but that politics is also an *ur*-technology of social media, undermining the possibility of fluid communication. From its backdoor workings to even its heterogeneous visual presentation, this makes *Tracking Transience* a technological riddle that few might have the patience to decipher.

It would be more apt to consider Elahi's “creative noncommunication” along the lines of what Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson call the “surveillant assemblage,” which is a body of a “distinctly hybrid composition.”³⁷ The human body as this “surveillant assemblage” is first “broken down by being abstracted from its territorial setting” and “then reassembled in different settings through a series of data flows. The result is a decorporealized body. A ‘data double’ of pure virtuality.”³⁸ *Tracking Transience* reconfigures the body-as-data by engaging in a digital discrimination (of care) that circumscribes Elahi into categories—tacos, for example—that are hardly pejorative. Instead, this data doubling mitigates Elahi's surveilled and criminalized body in ways that parody and scrutinize the authoritarian gaze. Key here is that much of this mitigation is achieved in the way Elahi consciously curates his online life in ways that are indirect, opting instead to capture “images... that are of empty, desolate, and at times outright depressing surroundings.”³⁹ By evacuating pictures of his fleshy body while leaving its datafied trace, Elahi evinces a “care of the data” that is cognizant of how online, networked media and culture, in its hunger for content, will not hesitate in cannibal-



Personality profile conducted by Knozen of over 4,000 voters likely to side with Trump. The not-so-surprising finding is that Trump voters are hardly shy. This doesn't discredit the “shy Trump” phenomenon: their organized and outgoing qualities suggest such calculated subterfuge to be plausible. Courtesy of Knozen and National Review.

izing his offline, corporeal self, reducing him to the rank of criminal. Again, Elahi shot these images “really anonymously to the point where it could be anyone.”⁴⁰ Such a horizontal move situates *Tracking Transience* as those constituent parts that welcome a “fractured rhizomatic crisscrossing of the gaze such that no major population groups stand irrefutably above or outside of the surveillant assemblage.”⁴¹

These latter points are crucial since Elahi was *once* a suspected terrorist. Cleared of his charges, it's worth asking: Why venture into sousveillance, further fracturing a body already burdened with hierarchies of surveillance? The longevity of *Tracking Transience* distinguishes itself in several ways from Magid's continued letter-writing after the apparent fallout with authorities. For one, Elahi isn't willingly playing coquettish detective; government agencies still stalk Elahi's site, checking in, from time to time, on the globetrotting artist. On these grounds, Elahi is *still* conceivably on the run, one erroneous tip away from being hauled back in for more questioning. As such, *Tracking Transience* finds Elahi flipping the script: He wants *us*—if we choose to navigate his unfriendly, almost impenetrable interface—to loosely play “detective,” to piece together these images emptied of all but his extreme approach to (digital) self-care. Though this act of curation (or care) exists as a somewhat convoluted aggregate of data, it is telling that Elahi has not been detained at an airport



Jill Magid, Trust, 2004. From *Evidence Locker*, DVD, edited CCTV footage, and audio.



Jill Magid, Final Tour, 2004. From *Evidence Locker*, edited CCTV footage, and audio.

since the fated day of June 19, 2002, when he was grilled by the FBI. To decriminalize himself, Elahi overloaded the surveillance system, an idea that draws from media theorist Matthew Fuller's strategies of resistance in technoculture.⁴² Elahi's resistance is one of self-writing in excess that produces not just a flourishing online self, but a paradoxical nourishing of his offline body.⁴³ Data caring for self—and vice-versa.

5. An Enduring Phenomenon

The mode of surveillance shown by "shy Trump" voters deserves study not least in the way disobedience leveraged some type of equity in a Trump presidency. Now in the White House, it is doubtful that Trump will bring these sleeper-cell voters into the fold. Indeed, little more than a year into his presidency, white evangelical women who voted for Trump still opt to exist in anonymity. Though these women continue to back Trump despite his marital infidelity, they report not only feeling "embarrassed" but also are reduced to meeting "in secret" or online in private Facebook groups for fear

of "reprisal in the workplace."⁴⁴ All this points to the enduring nature of the "shy Trump" phenomenon. Like Bartleby, "shy Trump" voters remain mute, marginal, and nonplussed towards political wrangling. Unlike Bartleby, though, "shy Trump" voters act in ways that reveal somewhat incipient socio-cultural modes of political engagement. From the cadre of "shy Trump" voters, we see how Bartleby's "zone of indiscernibility" fostered a radical form of self-care whereby individuals attended to the self as an indiscriminate body of data within a larger polling dataset. This shift in caring for the self is what allows "shy Trump" voters and Elahi—the true proto-caretaker in this digital paradox—to hide in plain sight, reappearing and disappearing at will, all the while unveiling how surveillance apparatuses can be subverted by performing a digital self-care that allows "a feeling of anonymity." Care in this way shows how curatorial practices might contend with these contemporary modes of being that exist via "social media and cell phone usage, or by way of digital information databases and data aggregators."⁴⁵

All this points to a contemporary moment where the self is increasingly governed by data. This datafication of sociality promises a complicated sousveillance that is itself under the watchful eye of ideological and repressive state apparatuses. As these communication technologies and networked cultures continue to proliferate, Elahi and "shy Trump" voters offer up deft data-driven ways for "post-Panoptical subjects [to] reliably watch over themselves."⁴⁶ Cognizant of data politics, "shy Trump" voters and Elahi employ tools of realpolitik, revealing that "data represent thinking, feeling, active subjects within digital systems" that are arresting the ontological tug-of-war in datafication.⁴⁷ Not that it isn't cathartic, but lamenting with these systems of surveillance comes up short. If we are to take a page from their respective books, the Bartleby-like personas of Elahi and timid Trump adherents typify the power and politics of the unannounced, surreptitiously nestling themselves within veillance and data culture in ways we are only beginning to understand.

Notes

1 John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs About How Government Should Work*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 154.

2 Tony Elliot. 2017. "Donald Trump: The People's President." *Eagle Rising*, 26.1.2017. <https://eaglerising.com/40426/donald-trump-the-peoples-president>.

3 Steven Shepard. "Poll: 'Shy Trump' voters are a mirage." *POLITICO*, November 3, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/poll-shy-voters-trump-230667>.

4 Jonathan Vankin. 2016. "2016 Exit Polls vs. Actual Results: Here's What May Have Happened." *Heavy*. Accessed 16.11.2016. <http://heavy.com/news/2016/11/2016-exit-polls-did-hillary-clinton-win-presidential-election-voter-fraud-donald-trump-lose-rigged>.

5 The "red shift" is a growing pattern in polling data, including pre-election and exit polls, where official vote counts tend to favor Republican candidates or those that are to the right of their opponent. In *CODE RED: Computerized Election Theft and the New American Century* (2014), political survey analyst Jonathan Simon disinters 15 years' worth of polling data to trace the emergence of this "red shift," a phenomenon that emerged once the 2002 Help America Vote Act passed and computerized voting took effect in the United States. Simon coined this phrase after George W. Bush's re-election over John Kerry, when an overwhelming majority of voter counts came out far more favorable for Bush. It isn't limited to Democrat-Republic contest though; Simon argues that the same directional shift emerged in 2016 primaries for Hillary, a candidate more right of her opponent, Bernie Sanders. That is, voter counts were more favorable for Clinton than exit polls, which had tipped Sanders for the win in several primaries.

6 Tamás Bodor, "The issue of timing and opinion congruity in spiral of silence research: Why does research suggest limited empirical support for the theory?" *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 24, no. 3, 2012, p. 269.

7 Courtney Kennedy et al. "An Evaluation of 2016 Election Polls in the U.S." *American Association for Public Opinion Research*. Accessed 4.4.2017. <https://www.aapor.org/Education-Resources/Reports/An-Evaluation-of-2016-Election-Polls-in-the-U-S.aspx>.

8 See Elizabeth Connors, Samara Klar, and Yanna Krupnikov. "There may have been shy Trump supporters after all." *Washington Post*. Accessed 12.11.2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/11/12/there-may-have-been-shy-trump-supporters-after-all/>; Aradhna Krishna, "Voter embarrassment about trump support may have messed up poll predictions." *Scientific American*. Accessed 11.11.2016. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/voter-embarrassment-about-trump-support-may-have-messed-up-poll-predictions/>; Cameron Easley, "Yes, there are shy trump voters. No, they won't swing the election." *Morning Consult*. Accessed 3.11.2016. <https://morningconsult.com/2016/11/03/yes-shy-trump-voters-no-wont-swing-election>.

9 Krishna, "Voter embarrassment."

10 Ibid.

11 Michel Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, The New Press, New York, 1997, p. 146.

12 Ibid., p. 145.

13 Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, The Formula," in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, Verso, London, 1998, p. 71.

14 Connors, Klar, and Krupnikov, "shy Trump supporters."

15 See Samara Klar and Yanna Krupnikov, *Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2016.

16 Sasha Issenberg, *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns*, Crown Publishing Group, New York, 2012, p. 296.

17 See Jonathan D. Simon, *CODE RED: Computerized Election Theft and the New American Century*, 5th ed., CreateSpace, 2016.

18 David Lauter. "The USC/L.A. Times poll saw what other surveys missed: A wave of Trump support," *Los Angeles Times*. Accessed 8.11.2016. <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-usc-latimes-poll-20161108-story.html>.

19 Krishna, "Voter Embarrassment."

20 The history of polling in the US throws into question why we even value the institution of polling itself. Take *The Literary Digest*, a weekly magazine that specialized in delivering fairly reliable presidential straw polls from 1916 to 1932. Its 1936 prediction that Governor Alfred Landon would win the presidential election was wildly off, with Franklin Delano Roosevelt re-elected by a landslide. The key difference in 1936 was the magazine's move to poll beyond their readership—a voting bloc that could afford a subscription to a weekly. By polling outside their readership, their data of financially secure readers collided with the rampant poverty of the Great Depression. Rookie error or not, this early snafu serves as a premonition of sorts for the limitations of polling.

21 See Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–82*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2005, pp. 1-24.

22 In his March 1982 lectures, Foucault references the *hupomnēmata*, a Grecian notebook or journal that also doubles as a practice where one jots down ideas, heard or read, to aid later recall. Foucault indicates that these "memory exercises" are chiefly of "use to oneself" but it "may be of use to others." This emphasis on the teleological end point links the *hupomnēmata*—or this practice of note taking—to *epimeleia heautou* or the

"care of oneself." To this point, Foucault states: "you see here a practice in which reading, writing, taking notes for oneself, correspondence, sending treatises, etcetera, together make up a very important activity in the care of oneself and the care of others." Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 11, 360, 362; Michel Foucault, "Self Writing," *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, The New Press, New York, 1997, p. 213.

23 Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 8; Foucault, "Self Writing," p. 214.

24 Hasan Elahi, "FBI, here I am!" (lecture presented at TEDGlobal 2011, Edinburgh, Scotland, July 11-15, 2011).

25 Ibid.

26 Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit*, U of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2007, p. 107.

27 Ibid., p. 106.

28 Ibid., p. 107.

29 Surveillance Camera Players. "Why we refuse to 'play detective'." NotBored.org. Accessed 12.11.2002. <http://www.notbored.org/playing-detective.html>.

30 Patricia Pister, "Art as Circuit Breaker: Surveillance Screens and Powers of Affect," in *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics*, eds. Marta Zarzycka and Bettina Papenburg, I.B. Tauris, New York, 2013, pp. 208-209.

31 Ibid, p. 209.

32 Ibid.

33 Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," in *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995, p. 175.

34 Surveillance Camera Players. "Nuovo lets Jill Magid slip inside." NotBored.org. October 9, 2007, <http://www.notbored.org/nuovo-review.html>.

35 Ibid.

36 Jenny L. Davis. "Here to Help." *Real Life*. Accessed 4.5.2017. <http://reallifemag.com/here-to-help>.

37 Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, "The surveillant assemblage," *British Journal of Sociology* 51, 2000, p. 611.

38 Ibid.

39 Hasan Elahi. "I share everything. Or do I?." *Ideas.Ted.Com*. Accessed 1.7.2014. <http://ideas.ted.com/i-share-everything-or-do-i>.

40 Elahi, "FBI, here I am!"

41 Haggerty and Ericson, "The surveillant assemblage," 618.

42 See Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2005.

43 See Corinne Weisgerber and Shannan H. Butler, "Curating the Soul: Foucault's concept of *hupomnemata* and the digital technology of self-care," *Information*,

Communication & Society 19, 2016, pp. 1340-1355.

44 Michael Tackett, "White evangelical women, core supporters of trump, begin tiptoeing away." *New York Times*. Accessed 11.03.2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/11/us/politics/white-evangelical-women-trump.html>.

45 Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2015, p. 39.

46 Roy Boyne, "Post-Panopticism," *Economy and Society* 29, 2000, p. 299.

47 Davis, "Here to Help."

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Bartleby; or, The Formula

Gilles Deleuze

“Bartleby” is neither a metaphor for the writer nor the symbol of any thing whatsoever. It is a violently comical text, and the comical is always literal. It is like the novellas of Kleist, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, or Beckett, with which it forms a subterranean and prestigious lineage. It means only what it says, literally. And what it says and repeats is *I would prefer not to*. This is the formula of its glory, which every loving reader repeats in turn. A gaunt and pallid man has uttered the formula that drives everyone crazy. But in what does the literality of the formula consist?

We immediately notice a certain mannerism, a certain solemnity: *prefer* is rarely employed in this sense, and neither Bartleby’s boss, the attorney, nor his clerks normally use it (“queer word, I never use it myself”). The usual formula would instead be *I had rather not*. But the strangeness of the formula goes beyond the word itself. Certainly it is grammatically correct, syntactically correct, but its abrupt termination, NOT TO, which leaves what it rejects undetermined, confers upon it the character of a radical, a kind of limit-function. Its repetition and its insistence render it all the more unusual, entirely so. Murmured in a soft, flat, and patient voice, it attains to the irremissible, by forming an inarticulate block, a single breath. In all these respects, it has the same force, the same role as an *agrammatical* formula.

Linguists have rigorously analyzed what is called “agrammaticality.” A number of very intense examples can be found in the work of the American poet e. e. cummings—for instance, “he danced his did,” as if one said in French *il dansa son mit* (“he danced his began”) instead of *il se mit à danser* (“he began to dance”). Nicolas Ruwet explains that this presupposes a series of ordinary grammatical variables, which would have an agrammatical formula as their limit: *he danced his did* would be a limit of the normal expressions *he did his dance, he danced his dance, he danced what he did*..¹ This would no longer be a port manteau word, like those found in Lewis Carroll, but a “portman-teau construction,” a breath-construction, a limit or tensor. Perhaps it would be better to take an example from the French, in a practical situation: someone who wants to hang something on a wall and holds a certain number of nails in his hand exclaims, J’EN AI UN DE PAS ASSEZ (“I have one not enough”). This is an agrammatical formula that stands as the limit of a series of correct expressions: *J’en ai de trop, Je n’en ai pas assez, Il m’en manque un*..“I have too many,” “I don’t have enough,” “I am one short” ...). Would not Bartleby’s formula be of this type, at once a stereotypy of Bartleby’s and a highly poetic expression of Melville’s, the limit of a series such as “I would prefer this. I would prefer not to do that. That is not what I would prefer ..”? Despite its quite normal construction, it has an anomalous ring to it.

I WOULD PREFER NOT TO. The formula has several variants. Sometimes it abandons the conditional and becomes more curt: I PREFER NOT TO. Sometimes, as in its final occurrences, it seems to lose its mystery by being completed by an infinitive, and coupled with *to*: “I prefer to give no answer,” “I would prefer not to be a little reasonable,” “I would prefer not to take a clerkship,” “I would prefer to be doing something else” ... But even in these cases we sense the muted presence of the strange form that continues to haunt Bartleby’s language. He himself adds, “but I am not a particular case,” “there is nothing particular about me,” *I am not particular*, in order to indicate that whatever else might

be suggested to him would be yet another particularity falling under the ban of the great indeterminate formula, I PREFER NOT TO, which subsists once and for all and in all cases.

The formula occurs in ten principal circumstances, and in each case it may appear several times, whether it is repeated verbatim or with minor variations. Bartleby is a copyist in the attorney's office; he copies ceaselessly, "silently, palely, mechanically." The first instance takes place when the attorney tells him to proofread and collate the two clerks' copies: I WOULD PREFER NOT TO. The second, when the attorney tells Bartleby to come and reread his own copies. The third, when the attorney invites Bartleby to reread with him personally, tête à tête. The fourth, when the attorney wants to send him on an errand. The fifth, when he asks him to go into the next room. The sixth, when the attorney enters his study one Sunday afternoon and discovers that Bartleby has been sleeping there. The seventh, when the attorney satisfies himself by asking questions. The eighth, when Bartleby has stopped copying, has renounced all copying, and the attorney asks him to leave. The ninth, when the attorney makes a second attempt to get rid of him. The tenth, when Bartleby is forced out of the office, sits on the banister of the landing while the panic-stricken attorney proposes other, unexpected occupations to him (a clerkship in a dry goods store, bartender, bill collector, traveling companion to a young gentleman ...). The formula bourgeons and proliferates. At each occurrence, there is a stupor surrounding Bartleby, as if one had heard the Unspeakable or the Unstoppable. And there is Bartleby's silence, as if he had said every thing and exhausted language at the same time. With each instance, one has the impression that the madness is growing: not Bartleby's madness in "particular," but the madness around him, notably that of the attorney, who launches into strange propositions and even stranger behaviors.

Without a doubt, the formula is ravaging, devastating, and leaves nothing standing in its wake. Its contagious character is immediately evident: Bartleby "ties the tongues" of others. The queer words, *I would prefer*, steal their way into the language of the clerks and of the attorney himself ("So you have got the word, too"). But this contamination is not the essential point; the essential point is its effect on Bartleby: from the moment he says I WOULD PREFER NOT TO (collate), he is no longer *able* to copy either. And yet he will never say that he prefers not to (copy): he has simply passed beyond this stage. And doubtless he does not realize this immediately, since he continues copying until after the sixth instance. But when he does notice it, it seems obvious, like the delayed reaction that was already implied in the first statement of the formula: "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" he says to the attorney. The effect of the formula-block is not only to impugn what Bartleby prefers not to do, but also to render what he was doing impossible, what he was supposed to prefer to continue doing.

It has been noted that the formula, I prefer not to, is neither an affirmation nor a negation. Bartleby "does not refuse, but neither does he accept, he advances and then withdraws into this advance, barely exposing himself in a nimble retreat from speech."² The attorney would be relieved if Bartleby did not want to, but Bartleby does not refuse, he simply rejects a nonpreferred (the proofreading, the errands ...). And he does not accept either, he does not affirm a preference that would consist in continuing to copy, he simply posits its impossibility. In short, the formula that successively refuses every other act has already engulfed the act of copying, which it no longer even needs to refuse. The formula is devastating because it eliminates the preferable just as mercilessly as any nonpreferred. It not only abolishes the term it refers to, and that it rejects, but also abolishes the other term it seemed to preserve, and that becomes impossible. In fact, it renders them indistinct: it hollows out an ever expanding zone of

indiscernibility or in determination between some nonpreferred activities and a preferable activity. All particularity, all reference is abolished. The formula annihilates “copying,” the only reference in relation to which something might or might not be preferred. I would prefer nothing rather than something; not a will to nothingness, but the growth of a nothingness of the will. Bartleby has won the right to survive, that is, to remain immobile and upright before a blind wall. Pure patient passivity, as Blanchot would say. Being as being, and nothing more. He is urged to say yes or no. But if he said no (to collating, running errands ...), or if he said yes (to copying), he would quickly be defeated and judged useless, and would not survive. He can survive only by whirling in a suspense that keeps everyone at a distance. His means of survival is to prefer *not* to collate, but thereby also *not* to prefer copying. He had to refuse the former in order to render the latter impossible. The formula has two phases and continually recharges itself by passing again and again through the same states. This is why the attorney has the vertiginous impression, each time, that everything is starting over again from zero.

The formula at first seems like the bad translation of a foreign language. But once we understand it better, once we hear it more clearly, its splendor refutes this hypothesis. Perhaps it is the formula that carves out a kind of foreign language within language. It has been suggested that e. e. cummings's agrammaticalities can be considered as having issued from a dialect differing from Standard English, and whose rules of creation can be abstracted. The same goes for Bartleby: the rule would lie in this logic of negative preference, a negativism beyond all negation. But if it is true that the masterpieces of literature always form a kind of foreign language within the language in which they are written, what wind of madness, what psychotic breath thereby passes into language as a whole? Psychosis characteristically brings into play a *procedure* that treats an ordinary language, a standard language, in a manner that makes it “render” an original and unknown language, which would perhaps be a projection of God's language, and would carry off language as a whole. Procedures of this type appear in France in Roussel and Brisset, and in America in Wolfson. Is this not the schizophrenic vocation of American literature: to make the English language, by means of driftings, deviations, de-taxes or sur-taxes (as opposed to the standard syntax), slip in this manner? To introduce a bit of psychosis into English neurosis? To invent a new universality? If need be, other languages will be summoned into English in order to make it echo this divine language of storm and thunder. Melville invents a foreign language that runs beneath English and carries it off: it is the OUTLANDISH or Deterritorialized, the language of the Whale. Whence the interest of studies of *Moby-Dick* that are based on Numbers and Letters, and their cryptic meaning, to set free at least a skeleton of the inhuman or super human originary language.³ It is as if three operations were linked together: a certain treatment of language; the result of this treatment, which tends to constitute an original language within language; and the effect, which is to sweep up language in its entirety, sending it into flight, pushing it to its very limit in order to discover its Outside, silence or music. A great book is always the inverse of another book that could only be written in the soul, with silence and blood. This is the case not only with *Moby-Dick* but also with *Pierre*, in which Isabelle affects language with an incomprehensible murmur, a kind of *basso continuo* that carries the whole of language on the chords and tones of its guitar. And it is also the angelic or adamic Billy Budd, who suffers from a stuttering that denatures language but also gives rise to the musical and celestial Beyond of language as a whole. It is like the “persistent horrible twittering squeak” that muddles the resonance of words, while the sister is getting the violin ready to respond to Gregor. Bartleby also has an angelic and Adamic nature, but his case seems different because he has no general Procedure, such as stuttering, with which to treat language. He

makes do with a seemingly normal, brief Formula, at best a localized tick that crops up in certain circumstances. And yet the result and the effect are the same: to carve out a kind of foreign language within language, to make the whole confront silence, make it topple into silence. *Bartleby* announces the long silence, broken only by the music of poems, into which Melville will enter and from which, except for *Billy Budd*, he will never emerge.⁴ Bartleby himself had no other escape than to remain silent and withdraw behind his partition every time he uttered the formula, all the way up until his final silence in prison. After the formula there is nothing left to say: it functions as a procedure, overcoming its appearance of particularity.

The attorney himself concocts a theory explaining how Bartleby's formula ravages language as a whole. All language, he suggests, has references or assumptions. These are not exactly what language designates, but what permit it to designate. A word always presupposes other words that can replace it, complete it, or form alternatives with it: it is on this condition that language is distributed in such a way as to designate things, states of things and actions, according to a set of objective, explicit conventions. But perhaps there are also other implicit and subjective conventions, other types of reference or presupposition. In speaking, I do not simply indicate things and actions; I also commit acts that assure a relation with the interlocutor, in keeping with our respective situations: I command, I interrogate, I promise, I ask, I emit "speech acts." Speech acts are self-referential (I command by saying "I order you..."), while constative propositions refer to other things and other words. It is this double system of references that Bartleby ravages.

The formula I PREFER NOT TO excludes all alternatives, and devours what it claims to conserve no less than it distances itself from everything else. It implies that Bartleby stop copying, that is, that he stop reproducing words; it hollows out a zone of indetermination that renders words indistinguishable, that creates a vacuum within language [*langage*]. But it also stymies the speech acts that a boss uses to command, that a kind friend uses to ask questions or a man of faith to make promises. If Bartleby had refused, he could still be seen as a rebel or insurrectionary, and as such would still have a social role. But the formula stymies all speech acts, and at the same time, it makes Bartleby a pure outsider [*exclu*] to whom no social position can be attributed. This is what the attorney glimpses with dread: all his hopes of bringing Bartleby back to reason are dashed because they rest on a *logic of presuppositions* according to which an employer "expects" to be obeyed, or a kind friend listened to, whereas Bartleby has invented a new logic, a *logic of preference*, which is enough to undermine the presuppositions of language as a whole. As Mathieu Lindon shows, the formula "disconnects" words and things, words and actions, but also speech acts and words—it severs language from all reference, in accordance with Bartleby's absolute vocation, *to be a man without references*, someone who appears suddenly and then disappears, without reference to himself or anything else.⁵ This is why, despite its conventional appearance, the formula functions as a veritable agrammaticality.

Bartleby is the Bachelor, about whom Kafka said, "He has only as much ground as his two feet take up, only as much of a hold as his two hands encompass"—someone who falls asleep in the winter snow to freeze to death like a child, someone who does nothing but take walks, yet who could take them anywhere, without moving.⁶ Bartleby is the man without references, without possessions, without properties, without qualities, without particularities: he is too smooth for anyone to be able to hang any particularity on him. Without past or future, he is instantaneous. I PREFER NOT TO is Bartleby's chemical or alchemical formula, but one can read inversely I AM NOT

PARTICULAR as its indispensable complement. The entire nineteenth century will go through this search for the man without a name, regicide and parricide, the modern-day Ulysses ("I am No One"): the crushed and mechanized man of the great metropolises, but from which one expects, perhaps, the emergence of the Man of the Future or New World Man. And, in an identical messianism, we glimpse him, sometimes as a Proletarian, sometimes as an American. Musil's novel will also follow this quest, and will invent the new logic of which *The Man without Qualities* is both the thinker and the product.⁷ And though the derivation of Musil from Melville seems certain to us, it should be sought not in "Bartleby," but rather in *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities*. The incestuous couple Ulrich-Agathe is like the return of the Pierre-Isabelle couple; in both cases, the silent sister, unknown or forgotten, is not a substitute for the mother, but on the contrary the abolition of sexual difference as particularity, in favor of an androgynous relationship in which both Pierre and Ulrich are or become woman. In Bartleby's case, might not his relation with the attorney be equally mysterious, and in turn mark the possibility of a becoming, of a new man? Will Bartleby be able to conquer the place where he takes his walks?

Perhaps Bartleby is a madman, a lunatic or a psychotic ("an innate and incurable disorder" of the soul). But how can we know, if we do not take into account the anomalies of the attorney, who continues to behave in the most bizarre ways? The attorney had just received an important professional promotion. One will recall that President Schreber unleashed his own delirium only after receiving a promotion, as if this gave him the audacity to take the risk. But what is the attorney going to risk? He already has two scribes who, much like Kafka's assistants, are inverted doubles of each other, the one normal in the morning and drunk in the afternoon, the other in a perpetual state of indigestion in the morning but almost normal in the afternoon. Since he needs an extra scribe, he hires Bartleby after a brief conversation *without any references* because his pallid aspect seemed to indicate a constancy that could compensate for the irregularities of the two others. But on the first day he places Bartleby in a strange arrangement: Bartleby is to sit in the attorney's own office, next to some folding doors separating it from the clerk's office, between a window that faces the side of a neighboring building and a high screen, green as a prairie, as if it were important that Bartleby be able to hear, but without being seen. Whether this was a sudden inspiration on the attorney's part or an agreement reached during the short conversation, we will never know. But the fact is that, caught in this arrangement, the invisible Bartleby does an extraordinary amount of "mechanical" work. But when the attorney tries to make him leave his retreat, Bartleby emits his formula, and at this first occurrence, as with those that follow, the attorney finds himself disarmed, bewildered, stunned, thunderstruck, without response or reply. Bartleby stops copying altogether and remains on the premises, a fixture. We know to what extremes the attorney is forced to go in order to rid himself of Bartleby: he returns home, decides to relocate his office, then takes off for several days and hides out, avoiding the new tenant's complaints. What a strange flight, with the wandering attorney living in his rockaway ... From the initial arrangement to this irrepressible, Cain-like flight, everything is bizarre, and the attorney behaves like a madman. Murder fantasies and declarations of love for Bartleby alternate in his soul. What happened? Is it a case of shared madness, here again, another relationship between doubles, a nearly acknowledged homosexual relation ("yes, Bartleby ... I never feel so private as when I know you are here ... I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life ...")?⁸

One might imagine that hiring Bartleby was a kind of pact, as if the attorney, following his promotion, had decided to make this person, without objective references, a man

of confidence [*un homme de confiance*] who would owe everything to him. He wants to make him *his* man. The pact consists of the following: Bartleby will sit near his master and copy, listening to him but without being seen, like a night bird who cannot stand to be looked at. So there is no doubt that once the attorney wants to draw (without even doing it on purpose) Bartleby from behind his screen to correct the copies with the others, he breaks the pact. This is why Bartleby, once he “prefers not to” correct, is already unable to copy. Bartleby will expose himself to view even more than he is asked to, planted in the middle of the office, but he will no longer do any copying. The attorney has an obscure feeling about it, since he assumes that if Bartleby refuses to copy, it is because his vision is impaired. And in effect, exposed to view, Bartleby for his part no longer sees, no longer looks. He has acquired what was, in a certain fashion, already innate in him: the legendary infirmity, one-eyed and one-armed, which makes him an autochthon, someone who is born to and stays in a particular place, while the attorney necessarily fills the function of the traitor condemned to flight. Whenever the attorney invokes philanthropy, charity, or friendship, his protestations are shot through with an obscure guilt. In fact, it is the attorney who broke the arrangement he himself had organized, and from the debris Bartleby pulls a trait of expression, I PREFER NOT TO, which will proliferate around him and contaminate the others, sending the attorney fleeing. But it will also send language itself into flight, it will open up a zone of indetermination or indiscernibility in which neither words nor characters can be distinguished—the fleeing attorney and the immobile, petrified Bartleby. The attorney starts to vagabond while Bartleby remains tranquil, but it is precisely because he remains tranquil and immobile that Bartleby is treated like a vagabond.

Is there a relation of identification between the attorney and Bartleby? But what is this relation? In what direction does it move? Most often, an identification seems to bring into play three elements, which are able to interchange or permutate: a form, image, or representation, a portrait, a model; a subject (or at least a virtual subject); and the subject’s efforts to assume a form, to appropriate the image, to adapt itself to this image and the image to itself. It is a complex operation that passes through all of the adventures of resemblance, and that always risks falling into neurosis or turning into narcissism. A “mimetic rivalry,” as it is sometimes called. It mobilizes a paternal function in general: an image of the father par excellence, and the subject is a son, even if the determinations are interchangeable. The bildungsroman [*roman de formation*], or one could just as easily say the reference novel [*roman de reference*], provides numerous examples.

Certainly, many of Melville’s novels begin with images or portraits, and seem to tell the story of an upbringing under a paternal function: *Redburn*, for instance. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* begins with an image of the father, with a statue and a painting. Even *Moby Dick* begins by amassing information at the beginning in order to give the whale a form and sketch out its image, right down to the dark painting hanging in the inn. “Bartleby” is no exception to the rule. The two clerks are like paper images, symmetrical opposites, and the attorney fills the paternal function so well that one can hardly believe the story is taking place in New York. Everything starts off as in an English novel, in Dickens’s London. But in each case, something strange happens, something that blurs the image, marks it with an essential uncertainty, keeps the form from “taking,” but also undoes the subject, sets it adrift and abolishes any paternal function. It is only here that things begin to get interesting. The statue of the father gives way to his much more ambiguous portrait, and then to yet another portrait that could be of anybody or nobody. All referents are lost, and the formation [*formation*] of man gives way to a new, unknown element, to the mystery of a formless, nonhuman life, a *Squid*. Everything began à l’anglaise but continues à l’américaine, following an irresistible line of flight.

Ahab can say with good reason that he is fleeing from every where. The paternal function is dropped in favor of even more obscure and ambiguous forces. The subject loses its texture in favor of an infinitely proliferating patchwork: the American patchwork becomes the law of Melville's oeuvre, devoid of a center, of an upside down or right side up. It is as if the traits of expression escaped form, like the abstract lines of an unknown writing, or the furrows that twist from Ahab's brow to that of the Whale, or the "horrible contortions" of the flapping lanyards that pass through the fixed rigging and can easily drag a sailor into the sea, a subject into death.⁹ In *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, the disquieting smile of the unknown young man in the painting, which so resembles the father's, functions as a trait of expression that emancipates itself, and is just as capable of undoing resemblance as it is of making the subject vacillate. I PREFER NOT TO is also a trait expression that contaminates everything, escaping linguistic form and stripping the father of his exemplary speech, just as it strips the son of his ability to reproduce copy.

It is still a process of identification, but rather than following the adventures of the neurotic, it has now become psychotic. A little bit of schizophrenia escapes the neurosis of the Old World. We can bring together three distinctive characteristics. In the first place, the formless trait of expression is opposed to the image or to the expressed form. In the second place, there is no longer a subject that tries to conform to the image, and either succeeds or fails. Rather, a zone of indistinction, of indiscernibility, or of ambiguity seems to be established between two terms, as if they had reached the point immediately preceding their respective differentiation: not a similitude, but a slippage, an extreme proximity, an absolute contiguity; not a natural filiation, but an unnatural alliance. It is a "hyperborean," "arctic" zone. It is no longer a question of Mimesis, but of becoming. Ahab does not imitate the whale, he becomes Moby-Dick, he enters into the zone of proximity [*zone de voisinage*] where he can no longer be distinguished from Moby-Dick, and strikes himself in striking the whale. Moby-Dick is the "wall, shoved near" with which he merges. Redburn renounces the image of the father in favor of the ambiguous traits of the mysterious brother. Pierre does not imitate his father, but reaches the zone of proximity where he can no longer be distinguished from his half sister, Isabelle, and becomes woman. While neurosis flounders in the nets of maternal incest in order to identify more closely with the father, psychosis liberates incest with the sister as a becoming, a free identification of man and woman: in the same way Kleist emits atypical, almost animal traits of expression--stutterings, grindings, grimaces--that feed his passionate conversation with his sister. This is because, in the third place, psychosis pursues its dream of establishing a function of universal fraternity that no longer passes through the father, but is built on the ruins of the paternal function, a function that presupposes the dissolution of all images of the father, following an autonomous line of alliance or proximity that makes the woman a sister, and the other man, a brother, like the terrible "monkey-rope" uniting Ishmael and Queequeg as a married couple. These are the three characteristics of the American Dream, which together make up the new identification, the New World: the Trait, the Zone, and the Function.

We are in the process of melding together characters as different as Ahab and Bartleby. Yet does not everything instead set them in opposition to each other? Melvillian psychiatry constantly invokes two poles: *monomaniacs* and *hypochondriacs*, demons and angels, torturers and victims, the Swift and the Slow, the Thundering and the Petrified, the Unpunishable (beyond all punishment) and the Irresponsible (beyond all responsibility). What is Ahab doing when he lets loose his harpoons of fire and madness? He is breaking a pact. He is betraying the Whalers' Law, which says that any

healthy whale encountered must be hunted, without choosing one over another. But Ahab, thrown into his indiscernible becoming, makes a choice—he pursues his identification with Moby-Dick, putting his crew in mortal danger. This is the monstrous preference that Lieutenant Starbuck bitterly objects to, to the point where he even dreams of killing the treacherous captain. Choosing is the Promethean sin *par excellence*.¹⁰ This was the case with Kleist's Penthesilea, an Ahab-woman who, like her indiscernible double Achilles, had chosen her enemy, in defiance of the law of the Amazons forbidding the preference of one enemy over another. The priestess and the Amazons consider this a betrayal that madness sanctions in a cannibal identification. In his last novel, *Billy Budd*, Melville himself brings another monomaniacal demon into the picture with Claggart: the master-at-arms. We should have no illusions about Claggart's subordinate function: his is no more a case of psychological wickedness than Captain Ahab's. It is a case of metaphysical perversion that consists in choosing one's prey, preferring a chosen victim with a kind of love rather than observing the maritime law that requires him to apply the same discipline to everyone. This is what the narrator suggests when he recalls an ancient and mysterious theory, an expose of which is found in Sade: secondary, sensible Nature is governed by the Law (or laws), while *innately depraved beings* participate in a terrible supersensible Primary Nature, original and oceanic, which, knowing no Law, pursues its own irrational aim through them. Nothingness, Nothingness.¹¹ Ahab will break through the wall, even if there is nothing behind it, and will make nothingness the object of his will: "To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough."¹² Melville says that only the eye of a *prophet*, and not a psychologist, is capable of discerning or diagnosing such obscure beings as these creatures of the abyss, without being able to prevent their mad enterprise, the "mystery of iniquity" ...

We are now in a position to classify Melville's great characters. At one pole, there are those monomaniacs or demons who, driven by the will to nothingness, make a monstrous choice: Ahab, Claggart, Babo ... But at the other pole are those angels or saintly hypochondriacs, almost stupid, creatures of innocence and purity, stricken with a constitutive weakness but also with a strange beauty. Petrified by nature, they prefer ... no will at all, a nothingness of the will rather than a will to nothingness (hypochondriacal "negativism"). They can only survive by becoming stone, by denying the will and sanctifying themselves in this suspension.¹³ Such are Cereno, Billy Budd, and above all Bartleby. And although the two types are opposed in every way—the former innate traitors and the latter betrayed in their very essence; the former monstrous fathers who devour their children, the latter abandoned sons without fathers—they haunt one and the same world, forming alternations within it, just as Melville's writing, like Kleist's, alternates between stationary, fixed processes and mad-paced procedures: *style*, with its succession of catatonias and accelerations ... This is because both poles, both types of characters, Ahab and Bartleby, *belong to this Primary Nature*, they inhabit it, they constitute it. Everything sets them in opposition, and yet they are perhaps the same creature—primary, original, stubborn, seized from both sides, marked merely with a "plus" or a "minus" sign: Ahab and Bartleby. Or in Kleist, the terrible Penthesilea and the sweet little Catherine, the first beyond conscience, the second before conscience: she who chooses and she who does not choose, she who howls like a she-wolf and she who would prefer-not-to speak.¹⁴

There exists, finally, a third type of character in Melville, the one on the side of the Law, the guardian of the divine and human laws of secondary nature: the prophet. Captain Delano lacks the prophet's eye, but Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, Captain Vere in *Billy Budd*, and the attorney in *Bartleby* all have this power to "See": they are capable of grasping

and understanding, as much as is possible, the beings of Primary Nature, the great monomaniacal demons or the saintly innocents, and sometimes both. Yet they themselves are not lacking in ambiguity, each in his own way. Though they are able to see into the Primary Nature that so fascinates them, they are nonetheless representatives of secondary nature and its laws. They bear the paternal image—they seem like good fathers, benevolent fathers (or at least protective big brothers, as Ishmael is toward Queequeg). But they cannot ward off the demons, because the latter are too quick for the law, too surprising. Nor can they save the innocent, the irresponsible: they immolate them in the name of the Law, they make the sacrifice of Abraham. Behind their paternal mask, they have a kind of double identification: with the innocent, toward whom they feel a genuine love, but also with the demon, since they break their pact with the innocent they love, each in his own manner. They betray, then, but in a different way than does Ahab or Claggart: the latter broke the law, whereas Vere or the attorney, in the name of the law, break an implicit and almost unavowable agreement (even Ishmael seems to turn away from his savage brother Queequeg). They continue to cherish the innocent they have condemned: Captain Vere will die muttering the name of Billy Budd, and the final words of the attorney's narrative will be, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" which does not indicate a connection, but rather an alternative in which he has had to choose the all-too-human law over Bartleby. Torn between the two Natures, with all their contradictions, these characters are extremely important, but do not have the stature of the two others. Rather, they are Witnesses, narrators, interpreters. There is a problem that escapes this third type of character, a very important problem that is settled between the other two.

The Confidence-Man (much as one says the *Medicine-Man*) is sprinkled with Melville's reflections on the novel. The first of these reflections consists in claiming the rights of a superior irrationalism (chapter 14). Why should the novelist believe he is obligated to explain the behavior of his characters, and to supply them with reasons, whereas life for its part never explains anything and leaves in its creatures so many indeterminate, obscure, indiscernible zones that defy any attempt at clarification? It is life that justifies; it has no need of being justified. The English novel, and even more so the French novel, feels the need to rationalize, even if only in the final pages, and psychology is no doubt the last form of rationalism: the Western reader awaits the final word. In this regard, psychoanalysis has revived the claims of reason. But even if it has hardly spared the great novelistic works, no great novelist contemporaneous with psychoanalysis has taken much interest in it. The founding act of the American novel, like that of the Russian novel, was to take the novel far from the order of reasons, and to give birth to characters who exist in nothingness, survive only in the void, defy logic and psychology and keep their mystery until the end. Even their soul, says Melville, is "an immense and terrifying void," and Ahab's body is an "empty shell." If they have a formula, it is certainly not explanatory. I PREFER NOT TO remains just as much a cabalistic formula as that of the *Underground Man*, who can not keep two and two from making four, but who will not RESIGN himself to it either (*he prefers that two and two not make four*). What counts for a great novelist—Melville, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, or Musil—is that things remain enigmatic yet nonarbitrary: in short, a new logic, definitely a logic, but one that grasps the innermost depths of life and death without leading us back to reason. The novelist has the eye of a prophet, not the gaze of a psychologist. For Melville, the three great categories of characters belong to this new logic, just as much as this logic belongs to them. Once it has reached that sought-after Zone, the hyperborean zone, far from the temperate regions, the novel, like life, needs no justification.¹⁵ And in truth, there is no such thing as reason; it exists only in bits and pieces. In *Billy Budd*, Melville defines monomaniacs as the Masters of reason,

which is why they are so difficult to surprise; but this is because theirs is a delirium of action, because they make use of reason, make it serve their own sovereign ends, which in truth are highly unreasonable. Hypochondriacs are the Outcasts of reason, without our being able to know if they have excluded themselves from it in order to obtain something reason can not give them--the indiscernible, the unnameable with which they will be able to merge. In the end, even prophets are only the Castaways of reason: if Vere, Ishmael, or the attorney clings so tightly to the debris of reason, whose integrity they try so hard to restore, it is because they have *seen* so much, and because what they have seen has marked them forever.

But a second remark by Melville (chapter 44) introduces an essential distinction between the characters in a novel. Melville says that we must above all avoid confusing true Originals with characters that are simply remarkable or singular, particular. This is because the particulars, who tend to be quite populous in a novel, have characteristics that determine their form, properties that make up their image; they are influenced by their milieu and by each other, so that their actions and reactions are governed by general laws, though in each case they retain a particular value. Similarly, the sentences they utter are their own, but they are nonetheless governed by the general laws of language. By contrast we do not even know if an original exists in an absolute sense, apart from the primordial God, and it is already something extraordinary when we encounter one. Melville admits that it is difficult to imagine how a novel might include several of them. Each original is a powerful, solitary Figure that exceeds any explicable form: it projects flamboyant traits of expression that mark the stubbornness of a thought without image, a question without response, an extreme and nonrational logic. Figures of life and knowledge, they know something inexpressible, live something unfathomable. They have nothing general about them, and are not particular--they escape knowledge, defy psychology. Even the words they utter surpass the general laws of language (presuppositions) as well as the simple particularities of speech, since they are like the vestiges or projections of a unique, original language [*langue*], and bring all of language [*langage*] to the limit of silence and music. There is nothing particular or general about Bartleby: he is an Original.

Originals are beings of Primary Nature, but they are inseparable from the world or from secondary nature, where they exert their effect: they reveal its emptiness, the imperfection of its laws, the mediocrity of particular creatures ... the world as masquerade (this is what Musil, for his part, will call "parallel action"). The role of prophets, who are not originals, is to be the only ones who can recognize the wake that originals leave in the world, and the unspeakable confusion and trouble they cause in it. The original, says Melville, is not subject to the influence of his milieu; on the contrary, he throws a livid white light on his surroundings, much like the light that "accompanies the beginning of things in Genesis." Originals are sometimes the immobile source of this light--like the foretopman high up on the mast, Billy Budd the bound, hanged man who "ascends" with the glimmering of the dawn, or Bartleby standing in the attorney's office--and sometimes its dazzling passage, a movement too rapid for the ordinary eye to follow, the lightning of Ahab or Claggart. These are the two great original Figures that one finds throughout Melville, the panoramic shot and the tracking shot, stationary process and infinite speed. And even though these are the two elements of music, though stops give rhythm to movement and lightning springs from immobility, is it not this contradiction that separates the originals, their two types? What does Jean-Luc Godard mean when, in the name of cinema, he asserts that between a tracking shot and a panoramic shot there lies a "moral problem"? Perhaps it is this difference that explains why a great novel cannot, it seems, include more than a

single original. Mediocre novels have never been able to create the slightest original character. But how could even the greatest novel create more than one at a time? Ahab *or* Bartleby ... It is like the great Figures of the painter Francis Bacon, who admits that he has not yet found a way of bringing together two figures in a single painting.¹⁶ And yet Melville will find a way. If he finally broke his silence in the end to write *Billy Budd*, it is because this last novel, under the penetrating eye of Captain Vere, brings together two originals, the demonic and the petrified. The problem was not to link them together through a plot--an easy and inconsequential thing to do, since it would be enough for one to be the victim of the other--but to make them *work together* in the picture (if *Benito Cereno* was already an attempt in this direction, it was a flawed one, under the myopic and blurred gaze of Delano).

What then is the biggest problem haunting Melville's oeuvre? To recover the already-sensed identity? No doubt, it lies in reconciling the two originals *but thereby also in reconciling the original with secondary humanity*, the inhuman with the human. Now what Captain Vere and the attorney demonstrate is that there are no good fathers. There are only monstrous, devouring fathers, and petrified, fatherless sons. If humanity can be saved, and the originals reconciled, it will only be through the dissolution or decomposition of the paternal function. So it is a great moment when Ahab, invoking Saint Elmo's fire, discovers that the father is himself a lost son, an orphan, whereas the son is the son of nothing, or of everyone, a brother.¹⁷ As Joyce will say, paternity does not exist, it is an emptiness, a nothingness--or rather, a zone of uncertainty haunted by brothers, by the brother and sister. The mask of the charitable father must fall in order for Primary Nature to be appeased, and for Ahab and Claggart to recognize Bartleby and Billy Budd, releasing through the violence of the former and the stupor of the latter the fruit with which they were laden: the fraternal relation pure and simple. Melville will never cease to elaborate on the radical opposition between fraternity and Christian "charity" or paternal "philanthropy." To liberate man from the father function, to give birth to a new man or the man without particularities, to reunite the original and humanity by constituting a society of brothers as a new universality. In the society of brothers, alliance replaces filiation and the blood pact replaces consanguinity. Man is indeed the blood brother of his fellow man, and woman, his blood sister: according to Melville, this is the *community of celibates*, drawing its members into an unlimited becoming. *A brother, a sister all the more true for no longer being "his" or "hers," since all "property," all "proprietorship," has disappeared. A burning passion deeper than love, since it no longer has either substance or qualities, but traces a zone of indiscernibility in which it passes through all intensities in every direction, extending all the way to the homosexual relation between brothers, and passing through the incestuous relation between brother and sister. This is the most mysterious relation, the one in which Pierre and Isabelle are swept up, the one that draws Heathcliff and Catherine along in *Wuthering Heights*, each one becoming Ahab and Moby-Dick by turns: "What ever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same. ... My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath--a source of little visible delight, but necessary. ... I am Heathcliff--he's always always in my mind--not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself--but as my own being ..."*¹⁸

How can this community be realized? How can the biggest problem be resolved? But is it not already resolved, by itself, precisely because it is not a personal problem, but a historical, geographic, or political one? It is not an individual or particular affair, but a collective one, the affair of a people, or rather, of all peoples. It is not an Oedipal phantasm but a political program. Melville's bachelor, Bartleby, like Kafka's, must "find the place where he can take his walks" ... America.¹⁹ The American is one who is freed

from the English paternal function, the son of a crumbled father, the son of all nations. Even before their independence, Americans were thinking about the combination of States, the State-form most compatible with their vocation. But their vocation was not to reconstitute an “old State secret,” a nation, a family, a heritage, or a father. It was above all to constitute a universe, a society of brothers, a federation of men and goods, a community of anarchist individuals, inspired by Jefferson, by Thoreau, by Melville. Such is the declaration in *Moby-Dick* (chapter 26): if man is the brother of his fellow man, if he is worthy of trust or “confidence,” it is not because he belongs to a nation or because he is a proprietor or shareholder, but only insofar as he is Man, when he has lost those characteristics that constitute his “violence,” his “idiocy,” his “villainy,” when he has no consciousness of himself apart from the proprieties of a “democratic dignity” that considers all particularities as so many ignominious stains that arouse anguish or pity. America is the potential of the man without particularities, the Original Man. Already in *Redburn*:

You can not spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world. Be he Englishman, Frenchman, German, Dane, or Scot; the European who scoffs at an American, calls his own brother *Raca*, and stands in danger of the judgment. We are not a narrow tribe of men, with a bigoted Hebrew nationality--whose blood has been debased in the attempt to enoble it, by maintaining an exclusive succession among ourselves. ... We are not a nation, so much as a world; for unless we may claim all the world for our sire, like Melchisedec, we are without father or mother. ... We are the heirs of aU time, and with all nations we divide our inheritance ... ²⁰

The picture of the nineteenth-century proletarian looks like this: the advent of the communist man or the society of comrades, the future Soviet, being without property, family, or nation, has no other determination than that of being man, *Homo tantum*. But this is also the picture of the American, executed by other means, and the traits of the former often intermingle with or are superimposed over those of the latter. America sought to create a revolution whose strength would lie in a universal immigration, emigres of the world, just as Bolshevik Russia would seek to make a revolution whose strength would lie in a universal proletarianization, “Proletarians of the world” ... the two forms of the class struggle. So that the messianism of the nineteenth century has two heads and is expressed no less in American *pragmatism* than in the ultimately Russian form of socialism.

Pragmatism is misunderstood when it is seen as a summary philosophical theory fabricated by Americans. On the other hand, we understand the novelty of American thought when we see pragmatism as an attempt to transform the world, to think a new world or new man insofar as they *create themselves*. Western philosophy was the skull, or the paternal Spirit that realized itself in the world as totality, and in a knowing subject as proprietor. Is it against Western philosophy that Melville directs his insult, “metaphysical villain”? A contemporary of American transcendentalism (Emerson, Thoreau), Melville is already sketching out the traits of the pragmatism that will be its continuation. It is first of all the affirmation of a world in *process*, an *archipelago*. Not even a puzzle, whose pieces when fitted together would constitute a whole, but rather a wall of loose, uncemented stones, where every element has a value in itself but also in relation to others: isolated and floating relations, islands and straits, immobile points and sinuous lines--for Truth always has “jagged edges.” Not a skull but the vertebral column, a spinal cord; not a uniform piece of clothing but a Harlequin’s coat, even white on white, an infinite patchwork with multiple joinings, like the jacket of

Redburn, White Jacket or the Great Cosmopolitan: the American invention *par excellence*, for the Americans invented patchwork, just as the Swiss are said to have invented the cuckoo clock. But to reach this point, it was also necessary for the knowing subject, the sole proprietor, to give way to a community of explorers, the brothers of the archipelago, who replace knowledge with belief, or rather with “confidence”—not belief in another world, but confidence in this one, and in man as much as in God (“I am going to attempt the ascent of Ofo *with hope, not with faith*. ... I will follow my own path. ...”).

Pragmatism is this double principle of archipelago and hope.²¹ And what must the community of men consist of in order for truth to be possible? *Truth* and *trust*.²² Like Melville before it, pragmatism will fight ceaselessly on two fronts: against the particularities that pit man against man and nourish an irremediable mistrust; but also against the Universal or the Whole, the fusion of souls in the name of great love or charity. Yet, what remains of souls once they are no longer attached to particularities, what keeps them from melting into a whole? What remains is precisely their “originality,” that is, a sound that each one *produces*, like a ritornello at the limit of language, but that it produces only when it takes to the open road (or to the open sea) with its body, when it leads its life without seeking salvation, when it embarks upon its incarnate voyage, without any particular aim, and then encounters other voyagers, whom it recognizes by their sound. This is how Lawrence described the new messianism, or the *democratic* contribution of American literature: against the European morality of salvation and charity, a morality of life in which the soul is fulfilled only by taking to the road, with no other aim, open to all contacts, never trying to save other souls, turning away from those that produce an overly authoritarian or groaning sound, forming even fleeting and unresolved chords and accords with its equals, with freedom as its sole accomplishment, always ready to free itself so as to complete itself.²³ According to Melville or Lawrence, brotherhood is a matter for original souls: perhaps it begins only with the death of the father or God, but it does not derive from this death, it is a whole other matter—“all the subtle sympathizings of the incalculable soul, from the bitterest hate to passionate love.”

This requires a new perspective, an archipelago-perspectivism that conjugates the panoramic shot and the tracking shot, as in *The Encantadas*. It requires an acute perception, both visual and auditory, as *Benito Cereno* shows, and must replace the concept with the “percept,” that is, with a perception in becoming. It requires a new community, whose members are capable of trust or “confidence,” that is, of a belief in themselves, in the world, and in becoming. Bartleby the bachelor must embark upon his voyage and find his sister, with whom he will consume the ginger nut, the new host. Bartleby lives cloistered in the office and never goes out, but when the attorney suggests new occupations to him, he is not joking when he responds, “There is too much confinement ...” And if he is prevented from making his voyage, then the only place left for him is prison, where he dies of “civil disobedience,” as Thoreau says, “the only place where a free man can stay with honor.”²⁴ William and Henry James are indeed brothers, and *Daisy Miller*, the new American maiden, asks for nothing more than a little confidence, and allows herself to die because even this meager request remains unfulfilled. And what was Bartleby asking for if not a little confidence from the attorney, who instead responds to him with charity and philanthropy—all the masks of the paternal function? The attorney’s only excuse is that he draws back from the becoming into which Bartleby, through his lonely existence, threatens to drag him: *rumors* are already spreading ... The hero of pragmatism is not the successful businessman, it is Bartleby, and it is Daisy Miller, it is Pierre and Isabelle, the brother and sister.

The dangers of a “society without fathers” have often been pointed out, but the only real danger is the return of the father.²⁵ In this respect, it is difficult to separate the failure of the two revolutions, the American and the Soviet, the pragmatic and the dialectical. Universal emigration was no more successful than universal proletarianization. The Civil War already sounded the knell, as would the liquidation of the Soviets later on. The birth of a nation, the restoration of the nation-state—and the monstrous fathers come galloping back in, while the sons without fathers start dying off again. Paper images—this is the fate of the American as well as the Proletarian. But just as many Bolsheviks could hear the diabolical powers knocking at the door in 1917, the pragmatists, like Melville before them, could see the masquerade that the society of brothers would lead to. Long before Lawrence, Melville and Thoreau were diagnosing the American evil, the new cement that would rebuild the wall: paternal authority and filthy charity. Bartleby therefore lets himself die in prison. In the beginning, it was Benjamin Franklin, the hypocritical *lightning-rod Merchant*, who instituted the magnetic American prison. The city-ship reconstitutes the most oppressive law, and brotherhood exists among the topmen only when they remain immobile, high up on the masts (*White Jacket*). The great community of celibates is nothing more than a company of *bons vivants*, which certainly does not keep the rich bachelor from exploiting the poor and pallid workers, by reconstituting the two unreconciled figures of the monstrous father and the orphaned daughters (*The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids*). The American confidence-man appears everywhere in Melville’s work. What malignant power has turned the trust into a company as cruel as the abominable “universal nation” founded by the Dog-Man in *The Encantadas*? *The Confidence-Man*, in which Melville’s critique of charity and philanthropy culminates, brings into play a series of devious characters who seem to emanate from a “great Cosmopolitan” in patchwork clothing, and who ask for no more than ... a little human confidence, in order to pull off a multiple and rebounding confidence game.

Are these false brothers sent by a diabolical father to restore his power over *overly credulous* Americans? But the novel is so complex that one could just as easily say the opposite: this long procession [*théorie*] of con men would be a comic version of authentic brothers, such as *overly suspicious* Americans see them, or rather have already become incapable of seeing them. This cohort of characters, including the mysterious child at the end, is perhaps the society of Philanthropists who dissimulate their demonic project, but perhaps it is also the community of brothers that the Misanthropes are no longer able to recognize in passing. For even in the midst of its failure, the American Revolution continues to send out its fragments, always making something take flight on the horizon, even sending itself to the moon, always trying to break through the wall, to take up the experiment once again, to find a brotherhood in this enterprise, a sister in this becoming, a music in its stuttering language, a pure sound and unknown chords in language itself. What Kafka would say about “small nations” is what Melville had already said about the great American nation: it must become a patchwork of all small nations. What Kafka would say about minor literatures is what Melville had already said about the American literature of his time: because there are so few authors in America, and because its people are so indifferent, the writer is not in a position to succeed as a recognized master. Even in his failure, the writer remains all the more the bearer of a collective enunciation which no longer forms part of literary history and preserves the right of a people to come, or of a human becoming.²⁶ A schizophrenic vocation: even in his catatonic or anorexic state, Bartleby is not the patient but the doctor of a sick America, the *Medicine-Man*, the new Christ or the brother to us all.

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Notes

- 1** Nicolas Ruwet, "Parallélismes et deviations en poésie," in *Langue, discours, société*, ed. Julia Kristeva and Nicholas Ruwer. Seuil, Paris, 1975, pp. 334-44 (on "portmanteau-constructions").
- 2** Philippe Jaworski, *Melville, le desert et l'empire*. Presses de l'Ecole Normale, Paris, 1986, p. 19.
- 3** See Viola Sachs, *La contre-Bible de Melville*. Mouton, Paris, 1975.
- 4** On Bartleby and Melville's silence, see Armand Farrachi, *La part du silence*. Barrault, Paris, 1984, pp. 40-45.
- 5** Mathieu Lindon, "Bartleby," *Delta* 6 (May 1978), 22.
- 6** Kafka's great text almost reads like another version of "Bartleby." See Franz Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1910-1913*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh. Schocken, New York, 1948, p. 26.
- 7** Blanchot demonstrates that Musil's character is not only without qualities, but "without particularities," since he has no more substance than he does qualities. See *Le livre à venir*. Gallimard/Folio, Paris, 1963, pp. 202-3. This theme of the man without particularities, the modern-day Ulysses, arises early in the nineteenth century, and in France appears in the rather strange book of Ballanche, a friend of Chateaubriant; see Pierre Simon Ballanche, *Essais de palingénésie sociale*, notably "La ville des expiations" (1827, in *Oeuvres complètes*. Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1967).
- 8** Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener," in *Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories*, ed. Harold Beaver. Penguin Classics, London, 1967, p. 89.
- 9** Régis Durand, in his *Melville, signes et métaphores*. Paris, L'Age d'Homme, 1980, pp. 103-7, has pointed out the role played by loose lines aboard a whaler, as opposed to the formalized riggings. Both Durand's and Jaworski's books are among the most profound analyses of Melville to have appeared recently.
- 10** George Dumézil, preface to Georges Charachidzé, *Prométhée ou le Caucase: Essai de mythologie contrastive*. Paris, Flammarion 1986): "The Greek myth of Prometheus has remained, through the ages, an object of reflection and reference. The god who does not take part in his brothers' dynastic struggle against their cousin Zeus, but who, on personal grounds, defies and ridicules this same Zeus ... this *anarchist*, affects and stirs up dark and sensitive zones in us."
- 11** On this conception of the two Natures in Sade (the theory of the pope in the *New Justine*), see Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill., 1991, pp. 99 ff.
- 12** Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale*, chapter 36. Penguin Classics, New York, 1920, p. 178.
- 13** See Schopenhauer's conception of sainthood as the act by which the Will denies itself in the suppression of all particularity. Pierre Leyris, in his second preface to the French translation of *Billy Budd* (Gallimard, Paris, 1980), recalls Melville's profound interest in Schopenhauer. Nietzsche saw Parsifal as a type of Schopenhauerian saint, a kind of Bartleby. But after Nietzsche, man still preferred being a demon to being a saint: "man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will." Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. Random House, New York, 1967, third essay, third essay, § 28, p. 163.
- 14** See Heinrich Kleist's letter to H.K. von Collin, December 1808, in *An Abyss Deep Enough: The Letters of Heinrich Von Kleist*, ed. Philip B. Miller. Dutton, New York, 1982.

Catherine Heilbronn had her own formula, close to that of Bartleby's: "I don't know" or simply "Don't know."

15 The comparison between Musil and Melville would pertain to the following four points: the critique of reason ("Principle of insufficient reason"), the denunciation of psychology ("the great hole we call the soul"), the new logic ("the other state"), and the hyperborean Zone (the "Possible").

16 See Francis Bacon and David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*. Thames and Hudson, New York, 1975, p. 22. And Melville said: "For the same reason that there is but one planet to one orbit, so can there be but one such original character to one work or invention. Two would conflict to chaos." Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, ed. Stephen Matterson. Penguin Classics, London, 1990, p. 282.

17 See R. Durand, p. 153. Mayoux writes: "On the personal plane, the question of the father is momentarily postponed, if not settled. ... But it is not only a question of the father. We are all orphans. Now is the age of fraternity." Jean-Jacques Mayoux, *Melville*, trans. John Ashbery. Grove, New York, 1960, p. 109, translation modified.

18 Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. Penguin, London, 1985, p. 122.

19 Kafka, *Diaries 1910-1913*, p. 28.

20 Herman Melville, *Redburn: His Maiden Voyage*. Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, Evanston and Chicago, 1969, p. 169.

21 Jaworski has analyzed this world-as-archipelago or this patchwork experiment. These themes are to be found throughout Pragmatism, and notably among William James's most beautiful pages: the world as "shot point blank with a pistol." This is inseparable from the search for a new human community. In *Pierre; or The Ambiguities*, Plotinus Plinlimmon's mysterious tract already seems like the manifestation of an absolute pragmatism. On the history of pragmatism in general, philosophical and political, see Gérard Deledalle, *La philosophie américaine* (L'Age d'Homme, Paris, 1983): Royce is particularly important, with his "absolute pragmatism" and his "great community of Interpretation" that unites individuals. There are many Melvillian echoes in Royce's work. His strange trio of the Adventurer, the Beneficiary, and the Insurer seems in certain ways to derive from Melville's trio of the Monomaniac, the Hypochondriac, and the Prophet, or even to refer to characters in *The Confidence-Man*, who would already prefigure the trio's comic version.

22 [In English in the original.—Trans.]

23 D.H. Lawrence, "Whitman," in *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Viking, New York, 1953. This book also includes two famous studies on Melville. Lawrence criticizes both Melville and Whitman for having succumbed to the very things they denounced; nonetheless, he says, it was American literature that, thanks to them, marked out the path.

24 [See Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, ed. Owen Thomas. Norton, New York, 1966, p. 233: "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison."—Trans.]

25 See Alexander Mitscherlich's *Society without the Father: A Contribution to Social Psychology*, trans. Eric Musbacher (J. Aronson, New York, 1974), which is written from a psychoanalytic point of view that remains indifferent to the movements of History and invokes the benefits of the paternal English Constitution.

26 See Melville's text on American literature, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in *The Portable Melville*, ed. Jay Leyda, Viking, New York, 1952, pp. 411–14, which should be compared with Kafka's text on "the literature of small peoples," in *The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1910-1913*, entry for December 25, 1911, pp. 210 ff.

Gilles Deleuze (1925–95) was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris VIII, Vincennes/Saint Denis. He published 25 books, including five in collaboration with Félix Guattari.

The Internet Is Not a Possibility

An Interview with Zach Blas

by Valerie Amend

Within our contemporary landscape, network hegemony and biometric surveillance are employed as tools of technological control. To bypass oppressive forces, it is becoming increasingly important to get outside of these systems. How can a curatorial approach aid in the presentation of new options? In this interview, Zach Blas shares his research that delves into what he calls “informatic opacity” and its strategic use. Our exchange details the ways in which the artist’s interest in queer and feminist theory allows him to consider new possibilities of opacity that engage audiences and offer structures of individual and communal resistance.

Blas is an artist, writer, and lecturer in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. He has exhibited and lectured widely, recently at Art in General, New York; the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; e-flux, New York; and Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City. He is a recipient of a 2016 Creative Capital award in Emerging Fields. A monograph on his work, Escaping the Face, is forthcoming from Sternberg Press and Rhizome.

VA: Many of your works outline methods that circumvent surveillance and present alternative solutions. For example, *Facial Weaponization Suite* (2011–2014) employs a pedagogical approach to educate viewers about biometric facial recognition, the biases within this technology, and how to resist this form of surveillance. Your newer work, *Contra-Internet* (2014–2018), discusses ways to get outside the Internet all together. Do you think it is necessary to work entirely outside the Internet, or is it important to learn how to protect ourselves within colonized networks?

ZB: The outside is an important conceptual frame for much of my practice. It’s an idea operative in various strands of intellectual thought and philosophy, but I’m particularly interested in its queer and feminist manifestations. Here, the outside is evoked to demand the possibility of alternatives to totalizing, dominating structures. Outsides can, and often do, exist! Consider the writings of J. K. Gibson-Graham—for example, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique*



Zach Blas, *Facial Weaponization Suite: Fag Face*, 2012. Video still.

of Political Economy.¹ They put forth the concept of post-capitalist politics to argue that economic alternatives persist within the supposedly totalized reign of capitalism. Contra much political philosophy, they insist on an outside to capitalism as a feminist project.

In *Contra-Internet*, the artworks are also concerned with articulating that there are, and can continue to be, outsides to the Internet. This strikes me as a crucial claim to make, when the Internet “appears” to be totalizing the world. This is the prophecy of the Internet of Things, and also ex-Google CEO Eric Schmidt, when he stated in 2015 that the Internet will disappear into the world. It strikes me as troubling to be unable to distinguish between the world and the Internet, because the more something becomes all-consuming, the more challenging it is to criticize, let alone think, imagine or create an outside to it. But alternative network infrastructure is emerging, as ways to bypass corporate Internet options, such as the Detroit Digital Stewards Program that trains communities how to operate and maintain local mesh networks.

The outside, then, for me is about the horizon of possibility, and artistic practice can be a kind of training that keeps that space open, so possibility can be seen, felt, experienced. Practically, of course, we can’t fully abandon being online right now. But I think of my artistic practice as having a duty to imagine beyond the practical to something more utopian or queer utopian.

VA: Is there anything left for us on the Internet, like the dark web? You've written about the idea of the antiweb. What does this mean, how are these systems accessed, and can they resist programmed bias?

ZB: There is plenty left for us on the Internet. We still find friendship and allies there. I'm not that interested in the dark web, which is still part of the Internet. As stated above, I'm more interested in focused, political breaks from the Internet as we know it—breaks that articulate political visions of queerness, anti-racism, decolonialism, and feminism. The point for me is that the Internet is no longer a possibility. The antiweb is a variation on this, which comes from the writings of Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, particularly *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*.² It has to do with resistance and asymmetry. The Internet, composed of networks, is a primary site of global control and governance today. Thus, what is asymmetrical to those networks will be future modes of resistance. This is quite provocative because this could mean that the antiweb is not a network at all. Recall not so long ago that the idea of the rhizome was championed as a model for radical, resistant action. If the rhizome now topologically matches global networked control, then that model is no longer adequate. So what is? I can't answer this practically, but I can use it as a starting point for doing certain imaginative work. This is a second major tenet of *Contra-Internet*: to imagine not only outsides of the Internet but also alternatives to the network form.

VA: *Contra-Internet* explores alternatives to the Internet. What tools can we use now to get “outside” the Internet? What are the differences between contra- and post-Internet practice?

ZB: Mesh networks, cryptographic practices, and other autonomous networking developments are all practical entry points to something beyond “the Internet.” At this point, I should state that I think of the meaning of the Internet broadly, more as a dominant, networked, capitalist condition, rather than something that only refers to technical infrastructure. The Internet is also a mode of subjectification, producing subjectivity through social media platforms, for instance. How does one rework such a production of subjectivity? That's an exciting question—but one that will not be answered only through practical alternatives.

The discourse on post-Internet practices is a bit overlapped at this point, and I'm not so interested in

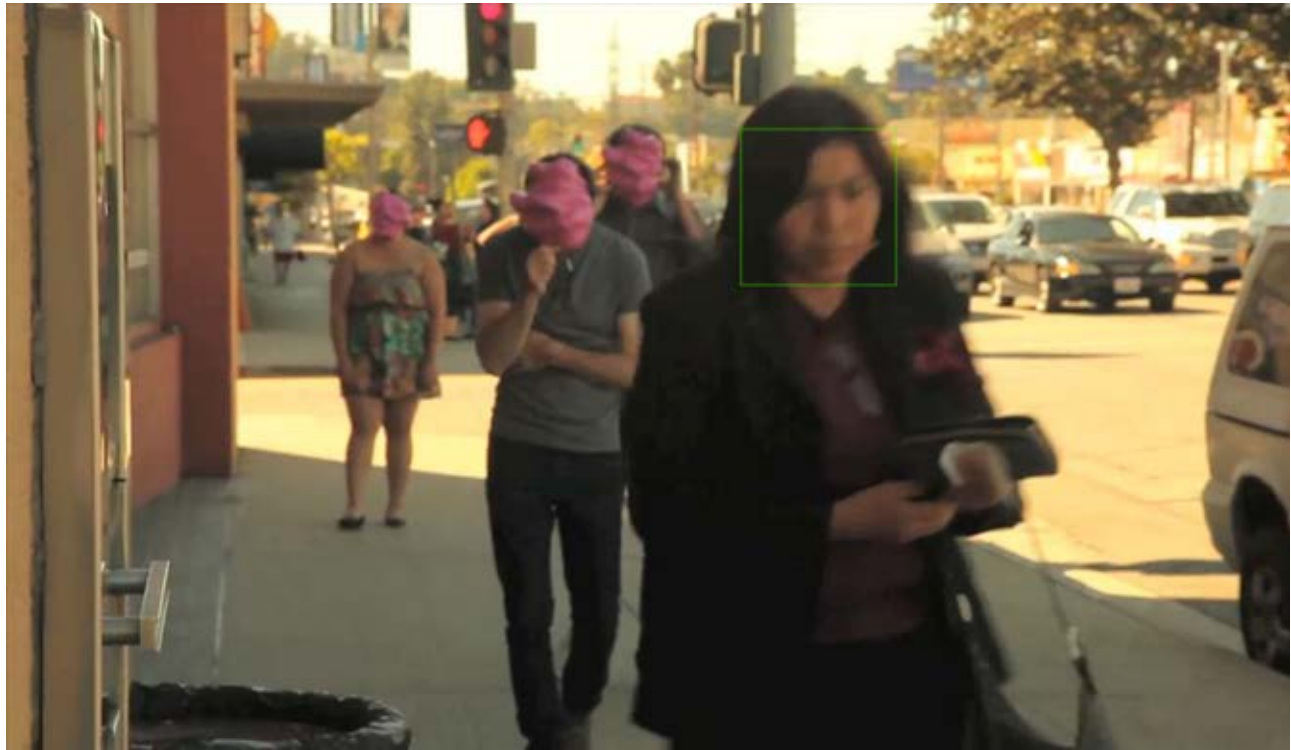


Zach Blas, *Fog Face Mask*, 2012. 3D-modeled plastic. Image courtesy of the artist.

having *Contra-Internet* be framed as simply a reaction to post-Internet. What I can say is that “post-Internet” doesn't strike me as a useful term for imagining outsides or being invested in political alternatives. Post-Internet as a concept totalizes the Internet, just like Eric Schmidt's thinking about the Internet of Things. *Contra-Internet* practices, beyond my work, seem to be more in line with histories of tactical media, hacktivism, cyberfeminism, and electronic disturbance, which are all directly invested in political change.

VA: Can you define what capture and opacity mean to you, and why you see a new vocabulary surrounding surveillance to be necessary? How can users identify situations of capture and practice resistance?

ZB: Surveillance is a frustrating catch-all word that seems to articulate not much in the end. Capture, on the other hand, is precise. It's a technical term that refers to how a computational system is able to identify and interpret something, be it a face, body or behavior. Capture is about developing algorithmic



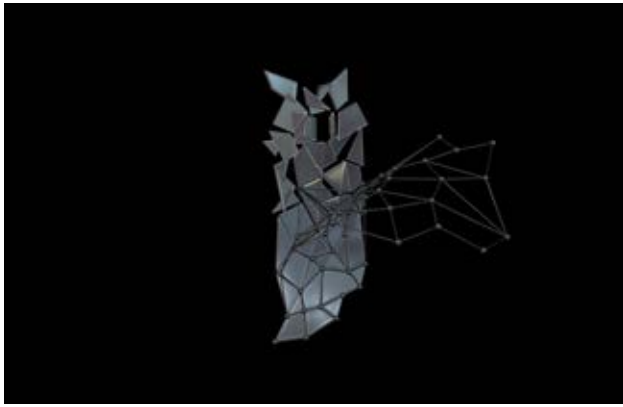
Zach Blas, *CI-00, Contra-Internet Totality Study #2: Internet*, 2015. .gif triptych image still. Image courtesy of the artist.

grammars, or standards, for analyzing the world. When a face is captured by a computational system, it does not mean that the computer has magically discovered a face. Rather, an algorithm for facial recognition analyzes a given image, and when a face is recognized or captured, it all seems simple enough. But when a capture algorithm does not work correctly, certain norms are exposed. For instance, there are numerous examples of biometric recognition technologies failing to recognize various minoritarian persons, such as transgender individuals and people of color. When this is considered from the perspective of capture, one would critically attend to why and how certain norms of recognition get standardized in algorithms and software as scientifically objective. Capture, simply put, makes us question the existence of norms, standards, and biases in algorithmic architectures, which are often used for surveillance and policing purposes. Such a critique of norms is, of course, at the heart of much queer theory, but this critique must be inflected at a technical level, which queer theory has not adequately addressed. Privacy is often presented as the go-to for all political moves against surveillance, but this is not visionary enough. Privacy is not the horizon of possibility here. Rather, I turn to opacity, particularly through the writings of Édouard Glissant, such as *Poetics of Relation*, in which he famously claims we must clamor for

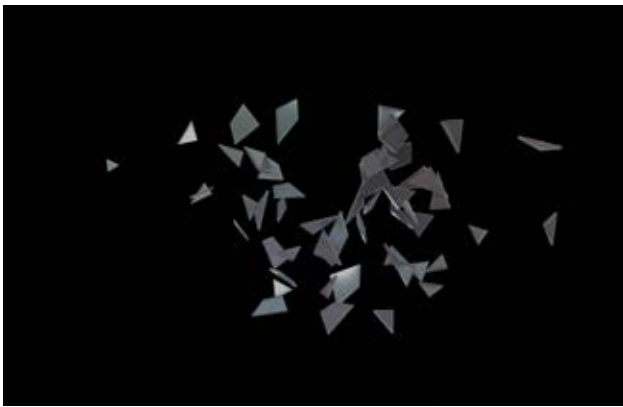
the right to opacity for everyone. Opacity, as an alterity that cuts through our relations to others as well as ourselves, is that which we must let exist. When opacity is violated, Glissant tells us, we enter imperialism and barbarism.

Capture, if it does anything, attempts to annihilate opacity. Thus, opacity strikes me as a robust conception against capture that can generously hold together various minoritarian politics and positions. For some time now, I have been articulating and imagining an “informatic opacity” that pushes against the ways in which computational machines destroy opacity in order to control populations. By investing in the struggle over opacity, we might arrive at something like the commons, whereas privacy can easily keep us in the realm of private property and individualism.

VA: Informatic opacity as a concept and practice is implemented in *Facial Weaponization Suite* through the realization of the *Fag Face Mask*. This mask was created and compiled using the data of multiple queer men’s facial scans. The result is an amalgamated mass of unreadable data that prevents capture when worn over the face. What forms of informatic opacity can we employ in our everyday lives? Do you consider opacity a form or protest or refusal? Can opacity create sanctuary in addition to resistance?



Zach Blas, *CI-16, Contra-Internet Inversion Practice #3: Modeling Paranodal Space*, 2016. Video still. Image courtesy of the artist.



Zach Blas, *CI-17, Contra-Internet Inversion Practice #3: Modeling Paranodal Space*, 2016. Video still. Image courtesy of the artist.



Zach Blas, *CI-18, Contra-Internet Inversion Practice #3: Modeling Paranodal Space*, 2016. Video still. Image courtesy of the artist.

ZB: We are always already opaque because opacity has an ontological dimension to it. For Glissant, opacity is precisely the world in relation. That said, Glissant never directly discusses opacity as a tactic, tool or form of protest. Opacity is a way of being and relating that is at once aesthetic, ethical, political—and ontological. However, I'm willing to understand opacity as something tactical and ontological. For instance, one attempts to become informatically opaque, in order to protect the opacity of the other. Put another way, one might mask in order to struggle for the right to opacity. Glissant once wrote, "That which protects the Diverse, we call opacity."³ How is this protection done in the everyday, against informatic control? Providing false data, obfuscating, encrypting, and refusing to be recognized are all potential options. But importantly, opacity is more than this kind of action; it is a worldly condition that must be protected, a kind of poetic and material necessity for minoritarian life to thrive.

Notes

- 1 J. K. Gibson-Graham. *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2006.
- 2 Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker. *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 2007.
- 3 Édouard Glissant. *Poetics of Relation*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor. 1999.

Valerie Amend is an independent researcher and curator. She is the founder of *Fluidity Online*, [<https://www.fluidity.online/>] a digital platform custom built for online exhibitions. Her recent projects include the Curators Workshop on the occasion of the 10th Berlin Biennale and the exhibition *Where is the Eternal Expanse?* [<https://www.fluidity.online/>] Additional roles include working as a curatorial assistant at TRANSFER Gallery and producing the Artist Web Project Series at Dia Art Foundation. She holds a master's degree in Curatorial Practice from the School of Visual Arts.

Zach Blas is an artist and writer whose practice confronts technologies of capture, security, and control. Currently, he is a lecturer in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London.

No Tears for the Sovereign

An Interview with Jesse Darling

by Vera Petukhova

VP: If our departure point is the question of what can art do, we cannot help but see the obvious contradictions within how these issues are being taken up in the art world. In our conversations leading up to this interview, we established that political action and resistance in the sphere of the art world are highly problematic and laden with inequities. What do you think are the imperative inquiries in constructing a dialogue around spaces for art and political resistance, and structures that problematise this space, as well as the problematics of creating art for a political sphere?

JD: So if we agree that within the limited and problematic space of art there is the potential for gestures of resistance or at least rehearsals of resistance, we have to acknowledge that these are contextualised, legitimised, and made possible by a modernist paradigm made possible in turn by patriarchal/individualistic ideal subjectivity, Eurocentric aesthetics, and speculative whiteness. All of which means that the space of art (within a given Euro-American context to which both of us belong) can never be neutral ground. I guess the same extends to the those other 'white spaces' of the Internet and tech culture in general—as though algorithms could ever be neutral, made as they are in the dominant mode.

VP: I actually feel cynical about how art and the political function together. I think many people must feel this way as of late, but then again there's also a lot of idealising how the space of art should produce change. So it seems like an important space to explore: looking at the contradictions of art/resistance and working through that.

JD: Yes for sure. And yet, I find myself an apologist for art, or I'm conscious of trying to find intellectual moves by which to justify its practice, despite being heartbroken and emptied out by much of what the system of 'art' (such as it is today) relies on to support or contextualise its existence.

VP: Before it is even political, do you think that art can be transformative?

JD: Well, yeah, I do. But it's complicated. Firstly because 'contemporary art' as we know it seems to have grown out of all kinds of practices that were explicitly *supposed* to function as transformative; religious iconography, for instance—and I also know that these developments go hand in hand with the story of modernity, which is a story of colonial appropriation: bodies and lives as raw material. You see this playing out still, of course, in various ways—the whole Dana Schutz affair at the Whitney Biennial. But on a personal level—and this is more difficult to parse—I have also *experienced* art as transformative, in much the same way as I have experienced music or poetry as transformative; the former more often than the latter. The immanence effect. It doesn't happen very often and maybe that's because art can seem to lack a certain immediacy, idk. I dislike work that demands a certain education or knowledge base of its viewer (if the viewer is to 'get it', presumably because they won't feel anything otherwise, perhaps because there is nothing to feel). I think I used to dislike work that demands that the viewer pays close attention, though I don't anymore. When I think of experiences I had as a teenager, I didn't have much education or attention back then, so I think what I found transformative—as far as I remember, putting new words on an old wordless feeling—was this sense of permission and conviction: that someone had put this into the world. I was thrilled by that. This is not, in the first place, a 'political' feeling. But it is a feeling that exists in some kind of relationship to resistance, which is a creative act in that it imagines something into being that does not yet exist.

VP: Art that's political often positions a kind of hyper-reality or acceleration of a current situation. I wonder if that immediacy is necessary to be effective or to hold some agency. Yet when art becomes political in an institutional context, it embodies



Jesse Darling, *Bucephalus/Comanche (war horse)*, 2016. Styrofoam, plastic, cotton, feathers, aluminium, steel. Courtesy of the artist.

many levels of contradiction. Most large-scale art institutions receive funding that is at odds with artwork that engages political resistance. When there's work that speaks out about debt, exploitative labour practices, institutionalised racism, etc., there will be a list of sponsors that directly contradict the agenda of the artist/artwork. The Sacklers building their wealth on the painkiller industry is a current example of this. Political art under an institutional context is probably always problematic, as it relies on those underlying power structures and narratives of modernity that you have mentioned.

JD: I know what you're talking about. I suppose in this case we are talking less about the work itself and more about a sort of curatorial premise that posits the exhibition as a space to address issues and politics. I feel very critical of that, though I acknowledge having 'benefited' (in the sense of having had my work shown and seen) through this kind of contextualisation. Though I question how beneficial this really is or was, for me and for others.

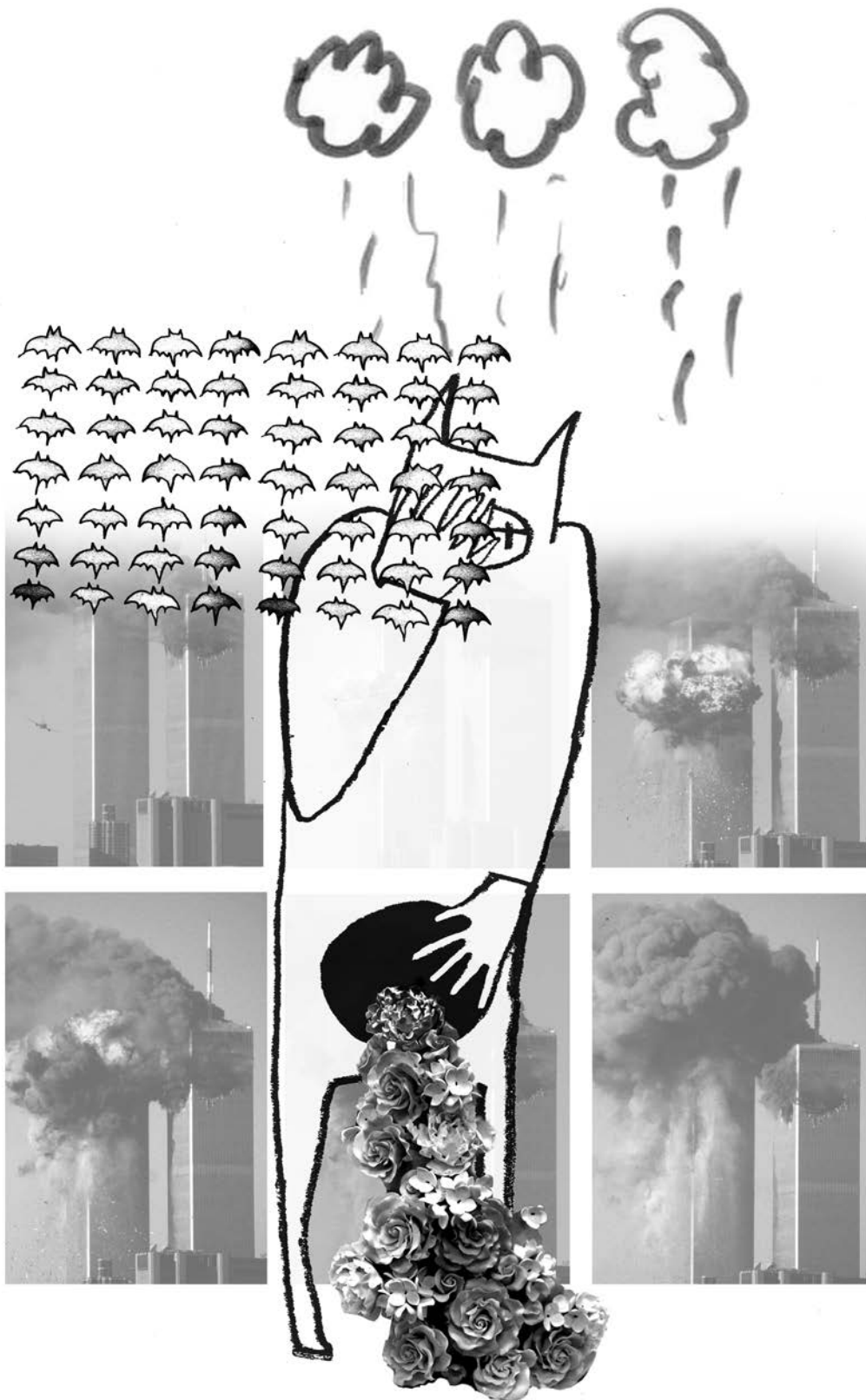
VP: I think that is essentially the question to work through: How do you acknowledge the issues of spectacle and the contradictions of the art world

when approaching a project? I think for both artists and curators it can be problematic. It seems like lately it is about creating discursive spaces, but I don't know how effective those can really be. And in being critical of these discursive spaces, it is important to think about who are they for and how can they affect action?

JD: Yes, I agree with you. There's an optics of engagement in which the institution wants to be seen to have addressed a given issue. And this is, of course, a superficial move in which the institution—or in some cases the artist-as-institution—is seen grappling with a huge phenomenon (in which it is necessarily complicit in most cases, e.g. structural anti-blackness or gender identities as they operate in racial capitalism), while in fact effectively replicating the conditions of exceptionalism and spectacle that perpetuate the violence of these phenomena, both in and outside of the art world. And then you have all the dirty business around money and markets, which we don't talk about much, although funding structures create forms in a very literal way. For a long while in the UK, for instance, you had a neoliberal box-ticking phenomenon with arts funding, in which one's project was supposed to demonstrate a certain 'engagement' with certain groups or publics. And in the event that the bid was successful, one would also have to show how this had been achieved. So inevitably this produces certain kinds of practice. And if art at its best is immanently relational and experiential, then this engagement can't be so easily traced. Though perhaps that's not the most important issue beyond the fact that it pushes the work into quantitatively measurable forms: units of data as units of capital.

VP: It seems that this has been an issue for decades, and several art movements have tried to work through it: Institutional Critique, Relational Aesthetics, Social Practice. But somehow it keeps coming back to the same kinds of obstacles. Once those movements become institutionalised, artists want to veer away from identifying with those movements because they feel part of the spectacle. We see it happening again with the Whitney Biennial or any other large-scale event or exhibition that takes on a political agenda.

JD: I don't want to talk too much about the Whitney thing (except to say that I'm firmly on the side of Hannah Black and the signatories of her letter), since others have spoken about it so eloquently already. In



Jesse Darling, *Untitled*. 2016. Digital collage. Courtesy of the artist.



Installation view (left to right) *Stay With Us Let It Carry You*, *Bust*, *Masc Trade*, *Material Girl*, *The Veterans & Gun_1*, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

curatorial terms, I think the Whitney story is really about the failure of ‘the political agenda’, a story about what happens when this agenda is understood in terms of spectacle and the optics of engagement to the detriment of the individuals and communities with whose bodies those optics are concerned. For me this demonstrates an ambivalent relationship to art itself, which I think is consistent with the crisis of postmodernism. On the one hand, we’re behaving as though politics and affect can all be dealt with on the gallery wall. But on the other hand, we refuse to take seriously the fact that the work itself might be imbued with power, both structural power and the power to signify. And you are right about this being a central problem for artists working in the realms of ‘the political’. I think it’s interesting how most have in fact capitulated to some degree, although there are examples of artists who resisted and continue to resist this kind of spectacle. I wonder, though, if there’s not a dozen forgotten refusalists for every Hammons or Lozano.

VP: Yeah, I think that’s a good point. For artists working more in the margins or on the outside, effectively working against becoming co-opted by the art world, I think there are certainly important things happening that don’t get recognised and are

more activist in a way that defies aestheticisation or institutionalisation. Also, it’s not really sustainable for artists or curators to work in those outside spaces sometimes.

JD: This was one of the big hopeful ideals of Internet art, right? As I’ve said before, it’s not that online art is properly democratising, since you need a computer and software and so on. But in theory, it went some way in allowing artists to refuse participation in physical spaces in which [their] bodies would be met and intercepted by the institutional encounter. Of course this hopeful premise was at least a partial fail in the end. I would love to believe that this is because of the immanent nature of the art object, but I doubt it. Everyone wants out of the browser and into the white cube: one needs that validation or thinks they do. And then there’s the way that this indexes with markets and money, in that there’s still this weird culture of disposability around digital objects. And even those artists who made good dollar from the post-Internet curation boom all ended up printing their .jpgs and .tiffs on canvas to hang in rich collectors’ houses.

VP: That’s definitely the kind of work that is the most heavily circulated.

JD: Yes, though the more interesting work is necessarily less salable because it tries to destabilise the object or imagines a different kind of spatiality or whatever. But with this stuff you have a good illustration of how the art world works to produce value where none exists. As I've said before, we're in the business of value creation here, at the bleeding edge: capitalism at its most advanced and avant-garde. You see this illustrated in the case of Damien Hirst. He's someone who once had a certain vision and I think a kind of rage that animates his early works—he really had something once upon a time. I saw a big retrospective of his not so long ago, and some of his early pieces felt impossible to dismiss. But walking through this retrospective, effectively charting the progression of his career, you could see the work becoming slowly more bloated and cynical, almost at times desperate. It felt like he was asking to be called out on it almost. Maybe I'm projecting, but in any case the works just got more and more expensive (to produce) and further and further away from the artist's own gesture. And now they can hardly give 'em away: investors are all like 'QUICK, SELL YOUR HIRST WHILE IT'S STILL WORTH SOMETHING!'—the implication being that it won't be for much longer. And while this might suck for Damien Hirst—though no tears for the rich man, I guess—I love the story because it illustrates the fact that art *might* actually mean something. And this 'meaning' might give it a value that is not determined by these hype cycles or by the market. So I think with net art and post-Internet, we may still be waiting for the truly great work to emerge—art made specifically for this space in its particularity, not as a version of other spaces but as a space in itself. *Nota bene:* I just saw that Damien Hirst has unveiled a new work for Venice, which rips off the aesthetics and concerns of high-end post-Internet figuration stuff in a sort of bait '90s jux thing; all these 'treasures' are supposed to have fallen from a shipwreck, but of course they resemble Egyptian statues and Eritrean carvings and so on. The work riffs on museum aesthetics without acknowledging the museum's part in colonial piracy. All those stolen artefacts sitting there in glass cases for white Europeans to gawk at. Unsurprisingly, the work does not problematise this relation. In fact, it seems to rely on the continuing dynamics of this relation in order to exist.

VP: It is interesting because before his work was hyper-commercial, the *Freeze* exhibition that started Hirst's career was super DIY and seemed to pick up on a Zeitgeist for emerging British artists. He effectively opened up a channel or estab-

lished a platform for himself, as well as many other British artists / curators. Part of it is also thinking about accessing power through other people that way or how it trickles down.

JD: Totally. He's both the success story and the cautionary tale! And I think that some of those post-Internet success stories actually function in a similar way, i.e. their work maps out a possible trajectory for others' careers. This isn't an option for everybody; there is a certain naturalised complicity required in order to get to that point, I think. Naturalised in the sense that compliance is only possible insofar as the dominant mode is willing to extend itself to you. And even in cases of tokenism or exceptionalism, I feel like this extension is conditional on a certain degree of 'good behaviour'.

VP: And in response to your prior statement on Internet art, I feel that the full potential of how art/the Internet can work together hasn't been fully actualised. Because it seems to always go back to trying to resemble a gallery show or work like a gallery does, instead of being something totally alien to how that pre-existing physical space operates.

JD: Well, it's not totally alien, and I think that's the tricky part; all technologies are built in our own image. So there are ways in which the English-language social Internet functions like the 'white cube' space—complete with policed protocols, best practices, white 'walls', i.e. the use of white as 'neutral' or backdrop (one might recall that in early computing, one typed in white or green against a black background). In this way, the Internet with which I'm most familiar seems to function like many of the showcase spaces of capital flow within the context of white Western capitalism, including and exemplified by the art world.

VP: Yeah, that's true. It's subject to those power dynamics. That also makes me think about the topic of surveillance that was brought up in an earlier exchange, and you mentioned that you didn't want to be contributing publicly to that conversation, as it was largely led by white men and their paranoias surrounding data. In relation to this topic of what potential the Internet holds for art and resistance, I wonder how artists can do things online without necessarily learning how to use code or work the infrastructure of the Internet and obtain those tech skill sets. I know that a lot of people are making efforts to disperse those skill

sets to other populations and empower people. But I wonder if that is the answer...

JD: I feel like the paradigm shift is probably something that neither you nor I can imagine, coming from our respective places of sited subjectivity. As to the subject of surveillance: most of what we mean by 'the Internet' now is a social web, the user web—which is to say, a bunch of products and services marketed through various portals and networks that mimic and construct the idea of the social. But it's not just an idea, right? Facebook, for instance, is always rolling out new features based on some notion of how people work in relation to one another, but most of these seem to fail in that they feel at best over-engineered and unnecessary, and intrusive and counterintuitive at worst. They are, of course, all of those things. The average user intuits very clearly when they are being sold a bunch of bullshit in the guise of a better 'experience'. And the failure of platforms to hide their intentions in the soft naturalised register of 'the social' seems to point to the fact of there being a genuine sociality in there somewhere—often something that arises *despite* the intentions of developers and CEOs. And it is here in this space that communities find one another, and in doing so produce forms of use that effectively subvert the practises of zoning and collating data that are now pretty much synonymous with online spaces. So this is my issue with the 'sovereign paranoia' of the largely white Western digital discourse. Only through a colossal lack of ingenuity and imagination—and a vested, fetishy faith in the power of the machine—does one come to believe that 'they' are ahead of 'us' in this regard (usual caveats around the pronouns).

A lot of it seems to come from a feeling of disillusioned utopia, like Internet 2.0 comes after the fall of Internet 1.0 and its promise of endless green pastures of cyberspace for everyone, which sounds like some old-world colonist's idea of a *terra nullius*; just one more nostalgic white world dream of a time and place in which one's sovereignty goes unchallenged. And then there is the fact that for many users this networked sociality, or sense of the collective, is what helps people keep going. It's tough out there and it's tough online, but here and there exist pockets of togetherness, however surveilled they might be. Anyone who thinks that surveillance itself forecloses any possibility of intimacy or joy has never lived their life on the receiving end of a gaze. This pretty much leaves white able-bodied men—and latterly, the lean-in white feminists who believe that

the gaze is something to be marshalled and weaponised. What is consistent in this kind of practice/politics is a disidentification with the user, and I find that to be a class position consistent with how the Other is positioned in most political rhetoric produced by white European men since the Enlightenment.

VP: What do you mean by the disidentification with the user? I think your criticism of that kind of work vs. publics that are truly vulnerable in the virtual/irl realms is really important.

JD: I've written and spoken about this stuff before, but I think what I'd add here is that these narratives of surveillance evoke the idea of 'the commons', which of course must be problematised (in virtual as in physical space). The commons—as notional safe zone where all can roam free—is not and has never been common; throughout history the commons have been fought for by given populations in the face of violence and marginalisation. The white man's commons looks very different from the perspective of a black man or a trans woman, of course, and in this way the idea of 'public space' as a site of democratic potential is a false promise. Even the concept of 'freedom' is rooted in Eurocentric Enlightenment ideals predicated functionally on the fact that freedom is possible only because many are unfree. Recent conversations around e.g. Gamer-gate or the appropriation of black online content by white-run businesses for (real and cultural) capital only serve to illustrate what we already know (and I wanna express my gratitude here to the scholars of colour who have given words and shape to ideas that white culture seems to have no apparatus with which to acknowledge). 'Sovereign paranoia' is how I privately describe the discomfort of the sovereign subject when [he] encounters a sense that [his] (data)body is a commodity, or that choices pertaining to this (data) body are no longer his to make. I don't have to spell it out: this is something that others have known and felt—and found ways to resist and transform—for a long time. So no tears for the sovereign, like I say.

VP: That's true and there seems to be more glorification of the kind of work that poses an idea or mode of resistance but never makes clear for whom that resistance is actually the most necessary. How do you approach those topics in your own practice?

JD: Good question, ha! I think a lot, a lot, a lot about representation and its failures, about appropriation,



Border Sphinxes I & II (boundary boys), 2016. Styrofoam, plaster, fiberglass, textile, barbed wire, silicon, steel. Courtesy of the artist.

about the source of one's crisis and the site of one's wound. I think there would be a far more interesting conversation around these surveillance questions, for example, if the white establishment framed its concerns around an understanding of where these mechanisms have been used before, in data and in culture—the 'muslim database' or no-fly list, for example, impacts people's lives in a way that e.g. targeted facebook ads do not. This could be a starting point for solidarity rather than a set of petulant gestures for the futurists in the peanut gallery. And as to how my own work figures into all this? Well, everything about the curatorial premise of 'post-Internet' made me want to run screaming, in the end. I see the same mechanisms at work in every subsequent curatorial trend that purports to be new or radical (and which in every case is neither). This wasn't about 'computers' or 'technology', because these things are still very interesting for me, but about the superficial criticality—and outright cynicism—of both artists and art worlds in that context. And in a way, my current practice grew partially out of wanting to alienate myself from all that anxious, compulsive, fashy obsession with 'contemporaneity' (which also equates to an obsession with youth and a fetishisation of capital) in favor of historicity and ethics. I wanted to reject the conversations I was being drafted to address, but I also wanted to work out my politics in a less performative way. And though it felt reactive at first, I also found that increasingly I was invested in the material quality of bodies and objects. And I'm invested in stories, which live in materials. So I became

a sculpture nerd and shut my mouth for a while, and perhaps I lost that audience entirely, thank goodness.

VP: I totally understand that impulse to move away from that association. When I saw your 2016 exhibition at Company Gallery in NYC, it did somehow make sense that you would have made that move. I mainly became familiar with your work through an interest in alt-lit and poetry, and I think your writing still resonates amid the physical work.

JD: Yes, for sure the text-based/poetic aspect of my work is still a big part of my process. I just needed to be silent for a while and stop speaking on panels or publishing essays so that I could feel like my words were my own again; to speak from a place of speculation or even desire, rather than always in opposition to something. I think it's okay to break the silence a little bit now.

Jesse Darling is an artist working in sculpture, installation, video, drawing, text, sound, and performance. Their work is broadly concerned with what it means to be a body in the world, though what that means is both politically charged and culturally determined. Their practice draws on their own experience as well as the narratives of history and counterhistory. Imagining the "high church of the modern" as a moveable or precarious tabernacle, JD's works and writing feature an array of free-floating consumer goods, liturgical devices, construction materials, fictional characters, and mythical symbols detached from the architectures, hierarchies, and taxonomies in which they have their place.

Vera Petukhova is an independent Brooklyn-based curator focusing on performance and media. She received her MA in Curatorial Practice from the School of Visual Arts and has worked with the curatorial teams at Performa and The Kitchen. Her research interests include the performative turn, digital culture, the experience economy, language and communication, cultural histories, film theory, feminist and gender theory, community/support structures, Soviet conceptualism, and contemporary art in Eastern Europe. She has curated video art programs and organized art exhibitions and performances in Seattle and New York. Her writing has been published in *Blouin Artinfo* and *Performa Magazine*.

Trickster Insertions for a Disruptive Resistance

Jovanna Venegas

“The Homeric Hymn to Hermes,” from the Archaic Greek period, introduced one of the most infamous mythological tricksters, Hermes. Much like Coyote from North America or Eshu of the Yoruba people in West Africa, Hermes is part of a large group of cultural heroes who were invented by various indigenous tribes or ancient civilizations as a means to explain the enigmatic, paradoxical or nonsensical aspects of the world. A classic story by Hermes tells of him stealing Apollo’s cattle and, in order to avoid being captured, invents a series of disguises and deviations. He makes the cattle walk backwards and uses thorny sandals to blur his own tracks. Although Hermes is eventually caught, his cunning, cleverness, and overall charm amuses Apollo, who subsequently offers him the herd and a golden rod to guide them.

The scholar Lewis Hyde, in studying tricksters, describes Hermes’ act of disguising his tracks and thus leaving multiple, contextual, and ambiguous meanings as “confounded polarity.”¹ The role of the artist-trickster and the curator-trickster (though the two are often one) is crucial in our time of curatorial resistance, and the five projects that follow offer ingenious precedents to consider. After all, the trickster regularly flips difficult ideas, seeming deadends, even misfortunes, into opportunities, breaching or rupturing boundaries—institutional, financial, geopolitical—just as curators and artists do. They work on projects that at first appear physically impossible. They take funds from the prosperous (in myth, tricksters take from the gods and give to humans) and allocate them to the arts. If we consider “the curatorial,” in Maria Lind’s words, as “a way of linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in physical space [...] an active catalyst, generating twists, turns, and tensions,”² then the very act of curating opens its sites to encounters and situations that offer the mark of the trickster.

The curator as trickster is always pressing audiences and institutions to bend further, adapt more quickly, be more subversive, slipping through the cracks of orthodoxy, imagining the curatorial as a form of shape-shifting. This work that the curator takes on embodies a notion not only of linking but of active communal reimagining of how to be a community, just as Irit Rogoff has said that “meaning is never produced in isolation or through isolating processes, but rather through intricate webs of connectedness.”³

But the trickster isn’t a mere con man, as con men never revisualize the world and its connectedness in a socially productive way. (Herman Melville, in his 1857 novel, *The Confidence-Man*, appropriately published on April Fool’s Day, presented an antithesis to Bartleby’s weary protest of refusal in “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street,” with a group of scammers trying to out-scam each other, representing the capitalism of the day, embracing greed and corruption.)⁴ Con men and tricksters may share traits such as shape-shifting, seizing contingencies and turning them into assets, telling lies, and destabilizing order, but the former employ “tricks that victimize,” while the latter deploy their tricks to constructively transform the world.⁵ We can counter the political



Cildo Meireles, *Insertions in Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project*, 1970, Coca Cola bottles and decals, Courtesy of the Modern Latin American Art (Jacqueline Barnitz, Art and Art History Department, University of Texas, Austin)

con-men in power around us by employing tricksterism ourselves, and this is precisely what these projects show us as historical lessons and future tools.

Consider, for example, the artist projects *Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project* (1970) by Cildo Meireles; *In the Name of the Place* (1995-1997) by the GALA Committee, headed by Mel Chin; and Suha Traboulsi in collaboration with Walid Raad's ongoing work titled *Postscript to the Arabic Translation*. Each was created in a different geographical, sociopolitical, and historical period, and all are representative of successful institutional insertions that, either knowingly or not, embody trickster methodologies in their approach to artistic practices and curatorial thinking. To look at them again today is to make visible their useful ironies and see in their networks of collaborators strategies to deploy so that we can confront and endure our precarious present.

By 1970, when Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles first showed artifacts from his subversive broad-scale public intervention, *Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project*, in Kynaston McShine's legendary *Information* show at New York's Museum of Modern Art, Brazil was six years into a dictatorship that would last twenty. A few years prior, the São Paulo Bienal had introduced North American Pop Art to the country, and Meireles, though engaged by it, considered its smooth formality inimical to Brazil's own economic and sociopolitical urgencies.⁶ The aggressive brutality of the dictatorship produced nationwide censorship, and consequently an extensive artistic response developed in diverse ways. Meireles removed Coca-Cola bottles from physical circulation, etched them with phrases such as "YANKES GO HOME!" or with instructions for turning bottles into Molotov cocktails. These bottles were slipped back into circulation, although it was always assumed they would have no effect on policy.

Yet what seems relevant to today is the very notion of inserting messages into mainstream media that shift meanings, offering alternative models for engagement,



Installation view (Bedroom), part of the exhibition TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995-1997, Red Bull Arts New York, 2016, Photography Credit: Lance Brewer

revising the very tools at hand, much as the deluge of fake news has created effective alternative realities drastically reshaping our own. Narrative techniques and revised objects and histories are apparatuses of manipulation, in Michel Foucault's sense of the *dispositif* as institutional and administrative mechanisms, that offer us tactical means to manifest political resistance—new forms of curatorial action that hide their potency in plain view, or what Hyde called “confounded polarity.”

Now, let's jump a quarter of a century ahead to the GALA Committee's *In the Name of the Place* (1995-1997), a two-year, revolving project originally presented in the form of props on the 1990s TV show *Melrose Place*.⁸ Somewhat echoing group actions by the Situationists and by Dadaists before them, the GALA Committee (short for University of Georgia, GA, and California Institute of the Arts, in Los Angeles), involved students from the universities, and later included professors, writers, and set designers, among others. Headed by artist Mel Chin, GALA inserted politically-charged work as set decorations into the prime-time soap opera viewed nationally, and indeed internationally. During those two years, they produced close to 200 objects slipped into the show, ranging from blankets, lamps, posters, alcohol bottles, and sign posts, as well as paintings and sculptures. These objects clandestinely occupying viewers' gazes confronted the Gulf War, the Los Angeles riots, the passing of the U.S. military's policy of “Don't ask, don't tell,” and NAFTA, along with lesser issues that were taboo to the Fox TV network. In one episode, for example, in which a main character becomes pregnant, the blanket she wraps herself in is embroidered with the chemical structure of RU-486, the formula of the abortion pill, while in another episode, two lovers wrap themselves in a sheet decorated with condoms.⁸ Here, too, as in Meireles's work, sly insertions into the ideological status quo make us rethink public space and what can and cannot be said in it of how we can intervene. Resistance to the mechanisms of power, presented with the trickster's sleight of hand in plain sight, selected and on display, couldn't be more apposite to the curatorial imagination today as it confronts the incursions of suppression and violence rising around us.



Installation view (D&D Advertising), part of the exhibition TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995-1997, Red Bull Arts New York, 2016, Photography Credit: Lance Brewer

And so, we come to a more recent enterprise of artistic tricksterism, Suha Traboulsi's project *Postscript to the Arabic Translation* in collaboration with Walid Raad. First shown in Hong Kong in 2015, and then at the Gwangju Biennial 2016, the project is ongoing—and viewable by appointment at the Aishti Foundation in Beirut. It consists of large wooden packing crates, the kind typically used for storing and shipping artworks, which have been painted over with copies of acclaimed works of the modern period from different regions—from Kazimir Malevic to On Kawara, Ibrahim el-Salahi to Jasper Johns. The reproductions were made by Traboulsi, a longtime artist, while she was the chief registrar of public collections for the Ministry of Culture in Beirut. A vast trove of works had been intended for a modern art museum that failed to open in Lebanon in 1975, prompting government officials to illicitly strip the collection for themselves. Traboulsi recreated the stolen works on crates as a way to make record of, and no doubt mourn, the losses.

But one thing: Traboulsi is no more authentic than her copies. Raad, whose most famous project, *The Atlas Group* (1989–2004), offered accounts of Lebanon in photographs and other media that blurred fiction and fact, is employing similar tactics here, at once trickster and moralist. While localized to a Lebanese socio-political topography, corruption and theft around cultural objects holds a broader legacy. Yet it could be said that Raad's point is not this alone—and the works themselves by Traboulsi, or should we say "Traboulsi," are not particularly well made. In keeping with his larger practice, his point is also to steep us in the ambiguities, paradoxes, and inconsistencies of reality, to make the viewer double-check the work, and by extension what we are told is truth. In the age of post-truth, of alternative facts and claims of fake news, no elevation of the profile of the trickster for good and bad could be more relevant.

It is in this liminal realm, in which skepticism and the need for sincerity and authenticity vie with deviousness and illusion, that the curatorial use of tricksterism comes into play both as subject and strategy. And while most curatorial practices are sited within institutions and conventions of institutionalized capitalism, there is every reason in

the current political climate to consider new ways of mediating and augmenting our reality, whether through wall texts, audioguides, catalog essays or other forms of discursive intervention. Artists' projects such as those shared here by Meireles, the GALA Committee, and Traboulsi/Raad help us see the way, both vexing and asserting what belief and resistance mean.

Notes

- 1 Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1998, pp. 75-6.
- 2 Maria Lind, "The Curatorial," *Artforum* no. 2, vol. 48, October 2009, p. 103.
- 3 Irit Rogoff. 2006. "Smuggling—An Embodied Criticality." European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies. Accessed 4.29.2017. <http://eipcp.net/dlfiles/rogoff-smuggling>.
- 4 Louis Proyect. 2013. "Herman Melville's 'The Confidence Man.'" Columbia University. Accessed 4.15.2017. http://www.columbia.edu/~lnp3/mydocs/culture/confidence_man.htm.
- 5 Jackson, William J., and Peter Johannes Thuesen. *American Tricksters: Thoughts on the Shadow Side of a Culture's Psyche*, Cascade, Eugene, OR, 2014, pp. 135-137.
- 6 This is cited in various text on his work. See for example: Zanna Gilbert and Cildo Meireles. "'Pop Art Is Poison.' Cildo Meireles on Ideological Circuits." Museum of Modern Art. Accessed 7. 15.2017. http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/539-pop-art-is-poison-cildo-meireles-on-ideological-circuits.
- 7 It was recently restaged at Red Bull Studios in New York City, September to November 2016.
- 8 Mel Chin. 1995-97. "In the Name of the Place." Accessed 4.5.2017. <http://melchin.org/oeuvre/in-the-name-of-the-place>.

Jovanna Venegas is a curator and researcher based in San Francisco. She is currently the curatorial assistant of contemporary art at SFMOMA. She received her BA in Art History from UCLA in 2010 and her MA in Curatorial Practice from the School of Visual Arts in 2017. From 2010–15 she lived in Mexico City and worked on exhibitions at House of Gaga, Colección Cesar Cervantes, and Eduardo Terrazas Studio. She was curatorial assistant to Lucía Sanromán on the exhibitions: *inSite: cuatro ensayos de lo público sobre otro escenario* (La Tallera, MX); *Citizen Cultura* (Santa Monica Museum of Art, US); and *SITELines: New Perspectives on Art of the Americas* (Santa Fe, US). While in New York she worked on public programs and curatorial projects at e-flux, the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Independent Curators International, and the 11th Gwangju Biennial.

Bartleby and Otaku

An Interview with Nadim Abbas

by Lux Yuting Bai

In this interview, Hong Kong-based installation artist Nadim Abbas discusses his understanding of Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street," otaku culture, databases, the Umbrella Revolution, military fetishes, the Urbanscape of Hong Kong, and how these seemingly remote elements are interconnected in his thinking and artistic practice.

LYB: While interrogating our postmodern culture with digital technologies, your oeuvre appropriates nineteenth- and twentieth-century existentialist literature, including Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener." In 2009, you directly borrowed the protagonist's catchphrase, "I would prefer not to," as the title for a series of surreal photographs that feature manga-like fictional characters. Do you interpret the Bartleby story as a manifesto on passive resistance?

NA: If you analyze the phrase from a semantic standpoint, "I would prefer not to" is neither acceptance nor refusal. I'm inclined to think now that Bartleby presents us not so much with a form of passive resistance, but rather a sort of immobility born out of a conviction that all choice is illusory. Bartleby is immobile not as a way of resisting the demands that are placed upon him, rather he is aware of all the contradictions embedded in every choice he could possibly make. He acknowledges the hypocrisy in every form of action and consequently applies an ambivalent attitude towards reality. The Bartleby story demonstrates less a form of passive resistance than pure passivity.

LYB: Non-action is also a form of action. Betraying one's own freedom to choose is still a decision that entails consequences. By refusing to eat, Bartleby chooses death, despite the passive characteristic of his manner. There seems to be a death drive underlying this surface of passivity.

NA: "I prefer not" is different from "I will not," which may be exemplified by someone like Gandhi and the hunger strike. The difference between Bartleby and

Gandhi is that Gandhi's resistance is civil disobedience as a direct response or protest against political injustice, while Bartleby signifies a form of literary paradox or escapism, if you will.

LYB: This notion of escapism is reflected in your works that investigate *otaku*, the Japanese subculture where the introverted male is withdrawn from the society and deeply immersed in anime and manga fandom. Since the emergence of the Internet, the phenomenon has become universal, carrying profound importance beyond the borders of a fringe subculture in Japan. How has *otaku* culture influenced your thinking and practice?

NA: The rise of *otaku* into a mainstream global phenomenon since the 90s has led to numerous mutations within various regional contexts. In the specific case of Hong Kong, the common translation of *otaku* into 宅男 (literal meaning: "apartment male") carries a spatial emphasis, connoting dense, claustrophobic interior spaces in urban environments. It also somewhat conflates the terms *otaku* and *hikikomori*, which remain distinct in Japanese, where *hikikomori* refers more to an acute condition of social withdrawal. Hence the *cliché* of *otaku* as a solitary male figure—a bit like Bartleby.

In the Yaumatei district in Hong Kong, there is a place called "In's Point," essentially a condensed shopping center dedicated to *otaku* culture, like Akihabara in Tokyo. Dozens and dozens of tiny little stores distributed on multiple levels exist to satisfy every individual whim: scale models of mecha robots and historical war vehicles, comics and idol flashcards, Bellmeresque ball-joint dolls and vintage vinyl toy figurines, BB guns and combat gear, video games, hardcore porn, even ritual Thai Buddhist amulets. Each store is like a self-contained niche catering to the particular fetishes of its clientele.

As a childhood and occasionally adulthood consumer of manga and anime, I was drawn to these shopping centres—there are many dotted around Hong Kong—

first out of a sense of nostalgia, then almost like a casual ethnographer, taking note of how supposedly asocial individuals could get together and share their mutual obsessions. For the *I would prefer not to...* piece in 2009, I started collecting mecha, monster, and *Tokusatsu* action hero figurines, which eventually formed the basis of the photo series you mentioned earlier, a kind of pseudo psychological inventory of character types.

My interest in *otaku* and *hikikomori* focuses on how they are nourished by the specifically dense urban fabric of a place like Hong Kong where even the cramped interiors of the shopping centers reflect the cramped interiors of a typical Hong Kong flat. From this psychic vacuum emerges a culture that finds solace in the seemingly, or may I say virtually, infinite space made possible by the Internet, with its anonymous chatrooms and forums. A place like In's Point, then, not only embodies a real-world manifestation of a virtually driven universe, it gives the virtual a weight in the real world that brings into question the notion of reality itself.

LYB: In his book *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, Azuma Hiroki brings forth animalization as the third stage of postwar culture, where human beings abandon any type of relation to grand narratives in favor of the database. *Otaku* are “database animals,” as their desires are instantly satiated by searching for classified emotional and erotic preferences through online programming. It results in a superficiality and a superflat culture where men find it more and more difficult to articulate meanings beyond surfaces. How do you perceive this new type of consumerism in the postmodern information era?

NA: As far as I have read it, Azuma's book introduces a way of viewing big data from a slightly more optimistic angle. It describes the database in relation to a Rousseauian idea of general will that ties various social communities and political entities together. Azuma presents an alternative model for thinking about the relationship between culture and deliberative democratic political systems in crisis.



Nadim Abbas, *I Would Prefer Not To #7 (Avoidant: Interpersonally Aversive)*, 2009. C-print, 64x42cm.

LYB: In your works such as *The Last Vehicle* (2016) at UCCA, there seems to be a more literal parallel between animals and the *otaku* way of being.

NA: In *The Last Vehicle*, a performer, who we affectionately called the “alien,” crawled around a sandscape in a one-piece bodysuit. Elements of the costume were appropriated from the cult anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, as well as being designed to blend like camouflage with the setting. We went through great pains to develop a specific body language with the performer, who was instructed to move, or rather not move, like an insect mimicking a leaf or a branch. Picture a masked body, driven to disappear into its surroundings, to be engulfed by objects whose animation increases in proportion to its own lack of animation.

Another text that I keep coming back to is Roger Caillois’ “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” which presents a striking counter-argument to the standard explanation of mimicry in the animal kingdom; namely as a form of deceptive camouflage used to protect the organism from hostile surroundings. Could mimicry instead be a “dangerous luxury” afforded by the organism’s orientation towards a reduced mode of existence,

devoid of consciousness, as opposed to the orientation towards life and self-preservation?

Caillois draws parallels here with clinical accounts of schizoid human subjects, and also this notion of a death drive that you touched upon earlier. This depersonalization by assimilation to space is something that for me resonates deeply with the figure of *hikikomori*, who, like the schizoid subject, invents spaces of which he is the convulsive possession. Like becoming a piece of furniture in your own flat...

LYB: The Bartleby story uncannily resonates with the Umbrella Revolution in 2014, where tens of thousands of Hong Kong residents peacefully protested against Beijing’s negation of the open election in 2017. Quietly occupying the city’s central financial district, paralyzing traffic and shuttering businesses, the protesters showed an incredibly placid form of resistance. How does your practice relate to this significant political movement?

NA: I think many would agree that the Umbrella Movement was revolutionary in the sense that it trans-



Nadim Abbas, *The Last Vehicle*, 2016. Mixed media installation with durational performance, dimensions variable.



Nadim Abbas, *I Would Prefer Not To (Rorschach)*, 2009. Aluminium window frames and grates fitted with black mirrored glass, each 45x80cm.

formed the local scene, and in an unprecedented way the way people in Hong Kong could relate to its streets. Obviously, for both supporters and detractors, it was a real rupture in the “business as usual” way of life. I still remember the euphoria of walking down roads and highways emptied of traffic and exhaust fumes, and later all the little ad-hoc gestures made by protestors: post-it messages, repurposed barricades, umbrella monuments...

To be honest, I think it might be an injustice to both Bartleby and the Umbrella protesters to align the two together completely. The Umbrella Movement or Revolution or whatever you want to call it signalled a mass awakening of political consciousness for Hong Kong’s youth, who had, it seems, largely up to this point been content with diverting their wants and desires to an all-pervading consumer culture and letting the government, corporations, and real estate developers run the show.

Otaku culture is, of course, an example of this consumerist diversion! But what I’m trying to say is that in the lead-up to the 2014 protests, a whole host of factors combined to change this apolitical mindset: ever-ris-

ing property prices coupled with a critical shortage of social housing; anxieties about loss of freedoms and a sense of regional identity post-handover; even a strange nostalgia for the supposed “good old days” of British rule... In other words, complete and utter despair over the future of Hong Kong.

So democratic self-determination aside, perhaps what the protests were really calling for was a reevaluation of the capitalist principles that have for better or worse made Hong Kong into what it is today, about formulating new, divergent ways of imagining the collective future of the city. To come back to your question about the relationship to Bartleby, yes, the means of protest were generally mild-mannered, peaceful, non-violent, etc. But there clearly was a demand, or at least a desire, for change. Bartleby, on the other hand, does not demand anything, he prefers not to... What Bartleby describes is a solitary space, the space of literature, whereas the Umbrella protests marked the emergence of a community or many micro-communities.

LYB: Within the context of the revolution, how do you perceive the relationship between art and activism?



Nadim Abbas, #4, 2016. Cosplay helmet mounted on green screen / cyclorama, dimensions variable.

NA: I find the relationship very ambiguous. This reminds me of a comment that a friend made when the protests were in full swing—that there would soon be a lot of Hong Kong artists making work with umbrellas! In fact, but for completely unrelated reasons, I’m currently working on a project that incorporates umbrellas into a performance.

Perhaps one of the dangers is when political engagement becomes just another subject or theme for the artist to the detriment of both art and engagement. From a strictly practical standpoint, think of all the more direct ways of engaging with something politically: protests, social work, legal injunctions... It seems to me that art that is politically engaged can often only do so in a roundabout way, and that is both its strength and weakness.

LYB: Your works often carry a military undertone, such as *Camoufleur* (2017), *Zone I* (2014), and *Apocalypse Postponed* (2014), which involves cocktails critiquing Art Basel. Do they imply how urban inhabitants view their environments, including art fairs, as war zones and battlegrounds?

NA: I’d be interested to know how you think the cocktails from *Apocalypse Postponed* were critiquing Art Basel! Granted, the art bar project—which was commissioned by Absolut, who were partnered with Art Basel—was developed in a very reflexive, self-aware manner. The question of how artists can maintain a critical distance from the engines of the culture industry is always in the back of my mind. So you could think of this bunker space that we built as a sort of reflection of the encapsulated bubble of an art fair.

But it was also a big party, with quite an open-ended design brief, which was to incorporate a functional bar and serve drinks. My approach was to take this already collaborative brief and bring in more collaborators. To work with architects, musicians, dancers, film makers, graphic designers, mixologists, even other visual artists; to develop a program that felt more like a collective effort than just the work of one artist. This, I think, helped to attract different audiences rather than the usual VIP art crowd, although there was plenty of that too.

Regarding the military undertones, I have this ongoing fascination with the correlation between domesticity and warfare, like how technologies developed on the battlefield, and other extreme environments, have found applications in everyday contexts. Canned food, for example. Or the “blood bags” that we used for one of the cocktails in *Apocalypse Postponed*, which was inspired by a method of food consumption used in space travel. Then there’s the paranoid cold war notion that the dream of domesticity is just a dormant continuation of a militarized state of emergency, where the bunker finds its counterpart in the modern regulated household.

After reading a lot of Paul Virilio, it dawned on me that the modern home simply reverses the architectural logic set in place by the bunker: while the bunker enables humans to inhabit artificial climates of aerial bombardment, poisonous gases, and radioactive fallout, the modern, technological household provides increasingly artificial climates *optimized* for human habitation, like the fully automated, air-conditioned high-rise service apartment.

This brings us back to *otaku* culture, which also performs an odd domestication of the military, with its fastidious obsession with *Gundam*, model tanks, and battleships. There’s a combat gear and BB gun shop in Kowloon with the ridiculous name Guns ‘n’ Guys, and I often wonder if the male fantasy that is fed here acts as some kind of surrogate for the lack of military service, or a military, for that matter, in Hong Kong. War games and increasingly sophisticated video games all enact a mediated relationship to violence that is quickly becoming the norm in an era of drones and telematic warfare.

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Nadim Abbas is an installation artist based in Hong Kong. His recent solo exhibitions include: *Blue Noon, Last Tango*, Zurich (2018); *Camoufleur*, VITRINE, London (2017); *Chimera*, Antenna Space, Shanghai (2016); *The Last Vehicle*, UCCA, Beijing

(2016); #4, *Holy Motors*, HK (2016); *Zone I*, The Armory Show, Armory Focus: China, New York (2014); *Satellite of ***, CL3 Architects, HK Arts Centre, HK (2013); *Tetraphilia*, Third Floor Hermés, Singapore (2013); and *Marine Lover*, ARTHK11 Special Projects (2011). His recent group shows include the 7th Moscow International Biennale of Contemporary Art and *Interval Space*, the second part of a Switzerland Cultural Exchange Project with the NAIRS Foundation at Osage Gallery, Hong Kong.

Lux Yuting Bai is an independent curator and writer based in New York City. She received her MA in Curatorial Practice at the School of Visual Arts and her BA in English Literature at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She was also the assistant curator at Hong Kong Contemporary Art Foundation. Her recent project *Becoming* (2018–), in collaboration with Liang Shaoji, is an ongoing curatorial experiment and documentary film that involves multilateral interventions among curators, artists, poets, and silkworms.



Nadim Abbas, *Camoufleur*, 2017. Mixed media installation with durational performance, dimensions variable.

Portfolio: Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism Vera Petukhova

Unlike the narrow nativist vision of our current politics, the late 1980s offered a prospect of walls coming down, not being proposed to rise as a disavowal of diplomacy and discourse. This was the moment of the exhibition *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Capitalism*. It was 1990—an optimistic time and a time of great curiosity for both the former Soviet territories and the West. What had been happening behind the Iron Curtain? What was the West really like? This exhibition was among the first to offer a wide survey, spanning the network of subversive practices of artists from the era. Under the Soviet regime, the group of conceptual artists featured in *Between Spring and Summer* set up fugitive exhibitions in domestic spaces and performed actions in remote locations (among them, Komar & Melamid and Ilya Kabakov would soon race to critical and commercial success in the bastions of the Western art world). These secret shows and performative works acted as sanctuary spaces in which the avant-garde could exist, discuss, and experiment within the void of public sponsorship.

The Soviet Conceptualists (now more typically called the Moscow Conceptualists), formed as an underground art movement in the early 1970s, were never clearly codified until the fall of the USSR at the close of the '80s. Their work stood against and to the side of the state mandate for Socialist Realism. Anything outside the mandate was seen as subversive and deemed criminal by the state, with any offending artist and the rings of his or her family subject to surveillance and punishment. The work was as bold in its slyness as it was in its fantasias of freedom, and the works on view in *Between Spring and Summer* (and in the portfolio presented here) reveal an aesthetic that is raw, deeply cynical, even nihilistic, carrying within it a poetics of dark humor.

In framing the context for these works in 1990, lead curator David A. Ross, who was then the director of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, writes: "It is an exhibition which presents the voices of artists who had previously been denied speech within their culture—a culture that suppressed truth for the sake of pragmatism, and that glorified a now seemingly obsolete utopian model."⁽¹⁾ He writes further of the context through which he connected a parallel of the political situations between East and West:

This is the age of Gorbachev. Communism has entered a new era in response to the global and social and economic pressures which have been transformed both East and West since the end of the second World War. Like Capitalism, Communism is in its "late" phase as well. The struggle for what Walter Benjamin termed the "crude and material things" is fueling the engines of change. An important result of these changes, however, is found in those deeply immaterial aspects of life; those reflections of the strength, intelligence, and soul found in the art and literature of a nation.

In the West, the Culture Wars of the 1980s and the emergence of the Punk aesthetic in art, literature, and music were a parallel that sought to subvert dominant ideologies, regarding race, gender, class, and sexuality, as well as critiquing the historical and contemporary roles of political and cultural institutions, and the politics of aesthetics and style. Though these movements in the West were not the same as those in the Soviet Union in the immediate years prior to its collapse, they did share a rambunctiousness, dark humor, and grit (if not Soviet melancholy) that presented open-ended litmus tests of the fragility of freedom. Democracy today would seem to have returned to that same precariousness—or perhaps it never left—and in that light, the Soviet Conceptualists' tactics of subversion and rebellion, and the creation of sanctuary, could not be more relevant. In bringing this exhibition and its work to the surface in 2018, we can learn from the example of their subcultural network and the ascent of new forms of opposition.

The images selected for this portfolio attempt to capture the essence of *Between Spring and Summer* in those qualities just described. The works presented here are by Collective Actions Group, Vadim Zakharov, Komar & Melamid, Igor Makarevich & Elena Elagina, and Ilya Kabakov.

Annotations for the images:

Materials used by the artists: Because artists' materials were off limits to anyone who was not an officially ordained artist, the Soviet Conceptualists would often use everyday materials to create their works, such as plaster, cement, and paper. This has often been compared with the practices of the postwar Arte Povera movement.

Ilya Kabakov, one of the most prolific and central artists of his generation, refers to the Soviet era as “a void”(2) in which artists were simply creating work for themselves and had no foreseeable public or means of circulation. In his essay for an exhibition catalogue titled “On Emptiness,” he refers to the vacant place or nihilistic consciousness in which the artists exist and produce artwork.

Komar & Melamid were a duo of SOTS artists involved in the exhibition. They were among the few artists in the show who were formally trained as artists and were able to obtain art materials officially. They coined the term “SOTS Art” to speak to a kind of hybrid of Socialist Realism and Pop Art that depicted subversive imagery of Soviet leaders, and the grandiosity of the images spoke at once ironically and aspirationally to a faded historical position of the regime—as if looking back at a history still to come.

Using domestic symbols and text, **Igor Makarevich & Elena Elagina** created installations that considered the place of women and children in Soviet life. Elena Elagina was one of the few women associated with the Soviet Conceptualist movement.

While some of **Vadim Zakharov's** work is sculptural, the images here depict performances staged by the artist and the work that resulted from the documentation. Here Zakharov is using his body as subject and addressing the feeling of futility felt by those attempting to pose opposition to the Soviet regime.

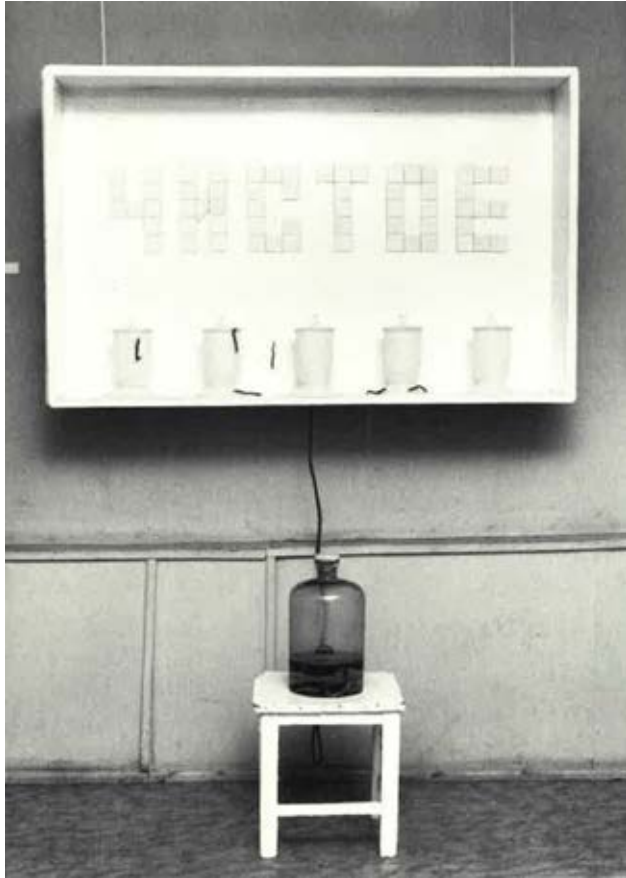
The Collective Actions Group—initially including Nikia Alekseev, Georgii Kizevalter, Andrei Monastyrsky, and Nikolai Panitkov, and joined later in the 1970s by Igor Makarevich, Elena Elagina, and Sergei Romashko—conducted participatory activities, often with mysterious instructions and frequently set in the woods in rural areas. While this approach was in some ostensible ways similar to the 1960s “Happenings” of Allan Kaprow, the CAG’s actions embodied the political condition of subjectivity within society, foregrounding displacement, bewilderment, and external control. The communal aspect of each action was central to the work. Events were ephemeral and only sometimes documented. The documentation itself was subtle, never quite indicating an *artistic* activity, but appearing as simply non-descript photographs.



Vadim Zakharov, *I Know Any Resistance to Elephants is Useless. Elephants Hinder Our Life*, 1982. Performance.



Vadim Zakharov, *After The Fur*, 1989. Plastic, plaster, paper, cement.



Igor Makarevich & Elena Elagina, *Pure*, 1989. Mixed media.



Igor Makarevich & Elena Elagina, *Children's*, 1989. Mixed media.



Illya Kabakov, *Olga Georgievna, Something is Boiling!*, 1984. Folding album.



Collective Actions, *Russian World*, 1985. Performance.



Collective Actions, From the performance *Ten Appearances*, 1981. Black-and-white photographs.



Komar & Melamid, *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers*, 1982-83. Oil on canvas.

Notes

1 *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, ed. David A. Ross. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1990.

2 Ilya Kabakov, "On Emptiness," trans. Clark Troy in *Between Spring and Summer*, pp. 53-9.

Vera Petukhova is an independent Brooklyn-based curator focusing on performance and media. She received her MA in Curatorial Practice from the School of Visual Arts and has worked with the curatorial teams at Performa and The Kitchen. Her research interests include the performative turn, digital culture, the experience economy, language and communication, cultural histories, film theory, feminist and gender theory, community/support structures, Soviet conceptualism, and contemporary art in Eastern Europe. She has curated video art programs and organized art exhibitions and performances in Seattle and New York. Her writing has been published in *Blouin Artinfo* and *Performa Magazine*.

On Being Present Where You Wish to Disappear

Nana Adusei-Poku

In 2009 the Centre Pompidou in Paris opened an exhibition called *Voids: A Retrospective*. Through works such as Yves Klein's *The Specialization of Sensibility in Raw Material State into Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility*, it explored a tradition of radical curatorial and artistic interventions on the "art of nothing." The exhibition consisted of empty spaces in which nothing was on display, apart from the white walls and wooden floors that constitute the architecture of the rooms. The decision to recreate the peak of minimal art and show nothing but emptiness or the absence of objects is intriguing. It can surely reignite discussions about the exhibition space as an artwork in itself or, as in the example of Maria Eichhorn's project *Das Geld der Kunsthalle Bern*, stress the economic dimension of the cultural practice of exhibiting and institutions.

The notion of nothing in art also inspired the Swiss conceptual artist Andreas Hausser to create the virtual *No Show Museum* in 2013. (The title of the show is borrowed from a work by John Barry.) *No Show Museum* is a museum of nothing with four hundred virtual pieces, a customized bus that works as a mobile exhibition space, and, most importantly, the framing of *nothing as an aesthetic*, which is a long-standing tradition in (Western) art. For Hausser, Barry, and the curators of *Voids*, nothing is universal. The claim of nothingness and the void as universal connects to the aesthetic gesture of an empty, often white-painted space, while the question of experience remains disconnected.



Robert Barry, *Some places to which we can come, and for a while "be free to think about what we are going to do."* (Marcuse), 1970–in progress, 1970, Kunsthalle Bern, 2009, installation view.

But does nothingness have to be empty, related to white, and, ultimately, be a shrouded representation of whiteness? Are empty spaces really, as John Barry claimed in his *No Show Museum* piece, quoting Marcuse, “places to which we can come, and for a while ‘be free to think about what we are going to do’”?¹ Is there really such a thing as no-thingness when you encounter an empty exhibition space? Is nothingness an aesthetic, or can nothingness be foundational for a coming-into-being—a gesture of multiplicity rather than a gesture of absence? Who has access to this space of freedom to think about “what we are going to do”?

Parallel Univers(es)als

Nothingness can mean something very different when it comes to black experiences. David Hammons’s *Concerto in Black and Blues* (2001) allowed entry to a space of profound nothingness in which blackness didn’t serve as a means to a universal framing. *Concerto in Black and Blues* consisted of an empty exhibition space without light. Visitors were given blue flashlights to use in their efforts to traverse the space. Inevitably, this not only created an intrinsic relational dependency among the exhibition’s visitors, but also allowed a space characterized by the absence of installed things, sounds (despite the concerto in the title), and objects to be filled with a dense sociality. Silence—but also rhythm, as insinuated by the title, which draws on jazz and blues traditions—was present. *Concerto in Black and Blues* is an art piece intrinsically bound to black experience—an experience of the abyss, losses, emptiness, a different temporality, and voids. Or, as Édouard Glissant writes, it is an experience—emblemized by the belly of the boat that delivered so many bodies to the unknown—“pregnant with as many dead as living under the sentence of death.”² Although these lives appear bound to social death, *Concerto in Black and Blues* brings blackness into being through an intrinsic sociality that is experienced in the dark as deeply relational. Hammons creates this relationality through the aesthetic gesture of composing a concert of bodies that try to navigate the dark, caught between objectification and agency. *Concerto in Black and Blues* can be connected to the Middle Passage—foundational for modern thought and practices of colonization—through which enslaved human beings were placed within the realm of the particular. This installation produces an experience of particularity within multiplicity, which contrasts with the idea of a universal perception of nothingness, because it becomes a relational experience. Nothingness becomes foundational for black existence through the passage from singularity into multiplicity.

This experience of nothing(ness), bound to black experience, is absent from shows like *Voids* and *No Show Museum*, which make a claim to a universal (objective) status. The absence of the black experience remains foundational and marginalized for the whiteness that fills these spaces. How to bridge this consistent ontological gap in the framing and making of art?

Such questions are challenging for those who want to be allies and advocates for the subversive power of art. They begin in the most intimate and painful spheres of our sociality and demand that we think beyond the threshold of the institution. Equity is not going to be achieved via policies, temporary projects, and fellowships for people of color. To claim that an empty space is a place where we can come and think about what we can do carries a universal that neglects those who have no access. Or who have access but won’t be heard. Or who have a different experience of whiteness. If this myth of the universal remains unchallenged, the desired possibilities of decolonization and equity will remain neither in the future nor in the present.

The Black Abyss

The void appears when one sees history repeating itself. The abyss is the *Ohnmacht* from which one doesn’t want to awaken.³ And nothingness is shelter whenever lived experience falls outside the parameters that determine and delimit the idea of the human—lived experience that, in turn, inevitably announces itself as a challenge to the idea of the human itself. The black abyss is deeply social, specific, and intimate. It is the void that calls blackness, in all its heterogeneity, into appearance. The void is the foundation of the black subject consistently displacing the ontological, insofar as blackness is, as Fred Moten puts it, without standpoint, or rather, the very refusal of a standpoint that is foisted upon it through its social and ontological construction. Refusing this standpoint is blackness’s way of remaining in the belly of the boat that Glissant names as foundational to its experience. In other words,

[It] is not (just) that blackness is ontologically prior to the logistic and regulatory power that is supposed to have brought it into existence but that blackness is prior to ontology ... it is the anoriginal displacement of ontology, that it is ontology’s anti- and ante-foundation, ontology’s underground, the irreparable disturbance of ontology’s time and space.⁴

It is, in short, a refusal to accept the ontological paradigm that currently organizes the world; it is a way of revealing itself as prior to the deployment of this paradigm as an organizing force (rather than just a descriptive tool) in determining social relations and all that is forced to exist beyond them.

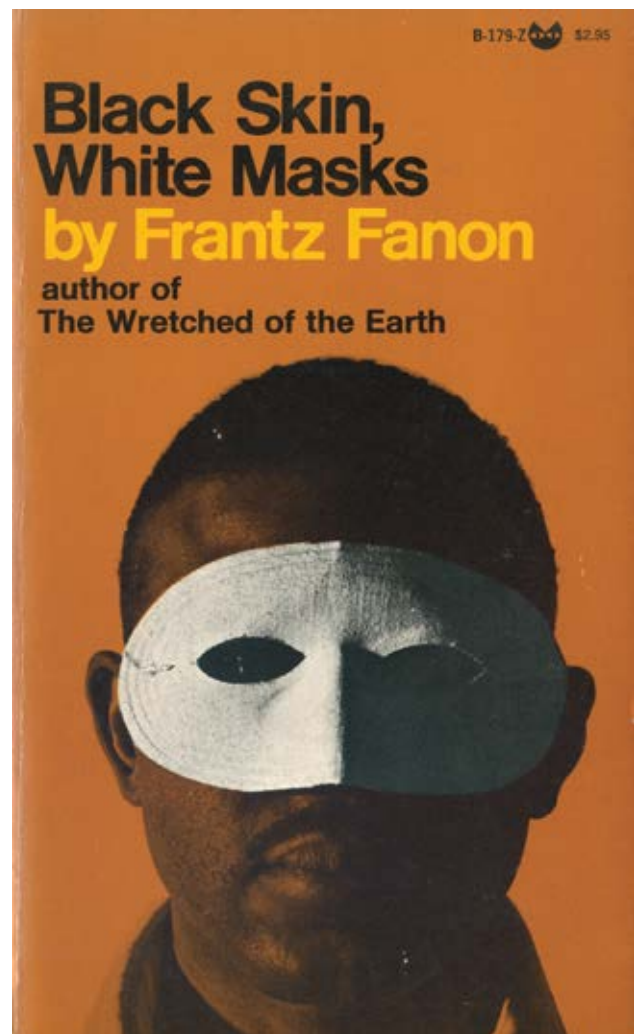
It is little surprise, therefore, that this notion of nothingness is a consistent theme in black arts and knowledge production. The void is always nearby. Here it is in Fanon:

I feel my soul as vast as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers; my chest has the power to expand to infinity. I was made to give and they prescribe for me the humility of the cripple. When I opened my eyes yesterday I saw the sky in total revulsion. I tried to get up but eviscerated silence surged toward me with paralyzed wings. Not responsible for my acts, at the crossroads between Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep.⁵

Fanon describes an embodied feeling (knowledge) of powerfulness and determination. Infelicitously explained through a series of ableist metaphors, this knowledge meets a series of constraints established by forces that come from outside of himself.⁶ He can't get up, and even the silence that overtakes him is eviscerated and held immobile by paralyzed wings. He remains stagnant. He seems without agency, stuck between antithetical conceptions—Nothingness and Infinity—of the unimaginability and endlessness of space and time. This triggers the physical reaction of crying. It is a search for relief, for ways of coping with this impossible juncture at which he is stuck. Fanon describes a liminal space, intrinsically bound to the imperial project, generated by it.⁷ It is a space that produces an experience that is not universal. Nor does it rely on any universal ground. It is a very particular experience, which finds a multiplicity of articulations. It is also an experience that, stuck between Nothingness and Infinity, may recode this Nothingness, this void against which an immobilized subject finds its form and perhaps the route of its flight, through the variegated content that is made available to it in the form of particularized experiences. Or alternatively, in highlighting a liminal space, Nothingness is inevitably recoded as a foundational ground, or as anti-/ante-ground, as a void that sustains.

This black abyss, which in the Fanon passage starts with a negative connotation that we find can be overwritten, is rich with knowledge and potential. It is incomparable, perhaps wholly unrelated, to the nothingness that often fills empty museums. The nothingness that Audre Lorde spoke out from, that Fanon was trapped in, that Fred Moten versifies, that Miles Davis and Dorothy Ashby riffed on—this nothingness is not absence but foundation. It is multifarious and stands in stark opposition to any white absence of understanding and space.

The urge to embody and think the universal—as in the *No Show Museum*—has to be questioned. Deployed during the Enlightenment as a reiteration of the Aristotelean polis, the universal is a “structure, not an event,” as Sara Ahmed puts it. The nation-state rose on this structural foundation of the polis as an “assembly,” through which inclusion as well as exclusion was established. This assembly is foundational for “modern” thought and hence the concept of the universal is



Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, 1967).

connected to exclusion, which produces the “particular” relational experience of (non)existence. The universal “is how those who are assembled are assembled. It is how an assembly becomes a universe.”⁸ The universal is a structure of thought, a condition of possibility for knowledge production, and only a few whose epidermis seems absent of melanin are privileged to hold that space (seemingly for eternity, sacrosanct for critique) in our contemporary cultures.

Passages into the Particular

For Édouard Glissant, every diaspora is a passage from unity to multiplicity. And it is the space of multiplicity that allows the “knowing body,” as Suely Rolnik calls it, to be unique and absolute within its core without being threatened by particularity. Without the implementation of this understanding, Glen Ligon’s *Untitled (I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background)* (1992), for instance, remains one-dimensional. After all, the “I” it signals can be read through multiple angles, as a multiplicity without unifying core: as the “I” of the painter; as the “I” of the author of the sentence quoted in the title (Zora Neal Hurston); or as the “I” of a plethora of black people (itself a multifarious assemblage, a refusal of totalization) who can immediately associate with the experience of objectification and framing through whiteness. What remains, however, are words on a painting that start to smear into an unreadable mass. What starts on the top of the painting as a self-repetitive clear text disseminates into a mass of overlaying unreadable black layering of the same text. The particularity of each vowel vanishes into an unreadable mass that creates a chorus of words, a choir that calls the edges of the painting into a polyphonic dialogue. In the same way in which the letters become unreadable, the black paint opens space for multiplicity, where blackness can remain in its complexity, understood as a “social hyperconscience,” as Glissant describes the experience of enslavement and its aftermath.

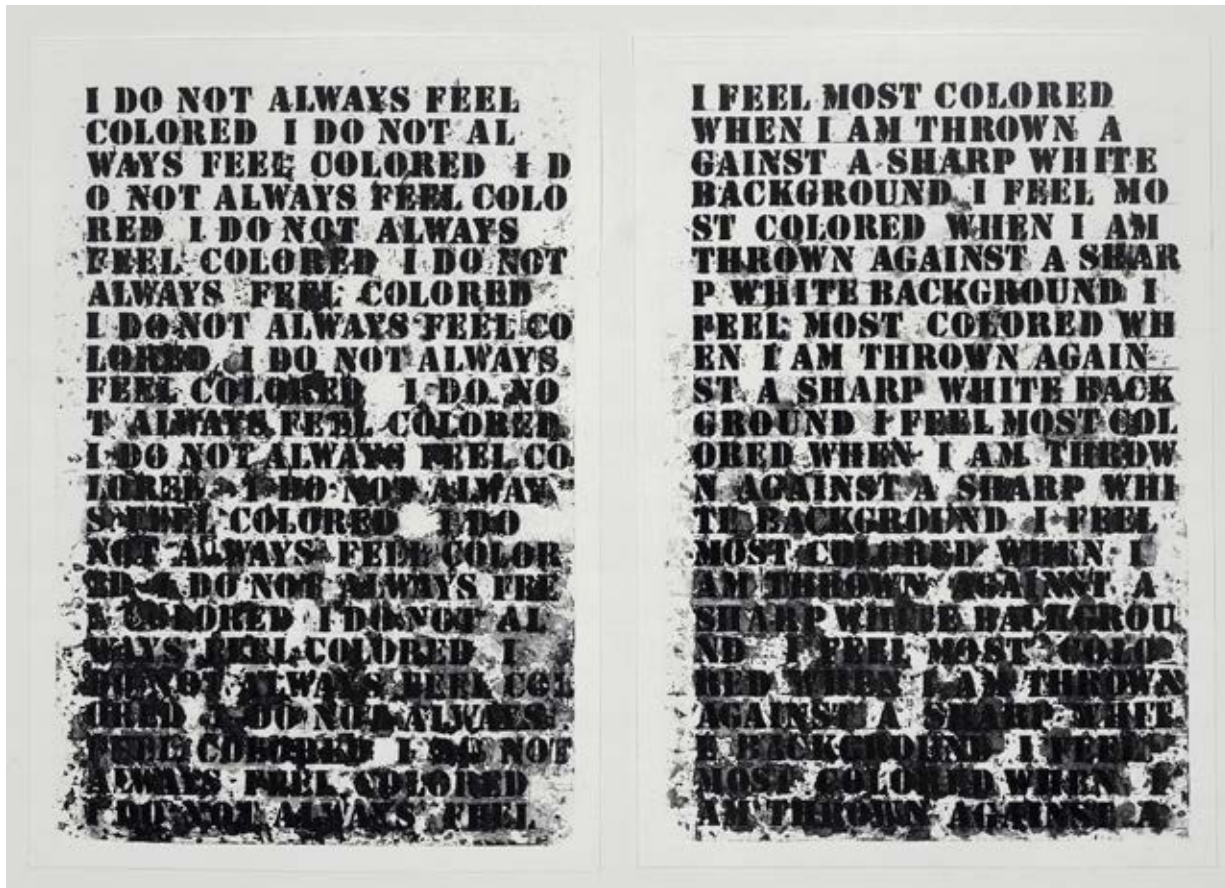
In contradistinction to what the space of multiplicity allows, in mainstream media this multifarious blackness is continually reduced to black male bodies being slaughtered. Through solely focusing on black cis men, mainstream media and certain forms of activist organizing implicitly hinder the possibility of justice and equity from coming into being. Acknowledgement of black queer, trans, gender-nonconforming, disabled, and femme voices is necessary and would undermine any single narrative of blackness and oppression. This is why campaign slogans such as “Say Her Name,” as well



Glenn Ligon, *Untitled (Four Etchings)*, 1992. Softground etching, aquatint, spit bite, and sugarlift on Fabriano. Edition published by Max Protech Gallery. Courtesy of the artist, Luhning Augustine, New York, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Thomas Dane Gallery, London.

as artworks that reference Black Lives Matter, are not—intrinsically and practically—part of mainstream media. By definition, they stand outside of the guiding, organizational paradigms of mass media as it exists today. And in this way, they challenge its natural proclivity to round things off through recourse to pared-down figures to represent (or rather, dilute) experiences that assume a fugitive role precisely through their variegated natures and particularity.

Neither the claim to be a (hu)man (and a brother/sister) nor the claim that one’s black life matters are new, of course. And yet the necessity and urgency to emphasize and articulate the worth and matter of the lives of black human beings, as well as to highlight the systematic neglect of black thought, remains unabated. In fact, it has remained unchanged since the inception of the imperial project, with settler-colonialism and its accompanying enslavement forming the colonial matrix of power. This matrix expresses itself through various means, from mainstream media to biennials and e-artworks.



Glenn Ligon, *Untitled (Four Etchings)*, 1992. Softground etching, aquatint, spit bite, and sugarlift on Fabriano. Edition published by Max Protech Gallery. Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Thomas Dane Gallery, London.

One of the pitfalls of the imperial project was that it promised freedom and agency through reason, and at the same time, it produced the dominance of reason, slavery, exploitation, genocide, and crimes against humanity.⁹ Obviously, something went wrong.

“We are on the edge of an abyss.” So wrote Cornel West, regarding the times to come in the US.¹⁰ But it’s not just the US that faces a fascist era; the whole world is in for a scary ride. As we confront this growing fascism in the US and around the globe, it is important to ask if we have ever been *out* of the abyss, considering the slow violence and trauma that have persisted in the wake of the imperial project.

Questioning the past emphasizes the limits of the present. In 1964, in the wake of the shooting of unarmed fifteen-year-old James Powell by police, Kenneth B. Clark said that the incident had to be examined not purely as a crime problem, but as a social problem. This statement has not lost its urgency. Clark pointed out that “the chronic day-to-day violence against the

human spirit which exists and is accepted as normal” is at the center of this social construct. But what forces allow this sociopolitical crime to prevail? Is it just a question of governmentality and capitalism? It is so easy to turn against entities such as institutions, when they are run by individuals who obey administrative tools. This acknowledgment is not about shaming the individuals or solely turning against the state apparatus. It is about critiquing both. Or to put it simply: I am tired of excuses from curators, artists, theorists, and critics alike every time the intersectional complexity of the subjects they address is overwritten by the comfort zone of their professional indifference.

The present shows that our lives, knowledge, and resistance seem not to matter. On the other hand, our black creativity and style, which have for centuries been means of survival, are lucrative. I am happy to watch more black (queer) women on television, but I don’t see them in higher education. The abyss is in the heart of the education system.

Thirty years after Clark offered his analysis, the theorist Sylvia Wynter stated in an open letter to her colleagues that the epistemological foundations of dominant forms of thought are one key source of the “chronic day-to-day violence” Clark spoke of. Intellectuals and scientists, argued Wynter, reproduce the epistemological foundations for this violence by treating them as objective.

We Know What Needs to be Done. How is the Question.

What I see in the academy and the museum is that black and postcolonial scholars and artists repeat the aforementioned claims (with nuances)—but they create for a space which reciprocates nothing. On the contrary, this space consistently challenges the validity and profoundness of their voices. This compartmentalization is a key problem when it comes to the pedagogical project to distribute black thought. We learn how to learn in the absence of our voices. Black (female) writers and artists in particular are tokenized in order to not only represent an authentic black experience, but also to “enlighten” predominantly white classrooms, conferences, and peers. While some might argue that the willingness of white students and teachers to learn about their role in the world could be considered a first step into a productive dialogue, playing the “indigenous interpreter” limits our possibilities and has a very important function in keeping white hegemony intact.¹¹ Furthermore, this kind of dialogue has its limits if black scholars, with their embodied knowledge and expertise, remain at the periphery of curricula, canons, and teaching faculty. The problem is structural as well as personal.

The absence of black thought in the arts and in education creates an “acute paralysis of will and sheer vacancy of imagination [...] rampant corruption and vicious authoritarianism [...] an exercise of power bereft of any pretense of the exercise of vision.”¹² History is without guarantees, and the abyss we are facing has changed. What kind of exercises of vision do we have to imagine now?

There is no healing presence when the wounded past is erased from our cultural memory.

Notes

1 Herbert Marcuse, “An Essay on Liberation,” 1969. Available at marxists.org <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/1969/essay-liberation.htm>.

2 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1997, p. 6.

3 I am deliberately not using the English translation of “powerlessness” for the German word *Ohnmacht*, as in *Ohn-* (deriving from *Ohne* = without) and *Macht* (power), because the construction “in *Ohnmacht* fallen” is a phrase in German used to describe fainting, a somatic reaction to being overpowered by forces outside of one’s body. To wake up from *Ohnmacht* would be described in German as “*zu sich kommen*,” which means to come to oneself. Hence, the process of being *Ohnmächtig* is connected to a detachment of the self from the body.

4 Fred Moten, “Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh),” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 112, no. 4, Fall 2013, p. 739.

5 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox. Grove Press, New York, 2008, p. 119.

6 Despite my fascination, I think it is always important to stress that Fanon’s writing was deeply heteropatriarchal. See also T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms*. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 1998.

7 When I write “imperial” I am referring also to its aftermath, which Alexander Weheliye poignantly described as “the uneven global power structures defined by the intersections of neoliberal capitalism, racism, settler colonialism, immigration, and imperialism, which interact in the creation and maintenance of systems of domination, and dispossession, criminalization, expropriation, exploitation and violence that are predicated upon hierarchies of racialized, gendered, sexualized, economized, and nationalized social existence.” Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2014, p. 1.

8 Sara Ahmed. 2015. “Melancholic Universalism.” Accessed 15.12.2015. <https://feministkilljoys.com/2015/12/15/melancholic-universalism/>.

9 See *Decolonizing Enlightenment: Transnational Justice, Human Rights and Democracy in a Postcolonial World*, ed. Nikita Dhawan. Barbara Budrich Publishers, Leverkusen, 2014.

10 Cornel West. 2017. “Pity the sad legacy of Barack Obama.” *The Guardian*. Accessed 9.1.2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/09/barack-obama-legacy-presidency>.

11 Daniel Matlin, *On the Corner: African American Intellectuals and the Urban Crisis*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2013.

12 David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2004, p. 2.

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Portfolio: Don't Follow the Wind

Patrick Jaojoco

Initiated by Tokyo-based artist collective Chim↑Pom and curated by Kenji Kubota, Eva and Franco Mattes, and Jason Waite, *Don't Follow the Wind* is an exhibition housed in the irradiated Fukushima exclusion zone. Despite the exhibition being “open” since March of 2015, the artworks on site will remain inaccessible to the general public until the radiation dissipates and the area is safe to re-enter.

The show is presented here as an exhibition model investigating forms of visibility as a critique. The site became irradiated after the tsunami-related meltdown of the TEPCO-owned nuclear plant in 2011, and—despite TEPCO announcing then that the site would be under control in less than a year—remains indefinitely closed. By staging an exhibition in the area, the project puts the dangers of nuclear power on continuous display by way of the impossibility of actually displaying the art to the public. Only a few images of the installations are available—printed below—and so incite the desire to see what cannot be seen, a desire paling in comparison to the experience of the area's evacuees. Even the “Non-Visitor Center,” a satellite exhibition staged in a gallery at Tokyo's Watari Museum of Art in 2015, was only visible through a small window, the artworks remaining impenetrable.

This is the strength of the exhibition unseen: the discourse produced around the invisible dangers of nuclear power, the almost incomprehensible temporality of which points specifically to one power plant and the corporate and economic forces behind it. Resistance here is in the resistance of an irradiated landscape, the limitations of which are poetically outlined by the artists involved and the curatorial team.

Patrick Jaojoco is a Brooklyn-based curator and writer. His research focuses on political ecology and intersections of radically nonlinear histories and temporalities. He is part of the curatorial collective Frontview, which is currently working on a project on decolonization and cartography. He has assisted with numerous institutional exhibitions, including Danilo Correale: *At Work's End* and Zach Blas: *Contra-Internet*, both curated by Laurel Ptak at Art in General, NY; and *Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s* curated by Gianni Jetzer at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, DC. Independently, he has curated shows across New York including *con•tin•u•ums (time beyond lifetimes)*; *Low-Grade Euphoria*, both at the Pfizer Building, Brooklyn; *DRIPPP*, an intensive collaborative project with four artists and two curators presented at the 2016 SPRING/BREAK Art Show; and *humanimalands*, an exhibition investigating the fluid ontologies of humans, animals, and landscapes in the Anthropocene presented at CP Projects Space. Jaojoco received his MA in Curatorial Practice from the School of Visual Arts and his BA in English Literature and Environmental Studies from New York University.



Maintenance trip with flag designed by Naohiro Ukawa, Fukushima exclusion zone, Japan. Courtesy of Don't Follow the Wind.



Trevor Paglen, *Trinity Cube*, 2015-ongoing, Fukushima exclusion zone, Japan. Courtesy of the artist and Don't Follow the Wind



Taryn Simon, *Final Photos*, 2015-ongoing. Fukushima exclusion zone, Japan. Courtesy of the artist and Don't Follow the Wind.



Ahmet Ögüt, *Once Upon A Time Breathing Apparatus for Breathable Air*, 2015-ongoing. Installation, Fukushima exclusion zone, Japan. Courtesy of the artist and Don't Follow the Wind.



Ahmet Ögüt, *Once Upon A Time Breathing Apparatus for Breathable Air*, 2015. Video still. Courtesy of the artist and Don't Follow the Wind.



Ai Weiwei, *A Ray of Hope*, 2015. Fukushima exclusion zone, Japan. Photo by Kenji Morita. Courtesy of the artist and Don't Follow the Wind.



Eva and Franco Mattes, *Fukushima Texture Pack*, 2015. Installation, Fukushima exclusion zone, Japan. Courtesy of the artists and Don't Follow the Wind.



Eva and Franco Mattes, *Fukushima Texture Pack*, 2015. Installation, Fukushima exclusion zone, Japan. Courtesy of the artists and Don't Follow the Wind.



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